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(Review) Stewart Justman, *The Autonomous Male of Adam Smith*

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STEWART JUSTMAN, *The Autonomous MALE of Adam Smith*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, Oklahoma, 1993, pp. 220.

Here is a provocative, important, rather outrageous study of Adam Smith's attitudes toward gender issues. Everyone interested in Adam Smith's economics, his social or moral theory, or eighteenth century arguments in favour of capitalist society will want to read it.

Stewart Justman is a Professor of English; in contradistinction to most economists, he *never* gives Smith the benefit of the doubt in interpreting Smith's meaning¹. To select a typical example, Justman writes that unlike Smith "I take the conventional view that contradictions matter, and am interested in Smith's use of verbal patches to cover them" (p. 15). This is unfair to Smith since Smith seeks to explain and reconcile contradictions. On the other hand, Justman is quite correct that whenever Smith cannot solve a contradiction, he does indeed attempt to cover it up.

The book has five chapters. Chapters one and five state and restate the basic argument that for Smith men in commercial society tend to have faulty reason, wandering desires, inordinate vanity, love of ornaments, lack of manhood, and other "vices" long imputed to women. Further, according to Justman, "Partly in order to spare himself and his readers the uneasy implications of his own vision of an effeminate society Adam Smith draws heavily on the masculine idiom of stoicism" (p. 4).

Chapter Two is an excellent study of "Stoic Values in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*". Parts of this chapter remind me of Marx's picking apart the inconsistencies in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*². Here, Justman picks apart inconsistencies in *TMS*: men struggle blindly to achieve false goods; they pursue worthless trifles. Justman argues that implicitly Smith figures man as woman; meanwhile, Smith "uses the exaggeratedly manly language of stoicism to mask the weak autonomy of men" (p. 67). A problem with this chapter is Justman's tendency to write as if there is only one correct interpretation or reading of Stoic thought. Of course, there is not. A definitive treatment of the relationship between stoicism and Smith's thought remains to be written.

1. RASHID, SALIM (1989), "Does a Famous Economist Deserve Special Standards? A Critical Note on Adam Smith Scholarship", *History of Economics Society Bulletin*, Fall, II (2) pp. 190-209.

2. See also some of the work of DANIEL DIATKINE, e.g. "A Moral Sentiments Reading of the *Wealth of Nations*", paper presented to the History of Economics Society Meeting, Lexington, Virginia, June, 1990.

Chapter Three, "Clashes of Opinion", the best in the book, is a penetrating criticism of Smith's moral theory. Justman argues that Smith's theory creates other-directed men; it is a morality of etiquette and imitation, which ends up as a prescription of conformity, passivity, and rule by society. Justman's criticisms are reminiscent of fundamental concerns raised by students of "mass society" from Tocqueville and Mill (Justman previously wrote a book on *The Hidden Text of Mill's "Liberty"*) to twentieth century sociologists.

Chapter Four, "The Domestic Woman" is a disappointment. Justman digresses into nineteenth century Victorian images of women and marriage as well as medieval images concerning the same subjects. The problem is that Justman does not appear to have consulted Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, "Report of 1762-3" first published in the Glasgow Edition of Smith's *Works*; there Smith extensively discussed the institution of marriage. Justman also does not appear to have consulted Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. An informed study of Smith's tastes in literature could shed quite a bit of light on Smith's attitudes towards the sexes.

Professor Justman focuses on some deep tensions in Smith's thought. Indeed, when one reads Smith's complete works, there are two significant omissions from his corpus. Smith wrote very little about sex or sin; I suspect these two lacunae are related.

In a sense Justman does not go far enough. Of course in some ways Smith wanted men to become more like women. Smith's major point was that he desired a society where men would "make money (properly understood), not war". If a man wants something which a neighbour owns, he should truck with that neighbour, barter, trade, purchase; not take, steal or pirate. Smith was against such traditional "masculine" pastimes as killing, war, pillage, rape, and plunder. Our masculine cohorts in, e.g. Serbia, are not following Smith's teachings on this issue; the rest of Europe ignores this fundamental Smithian tenet at peril to itself.

Professor Justman also has a tendency to see only the conservative side of Smith, often comparing him with Burke and other conservative thinkers. There is an entire radical side to Smith's thought which Justman completely misses³.

3. See ROTHSCHILD, EMMA (1992), "Adam Smith and Conservative Economics", *Economic History Review*, XLV, (I), pp. 74-96; PACK, SPENCER J. (1991), *Capitalism as a Moral System: Adam Smith's Critique of the Free Market Economy*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar.

Yet, Justman's book should promote further discussion, debate, and research into the issues surrounding Smith and gender. It does not presume to give final answers. Justman writes that the aim of his study is "to stir thought" (p. 23); he succeeds admirably.

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