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Fonna Forman-Barzilai

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ADAM SMITH AND THE CIRCLES OF SYMPATHY

Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy pursues Adam Smith's views on moral judgment, humanitarian care, commerce, justice and international law both in historical context and through a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan lens, making this a major and timely contribution not only to Smith studies but also to the history of cosmopolitan thought and to contemporary cosmopolitan discourse itself. Forman-Barzilai breaks new ground, demonstrating the spatial texture of Smith's moral psychology and the ways he believed that physical, affective and cultural distance constrain the identities, connections and ethical obligations of modern commercial people. Forman-Barzilai emphasizes Smith's resistance to the sort of relativism, moral insularity and cultural chauvinism that too often accompany localist critiques of cosmopolitan thought today. This is a timely, revisionist study that integrates the perspectives of intellectual history, moral philosophy, political theory, cultural theory, international relations theory and political economy, and will appeal widely across the humanities and social sciences.

FONNA FORMAN-BARZILAI is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, where she teaches political theory and the history of modern thought.

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The books in this series will discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies that were generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve.

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University of California, San Diego



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*To the memory of
Fay Forman
and
Rosalie Kaiman Nirenberg*

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*Les lois de la conscience, que nous disons naître de nature, naissent
de la coutume: chacun ayant en vénération interne les opinions et mœurs
approuvées et reçues autour de lui ...*

Michel de Montaigne

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As I sit to write these words at the end of a very long journey, I risk becoming precisely that person Smith described – the one “who skips and dances about with that intemperate and senseless joy which we cannot accompany him in.” I hope the depth and sincerity of my gratitude will lessen the “contempt and indignation” Smith would heap upon me for the bursts of exuberance surely to follow. In good Smithian form I will try to remain temperate as my heart dances.

Best then to begin by acknowledging the various institutions that have provided material support for this project. My thanks go to the Charles E. Merriam Fellowship in Political Science at the University of Chicago; the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation whose generous funding enabled early travel and research; Balliol College, Oxford and then Master Colin Lucas for granting the visiting studentship that twice provided a home and research support; the Grodzins Prize Lectureship at the University of Chicago that enabled my first lectures on the Scottish Enlightenment; and the *Political Theory* editorial fellowship conceived by Stephen White that lured me to Virginia and provided full financial support during my last two years of writing. More recently, I am happy to acknowledge generous research support from the Division of Social Sciences and the Department of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego; the UCSD Committee on Research; the UCSD Faculty Career Development Program, and the Hellman Family Faculty Fellowship.

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I was a law student in Madison when I first met Laurence Dickey; and it was he who reclaimed me from that dismal path and assured me through his

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own infectious example that the joys of studying European intellectual history were real and sustaining. He also introduced me to Adam Smith, my constant companion ever since. We have sparred continuously about method over the years, and always will; but we inevitably get to the same place on so many things, which I take as testimony to the underlying questions that drive us both and situate our sense of connection. Larry's support and confidence have sustained me through the years to a degree I am not sure he understands. These words of thanks could begin only with him, for he was my first and greatest teacher.

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I cannot imagine a more stimulating environment in which to have written a dissertation on Adam Smith than the University of Chicago in the 1990s. For reasons that remain a mystery to those of us involved, Chicago was reverberating with Smithiana during those years. Jim Otteson had just finished up as Lauren Brubaker, Ryan Hanley, Eric Schliesser and I arrived to begin our projects on Smith. It was a perfect case of spontaneity: we arrived in different departments, worked in different traditions with predominantly different teachers who themselves had only marginal interests in Smith. Surely some of us wanted to pry Smith from the “Chicago school,” though none of us came to Chicago for that purpose nor worked for a minute in the Economics Department. But we shared a profound fascination with the *Moral Sentiments* – and, though we would disagree quite vigorously at times and raise hell in whatever café we happened to be in, good book in hand, citing page and verse by heart, those engagements were formative for us all and cultivated a sense of community with roots that grew very deep over time, and deepen still. I thank my fellow “new voices” (the epithet is Schliesser’s fault) for so many years of intellectual comradeship. Each will hear his own distinct voice in my book, no doubt.

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In *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1999) Charles Griswold illuminated Smith's salience for contemporary thought more richly than anyone ever has. The book was a brilliant demonstration of what one might *do* with Smith – a magnificently disruptive suggestion to me at a time when Donald Winch's *Adam Smith's Politics* (Cambridge, 1978) and Hont and Ignatieff's *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1986) set my agenda – when I firmly believed that the most effective way, perhaps the *only* way, to salvage Smith from what the economists had done to him, was to proceed historically. In a very fundamental way I still believe this. But Griswold's book, especially its emphasis on “ordinary morality,” inspired something like a turning in my thought and approach: I began to think more critically about method – about what motivates the historian (this historian) to ask her questions, and about what history, done well, might bring to contemporary thought. Though it may seem that I sometimes distance myself from the book here, for I am not as optimistic as Griswold is about the adequacy of Smithian “therapy” for modernity, I hope the resonance of occasional academic quibbling doesn't overwhelm deeper harmonies and debts, and the extent that his book, more than any other, has situated my thoughts over the last decade.

My work has benefited enormously from my involvement with the International Adam Smith Society and its journal, *The Adam Smith Review*, of which I have recently become Editor. The Society and *Review* have done much in recent years to cultivate a sense of community among scholars across disciplines who are thinking innovatively about Smith and

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