

INTERPRETING ADAM SMITH'S VIEWS ON THE EDUCATION OF THE POOR
IN THE AGE OF BENEVOLENCE

by

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DEDICATION

To my beautiful family.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge	SPCK
The Theory of Moral Sentiments	TMS
The Wealth of Nations	WN

ABSTRACT

INTERPRETING ADAM SMITH'S VIEWS ON THE EDUCATION OF THE POOR IN THE AGE OF BENEVOLENCE

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This dissertation provides an interpretation of Adam Smith's article "Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Education of Youth" by placing it in the historical context of the great flourishing of charity that occurred in 18th century Britain. The common interpretation of the article from Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* is that Smith advocated for government to partially subsidize education for the poor. The moral degradation resulting from the division of labor required a remedy. However, the presence of a growing tradition of charity schooling in an age of increasing wealth provokes the question of why Smith, who is attentive to and appreciative of benevolence and who is critical of government, would abandon charity when it seemed most promising.

In Chapter 1, I provide a history of charity schools in Britain and a history of thought regarding the education of the poor. The chapter demonstrates how radical and

seemingly unwarranted Smith would have been to have advocated for direct government provision.

In Chapter 2, I explore the nascent discourse on government provision of education in Britain before *The Wealth of Nations*. The most significant discourse stems from Montesquieu's 1748 publication of *The Spirit of Laws*. I reveal, however, how poorly received such emergent statist sentiments were. They do not appear to be a foundation on which Smith would construct a proposal for government provision.

In Chapter 3, I explore Smith's article from the historical perspective which I have reconstructed in the prior two chapters. I show that the textual material which has been treated as ambiguous, inconsistent and digressive contains many inconveniences for the common interpretation that Smith advocated for government provision. I offer an alternative interpretation that Smith favored both the free market and charity over the option of government. I also show he rejected Montesquieu.

INTRODUCTION

In 1791 the famous English philanthropist, Hannah More, reflects on the times as “the age of Benevolence.” Historians have long concurred with her. There is little exaggeration in More’s spirited remark: “The noble and numberless structures for the relief of distress, which are the ornament and glory of our metropolis, proclaim a species of munificence unknown to former ages” (1828, vol. 1, p. 291).

Adam Smith recognizes the tendency in man towards such kindness and benevolence. He smiles upon it, and in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments (TMS)* he sides with Hutcheson and Shaftesbury to assert its presence and authenticity against Mandeville and Hobbes. He places benevolence in his definition of the perfection of human nature (II.ii.I.3; VI.iii.12). He gives it credit for being able to turn a free society into the good society (II.ii.3.4; III.5.4). And he is aware of how it naturally inspires and serves as an example (II.i.5.3). And although he grants the civil magistrate the authority “to command mutual good offices to a certain degree” – possibly to command benevolence – he recognizes that the authority requires the “greatest delicacy” (II.ii.1.8). Smith would seem to *prefer* to grant the prominent issue of the day – the care for the poor – to the promise of Hannah More’s philanthropy.

One may draw a similar impression from *The Wealth of Nations (WN)* that, when it comes to issues of poverty, he would prefer solutions that do not involve direct

provision. Smith shows considerable interest in remedying the conditions of the poor, but the remedy depends upon the cessation of state interference in the market rather than upon direct state provision. As W.F. Campbell (1967) points out, Smith wishes to remove special privileges, not counteract existing ones with additional special privileges in favor of the poor (p. 577). We see that he opposes those laws that would create an imbalance in favor of the politically connected. He identifies illiberal practices amongst the cabals of merchants that harmed laborers and farmers. And he reserves an especially harsh critique of the Law of Settlements which impeded the labor mobility for the lowest ranks.¹ Given how he frames his attack on mercantilism, it can be argued that Smith simultaneously sells the model of a commercial order to merchants based on economic reasoning, and also validates it to men of public spirit based on its moral and material superiority for the lower ranks.² Intricately intertwined are the moral and political projects of Scottish Enlightenment, the wealth of the Industrial Revolution, and the spirit of the Age of Benevolence.

Despite his demonstrated preference to respond to poverty by *removing* legislation and despite the flourishing of charity in his age, Smith would appear to advocate that government subsidize education for the poor. That is, if we believe the vast majority of interpretations today. R.D. Freeman (1996) writes, “Smith demanded that the government provide the opportunity for at least a basic education” (p. 180). Jerry Muller (1993) writes, “Smith recommends universal public schooling, largely at the

¹ Thus, it might be argued, he was able to avoid taking a direct position on the Poor Laws.

² Smith’s attention to the poor is acknowledged in his time. Thomas Ruggles, in his *History of the Poor* (1793) praises *The Wealth of Nations* on the subject of the poor, and tells the reader that he will liberally quote passages regarding the poor from WN as if they were aphorisms, and “leaving the reader to trace the deductions this great writer has made” (vol 2, p. 10).

government expense” (p. 150). Samuel Fleishcacker (2004) writes, “Smith shows no unease about including institutions to foster courage and intelligence, and to dampen religious enthusiasm, within the sovereigns third duty” (p. 235). Andrew Skinner (1996) writes, “There must be a system of public education” (p. 192). And R. Lamb (1973) concludes, “Smith argued that it is only the state through education which can alter this mass degeneration of the worker” (p. 278).

The opinion of such scholars is largely made plausible based on three aspects of Smith’s article “Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Education of Youth.” These aspects are: a clear summoning of the government into the discussion of remedies, the identification of a model of provision resembling Scotland’s own legally enforced system, and a passionate discussion of moral development reminiscent of his master work, TMS. Scholars regularly argue – using modern economic terminology – that Smith is making a case for the government to intervene in a “failed market.”

But there are numerous important textual inconveniences and ambiguities in the article that threaten an interpretation that Smith is an advocate for government. One such inconvenience is that he acknowledges the existence of and he expresses an appreciation for charity schooling, which in his time would have been an alternative to government provision. In this dissertation I introduce the age of benevolence as a context needed in the act of interpreting such textual inconveniences. The age of benevolence causes us to ask: Why would a position of advocacy for state intervention emerge in an environment marked by an unprecedented flourishing of voluntary charity? And why would Smith, the

insightful critic of government interference, turn his back on the non-governmental option of charity?

This dissertation is first historical, and second a textual analysis of Smith's article "Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Education of Youth." I concur with Edwin West (1977) that "Smith's argument [regarding the third duty of the sovereign] cannot be fully appreciated without substantial acquaintance with...history" (p. 14). Similarly, Irvin Sobel (1979) more generally writes that "the ideas of the great economic system-builders should be interpreted in the context to the problems, knowledge, and intellectual method of the time in which they wrote" (p. 351). I suggest that the missing context for understanding the article is the flourishing of charity. Including it changes the way the text may be plausibly read.

The result of my historical analysis is a portrayal of how radical the construed position of Smith as advocate of government provision would have been in 1776 Britain. Charity was a respected, traditional, and effective means of provision. Although charity was not universal, the idea of government subsidization had much going against it in the discourses of the time and the idea had not yet made significant strides in political discourse. Finding this radical proposal by Smith as tending toward implausibility on many counts, I gravitate toward comparing what he wrote to other discourses on education at the time, and I explore what appears today to be ambiguous and awkward in his text. I offer an alternative reading of what his text could plausibly have been aiming to persuade his audience of if not the merit of government intervention.

I argue that his text resembles those of his time which were engaging in a different and highly contentious discourse in the 18th century that needed to be resolved before the idea of government provision could take root. Namely, Smith's passionate portrayal of social ills and his assertion of public benefits – which many rely on for their common statist interpretation – are the familiar instruments of his time to merely demonstrate the *desirability* of an educated lower class, and no more. Though the text is a very compelling assertion of desirability, I argue that the assertion serves primarily this focused purpose. As to the means of provision – government, charity, or private – I argue that the article ventures into relatively uncharted territory and that the article demonstrates a caution and suspicion of government that would characterize the discussion for several more decades and require a different world politics to begin to alter.

The common interpretation, therefore, conflates two separable discourses that writers in his time were able to keep separate: the desirability of education and means of provision. Smith demonstrates amiability in the first discourse, and austerity to the second discourse. The common interpretation gives much more attention to the amiability than the austerity, the heat than the coolness. The result is a conflated interpretation that because Smith is passionate or certain about the desirability of education, that he is equally so about government provision. But the article is much more disciplined, prudent, and systematic than has been generally acknowledged.

In chapter 1, I portray the intellectual discourses leading up to Smith's publication of WN in 1776. I show, first, that the intellectual talents of the day are directed variously

at other important issues. Namely, they are engaged in the enthusiastic development of a philosophy of education and in the reformation of universities. Both of these engagements are aimed to improve the middle to upper ranks; thus the intellectual talents are not applied to educational issues of the poor. Second, in so far as they engage issues of the poor, they do so dismissively. Bernard Mandeville is a seminal figure throughout the century who characterizes education for the poor as a public bad instead of a public good. Mandeville's position is reiterated by intellectuals, urban elites, and rural landholders throughout the century. Third, there is a governing framework that views the educational provision for the poor to be a matter of charity. To that end, charity is mature, widely-respected by the middle ranks, deeply ingrained in communities, heavily participated in by the growing middle-class, expressed as a matter of religious duty, and deemed capable to its humble task.

In Chapter 2, I explore to what degree any statist ideas preceded Smith within British discourse. I wish to assess whether there were ideas in Britain before 1776 that could be seen as constituting an emergent paradigm that Smith adopts in his article. I determine that there is a line of statist thinking stemming from Montesquieu, and there are some utopian fictions from a few of the most radical social reformers of the day. Based on the reception of Montesquieu's ideas, I reaffirm how inhospitable Britain was to his ideas. And based on the nature of the radical reformers' proposals, I determine that statism was generally still short of its future incarnation of universal popular provision. To expect Smith to have gone beyond these discourse and to have advocated for a government provision for the poor is to have to cast Smith as more radical than the most

overt radical reformers. And we still don't have an answer about why he would have dismissed charity.

At this point, there are two possible ways to apply this history. First, one might celebrate Smith as a progressive or radical that was prescient of 19th century development of national education. And related, one might further develop the discussion of Smith as a kind of overall radical for his time – an existing line of discussion in Smithian literature.³ On the specific topic of education, a few have hinted at Smith's radicalism. Dennis Rasmussen (2007) calls Smith's plan "progressive" (p. 111). Ryan Hanley (2009) says it is "radical for this time" (p. 60). Gertrud Himmelfarb (1983) writes, "He now advanced a scheme requiring a greater measure of government involvement than anything that had ever existed before" (p. 59). And Lionel Robbins (1965) writes that it was "very unconventional" (p. 90), and it was "some forty years later" that "compulsory education is in the picture" (p. 92).

Alternatively, the one might respond to the would-be radicalism, as I characterize it in this dissertation, and decide that it requires us to adopt a fresh skepticism towards the common interpretation of Smith as an advocate of government provision. Smith might be said to have been radical when it came to free trade. But such expressions of radicalism are quite different. He was quite overt about his views on trade. And the radicalism was in the direction of liberty. On education, there is much about the article that is awkward, vague, and contradictory. And he would be expressing a radicalism in the direction of violating liberty through taxation, social control, and a displacement market and

³ Emma Rothschild (1992) characterizes Smith as conservative economic theorist in this line of discourse..

charitable solutions. Therefore, I am choosing to believe that my portrayal of educational discourse at the time should prompt a reexamination of the text for an alternative interpretation before embracing the idea that Smith ushered in a sphere of government responsibilities that others had not contemplated.

In Chapter 3, then, I begin by surveying the literature that interprets Smith as an advocate for government provision. Then I survey the infrequent cases in the literature where scholars believe his position must be qualified. The main purpose of this chapter is to determine if it is possible to more fully substantiate these infrequent dissenting views. I do so by viewing passages that have been given less attention, and to considering how the nuances of historical discourses appear to elucidate them. I take as an assumption that Smith's writing is not sloppy, digressive and unintentionally awkward. I assume, instead, as Peter Minowitz states, that Smith's writing is "systematic and rigorous as a matter of principle" (1993, p. 6). But also I assume that Smith's writing may in part rely on implicit knowledge of discourses specific to education, endowments, and charity at the time – implicit knowledge generally lost to us today. I resituate these passages into these historical discourses and I find the passages gain greatly in meaning by doing so. These passages may plausibly amount to significant inconveniences for the common interpretation of Smith as an advocate for government provision.

I argue that the inconveniences demonstrate, first, a strong posture against government interference in natural markets. Second, Smith does enter a preexisting debate, and he rejects the existing strand of discourse related to government provision identified in Chapter 2. Third, Smith gives charity schools a high stature in the

discussion, elevating them as a possible solution distinct from an older institutional form of endowments, and sharing qualities of the free market. A few scholars have claimed Smith appreciated charity schools (e.g. West 1994; 1977, p. 16-17; Mueller, 2015), but here I provide some significant substance to those claims. Fourth, Smith equivocates as to the best means of provision; he requires an assessment of conditions and proposals before a judgment can be made. I conclude that Smith's article offers a strong case for the desirability of education, but that it withholds government advocacy and would seem to prefer that government merely encourage the natural processes of the free market and benefaction.⁴

Five historical realities obscure just how radical Smith would have been to propose government, and may be to blame for the lack of attention to charity in discussing Smith. First, philosophical discussion regarding the role of government in education does actually precede Smith; therefore, the article might just be a sign of the times. Second, his very own Scotland did have a partial governmentally endowed education system; therefore, Smith might be a traditional Scot instead of radical. Third, in Britain it would be only two decades before significant governmental models would be proposed; therefore, Smith might be prescient of intellectual developments. Fourth, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* makes plausible that Smith would be greatly concerned about the lack of educational opportunities; therefore, one can imagine that Smith would make exceptions against liberty. Lastly, he describes criteria for government intervention that

⁴ I will give some attention to the fact that Smith does appear to entertain the possibility that government might "impose" upon people the necessity of acquiring education by making them pass some sort of test (either formal or informal) to be permitted to ply a trade. However, this dissertation is focused specifically on the how strong of a case he makes regarding government *provision*, which would constitute the largest expenditure and greatest act of social control in his discussion.

resemble modern economic criteria of “market failure;” therefore, prescient of future political economics, he allows public benefits to rationalize government intervention. The scope of this dissertation is dictated by the challenges these perspectives pose. I will address each one through the course of it to show that each perspective must be significantly qualified, and that none ought to determine how we read Smith.

To conclude, the following dissertation enters what Craig Smith calls the new *Das Adam Smith Problem*. Craig Smith (2014) writes, “Those who interpret Smith in light of the tradition of natural jurisprudence (Haakonssen, 1981; Hont and Ignatieff, 2010) stress the distance between Smith’s views on justice and contemporary notions of distributive justice. Others, including Samuel Fleischacker (2003) and Gareth Stedman Jones (2004), have made a case for reading Smith as a thinker who foreshadows modern ideas of social or distributive justice” (p. 254). The interpretations of Smith’s position on education tend to characterize him as concerned with social and distributive justice. Nathan Rosenberg (1965) calls his article on education, “a major source of inspiration for a socialist critique of capitalist institutions” (p. 127). Macfie (1967) writes that Smith admitted “a formidable state autocracy; a socialist spread of controls that would make some modern socialists’ eyes pop” (p. 8). And Fleischacker (2004) claims Smith’s third duty of the sovereign “is broad enough to include practically all the tasks that modern welfare liberals, as opposed to libertarians, would put under government purview” (p. 234). As that such views always vie to determine Smith’s legacy, it is important to scrutinize how they are maintained and whether they have exhausted the discussion of Smith’s position. I discover that historical context helps explain the article as, indeed, highly representative

of what we would today call a “classical liberalism:” it analyzes a problem and evaluates the merit of remedies, all with a presumption of liberty and a caution and prudence toward anything that might violate it. I show that there remain valid reasons to be suspicious of the construed scope, manner, logic, precision and conviction of Smith’s consideration of government provision for the poor.

Despite having built a framework for a larger project, I find myself facing unique circumstances that force me to be selective in what I present. As an active duty member of the United States Air Force facing mission demands, I am required to bring my studies to a close. The larger project on which I have worked deserves more time before it is ready for publication and it will have to be pursued incrementally in later efforts. For the present situation, my findings must be honed into a presentable form. I have chosen to place emphasis on the historical context that I feel is informative for reading Smith’s article. And I provide textual analysis that demonstrates his caution toward government in the sphere of education and his preference for charity. I hope to have selected the material that provides a cohesive argument, and that suggests the potential for additional inquiries into characterizing Smith’s posture toward government. At the same time, I look forward to the extension of the vetting process that may add to the future evolution of the larger project, and that may continue to aid me in adding delicacy and nuance to the treatment of the subject.

CHAPTER 1: THE STATE OF DISCOURSE REGARDING EDUCATING THE POOR BEFORE ADAM SMITH

Education has been so much the subject of disquisition... and it must ever be an object of anxious attention... Education, like morality, is an inexhaustible fountain of good and evil, on which the eye may ever dwell.

– David Williams, *Lectures on Education* (1789a, p. 18)

Education theory was a topic of great interest and enthusiasm as Smith wrote about education in WN. Baconism and Newtonianism had ushered in a strong sense of the need for curricular reform toward science, empiricism, and usefulness (Gilead, 2011; Allen, 1993). Influenced by these great intellectual forefathers, moralists such as John Locke, The Earl of Shaftesbury and David Hume had offered views on the social-psychology of morals and on potential abilities. They inspired many to disregard the presumption of innate, unmalleable and predestined traits, and they prompted methodological reform suited to the emerging views of the malleable mind (Crimmins 1990, p. 71; Stewart 1855, Vol. 8, pg. 55). As Smith penned his thoughts on education, Smith entered into an environment rich in discourse that had prompted enthusiasm to broadly rethink many aspects of education.

Although education theory was in its “infancy,” as Joseph Priestley writes in 1768 (p. 86), it would be a precocious infancy. Historian Stephen Bygrave (2009) writes that

the literature on education in the second half of the 18th century was “so ubiquitous” as to require “a very big book indeed” to survey it (p. 14). He cites a figure of 200 educational treatises published between 1762 and 1800.⁵ In a review of a treatise in 1808, the editors of *The Port Folio* could very credibly criticize the new treatise on the grounds that the author’s “topicks of education...have [already] been amply and ably discussed by original thinkers” (Dennie and Hall 1808, p. 85).

Many important discourses on education occurred in the 18th century which would radically change education. Perhaps, the most significant ones were those largely inspired by John Locke. Namely, it had become of great interest among philosophers and reformers to determine the value of natural philosophy, empiricism, and professional education in lieu of classical and virtuous education. It also was of interest to determine the relative value of formal education and domestic education for the upper ranks. More nuanced methodological debates included determining the value of structured education versus social and random experiences, the value of allegory, the value of corporeal punishment, and the value of the language of instruction (Gaelic, English, or Latin). In addition, the topic of women’s education received growing attention. Finally, the desirability of the literacy among the poor was debated.

One of the distinct hallmarks of the discourse on education is how diverse its contributors were. “Education had not yet come to be defined as a separate discipline or subject,” (Musgrave 1968, p. 12), and thus many interests coincided with it and helped it

⁵ 1762 is both the year in which Rousseau published *Emile*, and also the year of the expulsion of the Jesuits from France. It marked a spike in interest in reestablishing education in a secular form. See Maurice Whitehead (2013) for extensive history of the conflict with the Jesuits. Chisick (1981) cites a different source, identifying a spike of 15 works in 1762 dedicated to education, and over 150 works dedicated just to *Emile* over the course of the next 3 decades (p. 41-43).

become manifest as a focal topic over time. In recent years, commentators have begun to draw attention to the strands of education theory in the many achievements we associate with the Scottish Enlightenment. Most obviously, education theory inspired the dramatic transformation of the Scottish universities' curriculum toward practical ends and sciences (Broadie 2007; Jones, 1983; Olson, 1971). Education theory also directed the universities' more integrated role in the community, and promoted the dispersion of a spirit of invention and improvement (Wood, 2006). Education theory was part of the Scottish interest in conjectural history (Allen, 1993). And education theory eventually figured into the evolving logic of the specific details of the poor laws of Britain (Himmelfarb, 1983; Dean, 1991).

Education theory was also present in the Scottish moral theories of the time. Although Smith offers his most direct comments about education in the articles in Book V of WN, much of his corpus can be understood against the backdrop of the emerging theories of education. Moral theory is a field of 18th educational theory, and vice versa. Or, as Harvey Chisick (1981) writes, "Sensationalist psychology...implied a theory of education" (1981, p. 38-39).

The particular topic of university reform is an example of how scholars of all different disciplines and backgrounds were deeply invested collaborators governed by an unprecedented enthusiasm for educational change, for rethinking prior models, and for challenging the status quo. The more familiar names of Scottish university reform include John Stevenson, Charlie Mackie, Colin MacLaurin, John Simon, George Turnbull, Robert Molesworth, Lord Shaftesbury, William Leechman, Francis Hutcheson,

Alexander Dunlop, James Arbuckle, William Wishart, George Rosse, Alexander Gerard, and Thomas Reid. Many of these figures were not just professors, but were also very much public figures, sometimes serving as preachers, and sometimes destined to become politicians. These, and many more, influenced the education movement by their strength of character in fighting back religious doctrine, by their foresight and position in hiring sympathetic professors, by their ability to liaise between political and scholarly spheres, by their experimentation in new methodologies and purposes (P. Jones, 1983; Phillipson, 1983; Wood, 2006).

Over the course of the century, we can observe a tremendous transformation of university curricula, structure, and objectives. Scholasticism and religious authority gave way incrementally; replaced by moral and natural sciences. The universities added a number of chairs to Law, Medicine, Rhetoric, Chemistry, Natural History, Astronomy and Agriculture, enabling a significant growth in the programs. The universities became more practical. The very nature of teaching evolved: an emphasis on quality teaching grew, a professional structure of advancement developed, and regency gave way to specialized chairs of instruction (Wood, 2006; Smout 1969, p. 476; Chitnis 1986, p. 35-71.).

Meanwhile, many social and economic changes caused an even wider group of social leaders to reflect on education. Interest in education was related to concerns regarding the growth of population, the changes in the economic structure of society, the dissolution of traditional community models, and the increase of urban pauperism. Each of these changes compelled clergy, philanthropists and social reforms to contemplate the

role of education in resolving the apparent degradation of moral standards, traditional manners, religious discipline, and social order.

By the time Smith writes WN, many commentators on education were self-aware of its importance on a grand scale. Joseph Fenn (1769) writes, “The Education of Youth is considered in all Countries as the Object which interests most immediately the Happiness of Families” (p. III). Carl Benhard Wadström (1794) writes, “The education of youth...is a matter of the highest importance to every society” (p. 92). In the journals, the tone was the same. In the year of WN’s publication, one can read, “The education of youth is of utmost importance to the present, as well as their future, happiness” (Dick 1776, p. 157). Also, “There is not, perhaps, a point of more national concern than the education of youth” (Smollet 1781, p. 103). Education was viewed by many as a national concern. Correcting its deficiencies preoccupied many social reformers of public spirit.

What becomes evident is that in the second half of the 18th century there was a thick market of ideas regarding education, there was great anxiety and enthusiasm, and there was a public spirit regarding social improvement. All of these facts might appear to predict that when Smith published WN in 1776, he was entering into a prominent discussion among the nation’s leading thinkers as to how to expand availability of this product of education which had attracted so much interest, this product which was essential for happiness and for the flourishing of society. However, it is not the case that philosophers, politicians, and intellectuals had given much attention to the desirability of expanding access to the lower ranks. They had instead given their attention rather exclusively to the improvement of education for the upper classes, for their would-be

students at universities, and for present and future leaders (Green 2013, p. 238) In so far as they addressed the poor, their comments amounted to what might be called a negative theory of education – meaning, the poor either could not learn or were precluded by their circumstances from learning (Green 2013, p. 238).

And while philanthropists and clergy did find access desirable, they did not push the discourse toward issues of government assistance. Therefore, as Smith wrote his article which has been interpreted as advocating for government provision of universal access for poor⁶, his intellectual peers had left the poor out of their configurations for school reform, had generally dismissed them, and had offered almost no jurisprudential framework for discussing their education. And the philanthropists and clergy did not turn political. A political-economic debate on the merit of public versus private education was almost entirely absent.

Locke, Mandeville and Doubt about Educating the Poor

In the following two section, I examine the works of philosophers in the 18th century. I will characterize the history of thought regarding education when Smith was writing. I will begin by showing that Locke and Mandeville found literacy education of the poor to be undesirable. They set the foundation, or gave a prominent voice, for discourse throughout the century. It is a discourse marked by a skepticism which would preclude developments in theories of education, create a rift between intellects and philanthropists, foreclose a politics that could entertain governmental involvement, and

⁶ e.g., Rothschild (1998); Muller (1993); A. Skinner (1996); Rimlinger (1976); Pack (1991); Buchan (2006); Fitzgibbons (1997).

set Britain on a different path from continental Europe starting in the middle of the century.

“The most interesting question about the development of national education in England is...not so much why it occurred but why it occurred so late” (Green 2013, p. 204). Andy Green provides a review of the literature as to why the British were so hostile to the ideas that the French embraced. First, the Restoration had been “unfavorable to popular education, which was seen as a dangerous stimulant to sedition and unrest” (p. 234). This first explanation suggests an even deeper source of the sentiments which I characterize as “Mandevillian” in the discourses of the 18th century. Second, Britain had enjoyed many years unengaged in the continental wars; thus Britain did not develop a sense of the necessity to educate officers, now ere they compelled by a need to create a national identity (p. 235-236). Third, Britain, which had a far less swollen bureaucracy than France, and did not feel the need to create such a class of people.⁷ Fourth, the early development of a merchant class lent to a broad suspicion of government (p. 236). And lastly, Britain was not hostile toward the church’s influence in education the way the French were.

These theories by historians may serve as a backdrop for the current inquiry. But much of the literature that produced them served a different purpose than mine, and can only marginally inform my inquiry. These theories have been generated by historians such as David Landes, Parry Anderson, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, David Marquand, Andrew Gamble, Tom Nairn, and David Marquand. In most of these cases,

⁷ Green’s assertion in regards to lack of military and bureaucratic needs comports well with John Brewer’s excellent account of the time (1988).

their objectives have been to understand the decline of British industrialism in the late 19th century, and to implicate the late development of national education. As such, they do not offer substantive accounts of 18th century education, and they make statements that broadly apply.

In contrast, my project has a more specific focus, and requires great detail and substance. I wish to characterize the state of public discourse in the specific point in time – the years when Smith formulated his thoughts and published WN. I trade off interesting theories regarding deeper determinants of a spirit of the times for a fuller representation of discourse among those specifically discussing education. I wish to capture the tenor of the discourse so as to understand what challenges Smith had to face in 1776. The current inquiry is thus a more focused and demonstrative project. This focus allows me to propose some theses specific to the second half of the 18th century before the French Revolution radically altered the politics and polemics. And such theses include, first, that philosophers and intellects had not yet deemed the education of the poor to be desirable, thus precluding them from entertaining questions of jurisprudence and police; and second, that philanthropists and clergy operated within a mental framework of charity solutions, thus precluding contemplation of governmental solutions. These dispositions begin to reveal how radical Smith would have been to advocate for governmental provision. In Chapter 2, I extend my theses to demonstrate that the environment was also hostile to nascent statism.⁸

⁸ And perhaps indicative of the explanations that Green (2013) references.

John Locke is a seminal figure in 18th century educational discourse (Gill, 2016; Jones 1938, p. 5). He laid the foundation for the 18th century theories of education with his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) (Chiscik 1981, p. 39). It seems correct to begin with him, as many others do (e.g., Compayré, 1886). He stimulated two main debates: the merit of domestic education via tutors and parents versus that of formal education in a public school; and the merit of useful or scientific education versus classical and virtue-oriented education. These debates can be seen in most treatises throughout the century. They figure into university reform. They stimulate Smith's views on boarding schools and travel abroad. They can be seen in Smith's criticism toward the history of philosophy within the article of education as well as in his recommendations for scientific knowledge in his article "Of the Expense of the Institutions for the Instruction of People of All Ages." Toward the end of the century intellectuals continued to directly engage Locke's ideas for education. James Buchanan's *Plan of an English Grammar-School Education* (1770) and Vicemus Knox's *Liberal Education* (1781) are testimony of his enduring influence.

Locke's importance and novelty can be understood when viewing the state of education in Britain in his time. Both the Tudor monarchy and wealthy merchants had shown an interest in expanding grammar schools and universities in the 16th century. Wealthy merchants had endowed schools, and the monarchy had set about reorganizing them, supervising them and encouraging them (Simon, 1968; Green 2013, p. 233). After the revolutionary period of the mid 1600s, the church played a larger role in education – and the church was wary of the republican sentiments in education (Green 2013, p. 234).

By the end of the century, as Locke was writing, school endowments had languished and lost their value, management had become corrupted, enrollments dwindled, the aristocracy and gentry chose in increasing numbers to educate their children at home, and children of lower ranks were pushed out of the grammar schools (Green 2013, p. 234). Many in England felt the need for major reforms.

Locke stimulated such reform initiatives and prompted a new interest in useful and scientific education. But he did not trigger reform specifically for the education of the poor. The discourses, instead, focused on students who would attend university, become statesmen, and hold rank (Gay, 1998). Locke did not discuss the education of the poor. The poor are absent from *Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1692). Locke's concern for the poor extend no further than the search for immediate solutions for the social blight of pauperism. His solutions are to close down taverns, compel hard work, and institute legal reform to force begging children into workhouses where they might develop a skill (Gay 1998, p. 190). He offers no recommendation to educate the poor toward literacy.

Instead, his recommendations for the poor laws remained a legacy weighing against literacy and moral education for the poor. Thomas Ruggles writes in the 1790s, nearly a century after Locke discussed the poor laws, "It would be premature to offer at this time a specific plan for the establishment of [schools of industry within the administration of the poor rates]; it may nevertheless be proper to preserve, that Mr. Locke's theory, with the experiments already made in the country of Lincoln, would together form a good outline" (1793, vol. 2, p. 174). Poor law reformation stood quite

apart from liberal education, and continued to govern much of the thinking through the century.

Nonetheless, some ideas have a life of their own. Locke's idea of the influence of experience, or "nurture," did inspire many philanthropists to contemplate whether the poor might be malleable towards decency and orderliness through means other than placing them in workhouses. I am specifically referring to his theory of *tabula rasa*. The contemplation of malleability is a major transformation in the idea of the poor (Crimmins 1990, p. 71). Chisick (1981) calls it one of the "foundations" of Enlightenment thought, and claims that it implied an "unlimited power" in education (p. 242). The poor need not be seen as fully predestined toward a vice; punishment need not be seen as the only treatment (e.g. Fielding, 1751). The poor could now be a project that aimed at greater permanent transformation. Educating for literacy then, even though not a part of Locke's plan, came to compete with the workhouses of the time for the common ends of social control (Dean 1991; Richardson 1994). Activist school teacher Alexander Christison writes in a manner that reveals the massive transformation of thinking that had happened over the course of the century: "Genius is no respecter of ranks, and may be oftener found in the cottage than in the palace" (1802, p. 7). Howlett (1788) writes that Locke's moral theories redeemed him from his 1697 recommendation to the Board of Trade for modifications to the Poor Laws (p.24).

Still, many intellectuals shared his preference toward labor and discipline to achieve social control of the poor. Most had little to say about the poor, and what they said was negative. Historians today identify that the Enlightenment thinkers operated

within a paradigm of two societies (Gay, 1969; Hampson, 1968). As Norman Hampson (1968) writes, Enlightenment thinkers “drew a sharp distinction between their own educated public and the illiterate rabble” (p. 110).

There is perhaps no philosopher more emblematic of the skepticism toward the education of the poor than Mandeville. In his second edition of *The Fable of the Bees* (1723) Mandeville consciously stepped in as the critic of charity schools. Mandeville honed and legitimized anxious sentiments about the social experiment of educating the poor. As will be made evident throughout this dissertation, it was as important for well-intended philanthropists and social reformers to respond to him in 1800 as it was in 1723.

Mandeville’s concerns resonated with a wide audience. He begins his analysis of the charity school movement by asking why education should be viewed as a solution to the problem of vice. Which passion ought education to quell? Whatever passion one might name, that passion is likely to be found among the virtuous as well. “Rogues have the same Passions to gratify as other Men... a Robber may be as much supported by his Pride, as that of an honest Soldier” (1924, vol. 1, p. 275). He also asks, what evidence can one submit as proof of effectiveness? Despite a long tradition of charity schooling, “there is as much Wickedness as ever” (p. 276). Finding misguided the inclination to fix the social ills of the day through education, he thus seeks to explain the strange inclination.

He determines that there is a “Charm that renders Charity-schools...bewitching,” and that schools are “earnestly and fervently recommended by the whole body of the Clergy” to ensure one’s “future Welfare” in the afterlife (p. 284). Mandeville determines that there is merely a dangerously “zealous” culture and politics that perpetuates

charities. He describes the phenomenon as being built on specious argumentation and protected by a natural defensiveness. He decides to break through the defensive “fortress” with the strongest counterargument that he can offer.

His counterargument rests largely on the belief common at the time that the lower ranks served an essential function in society in their current state – that their numbers and their ignorance served to produce wealth for the country. It was a mercantilist view, one in which “poverty, instead of being an evil, was considered useful and indeed essential to the wealth of the country” (Rimlinger 1976, p. 336). In such a model of the economy, knowledge is dangerous because it makes laborers discontent with their place.

Mandeville writes:

To make People easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite that great Numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor. Knowledge both enlarges and multiples our Desires, and the fewer things a Man wishes for, the more easily his Necessities may be supply'd...The more a Shepherd, a Plowman or any other Peasant knows of the World, and the things that are Foreign to his Labour or Employment, the less fit he'll be to go through the Fatigues and Hardships of it with Chearfulness and Content (1924, vol. 1, p. 288)

Therefore, we should predict that education would stir sentiments, such as envy, which would create political unrest rather than peace, order, and virtue. The current social order would be put under pressure and would become unstable.

In terms of economics, the new order would see higher prices and greater instability. He argues that there is a natural “compound” of jobs in a society. Education is

a plan that “meddles and interferes” with the natural compound, and that threatens the “Harmony of Society” (p. 299-300). Education reveals alternative employments and instills a sense of pride, leading the lower ranks to shun mean and dirty jobs and causing wages of such jobs to go up. Also, in the new relationship to employers, laborers will feel emboldened to change jobs, thus further creating uncertainty and instability (p. 303).

There is a disquieting moral component to these predictions. Education would seem to trigger vicious sentiments, instead of virtuous. Laborers who have a small degree of literacy will “esteem themselves infinitely above those who are wholly ignorant.” Mandeville writes, “We are all fond of, and apt to overvalue those Qualifications we have purchased at the Expence of our Ease and Quiet for Years” (p. 289).

Mandeville presents these views, knowing that they will provoke a backlash. He exclaims, “It is ten to one but they’ll indict me for endeavoring by Instigation of the Prince of Darkness, to introduce into these Realms greater Ignorance and Barbarity” (1924, vol. 1, p. 290). “They,” in the exclamation, are the lower and middle ranks, the clergy and social reformers. As for the scholars, philosophers, and political elite – he feels they will commiserate with him.

Enduring Resistance

The resistance to education for the poor remained throughout the century. The views of Locke and Mandeville frame the debate and are respectively appealed to or complained of well into the 19th century. The reverend and teacher Samuel Parr writes in 1780 of Mandeville’s enduring influence in the discourse on education, “The liveliness of [Mandeville], has, I know, procured him converts among readers of morose tempers, and

contracted views” (1828, p. 117). In 1799, a parish leader in Sinclair’s 1799 *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1799, Vol. 21, p. 316) complains of the lack of interest from philosophers in particular. And in 1806, a magistrate in Glasgow, Patrick Colquhoun, shames the higher ranks in general. Proposing that education for the poor is desirable, he writes, “Numberless instances occur in this nation...where benevolent individual are employed in administering relief in distress. But the higher and noble aim of preventing those calamities which lead to idleness and crimes...has not, as yet, generally attracted the notice of those who walk in the more elevated walks of life” (p. 11).

The resistance to education for the poor persists in several forms. First, mercantilist doctrine remained strong; that is, poverty was seen as necessary for the overall success of the economy. Arthur Young writes in 1771, for example, that “Everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor or they will never be industrious” (as cited in Rimlinger 1796, p. 336). In 1803 John Millar was still rallying against the mercantilist doctrine: “The doctrine maintained by some politicians, that the ignorance of the labouring people is of advantage, by securing their patience and submission under the yoke which their unequal fortune has imposed upon them, is no less absurd, as it is revolting to all the feeling of humanity” (1812, vol 4, p. 159).

Second, the views of the poor were prohibitively pejorative. The sentiments of many thinkers went little further than to assert that the poor were a fixture to society, and that their vices were inherent either to their person or their condition. In terms of their person, Voltaire writes, “I doubt whether that class of citizens will ever have time or capacity for education.” And “they will always be stupid and barbarous (cite by Viner

1991, p. 283.) Thomas Ruggles (1793) writes of “the wayward nature of their disposition...[their] vicious habits...their idleness and dissipation... that neither the power of the legislature nor the wisdom of philosophers can teach to alleviate” (p. 10-11). James Anderson (1777), who sympathized with the poor, recognizes that owing to their offensive appearance and manners, “it is not surprising that they should often find occasion for blame” (p. 7). Little had evolved since Daniel Defoe at the beginning of the century. Defoe (1704) complained that the poor were people who made the nation lazy, clogged the parishes, and made themselves “worthy of laws, and peculiar management to dispose of and direct them,” and that “no man in England could be poor for want of work” (p. 9).

Third, the focus on prohibitive conditions for learning would remain salient all the way through the century. As writers began systematically to consider the causality of poverty and vice, they did not all come to the conclusion that education would overcome circumstances (Dean, 1991). Reverend George Lavington sees poverty and the conditions of poverty, rather than lack of formal education, as causal to ignorance (1746, p. 7). Adam Ferguson writes, “We forget how many circumstances, especially in populous cities, tend to corrupt the lowest order of men. Ignorance is the least of their failings” (1767, p. 135).⁹ Howlett’s *The Insufficiency of the Causes to Which the Increase in the Poor have been Commonly Ascribed* (1788) does not even ascribe any causal impact of education to the state of the poor. Instead, such writers add even further reasons to doubt the potential success of education.

⁹ Donald Winch (1996) writes of Adam Ferguson that “he believed the situation of the lower ranks in commercial society was so far beyond repair as to make them unfit for any political role” (p. 120).

Ruggles, for instance, in *The History of the Poor* (1793) points to the unflagging physical and nutritional challenges, as well as the inhibiting laws that determine their mental state (p. 10). William Playfair in his 1802 edition of WN, inserted a “Supplemental Chapter” in which to criticize Smith’s views on education, specifically pointing out that “the natural occupation of a working man is too constant to admit of his ever learning enough by reading, either to increase his comforts, his fortune, or the general stock of knowledge amongst mankind” (1805, vol. 3, p. 243). And William Godwin (1793) writes that if literature has the effect of improving morality, “the nation must have...arrived at some degree of leisure and propriety, before the love of letters can take root among them...It can hardly be expected [that] men, who are compelled in every day by laborious corporeal efforts...should arrive at great expansion of mind or comprehensiveness of thinking” (vol. 2, p. 22). The historian Steven Wallech (1986) writes, “The likelihood of many members of the ‘labouring classes’ escaping their status seemed improbable. Caught, therefore, at the bottom in a general state of poverty, their ‘laboring classes’ could not avoid the numbing habits that perpetuated their condition” (p. 424).

Fourth, the experience of taxation through the poor laws had created a resistance to projects for the poor. Henry Fielding (1751) in mid-century attributes part of the problems of the poor to the perversion of the laws and the misuse of funds (p.18; 55; 71). Frederick Eden (1797) called the Poor Laws, a “fruitful source of endlessly accumulated expense,” and fought strongly against their expansion (vol. 1, p. 481). James Malcolm called the handling of the poor rates a “junto” in his 1805 work, and he reminded his

audience of the tradition of wise dissent toward anything other than a system of “chastising” the poor (p. 154). Howlett (1788) complained that government had not proven itself capable in this sphere. And historian Thomas Mackay reflected in 1898 that the Poor Laws had “given rise to an administration which, by *every competent observer*, was deemed ruinous and demoralizing” (emphasis added) (p. 39).

Fifth, there was a lack of scholarship on how to educate the poor. Dugald Stewart worries about the lack of a philosophy of education specific to the poor in his *Lectures on Political Economy*, given in the first decade of the 19th century. He writes that what philosophy of education there was, in term of curriculum and means of communicating knowledge, amounted to little value. It “would fail most remarkably in its application to the instruction of the lower [ranks]” (1855, Vol. 8, p. 52).

Chisick finds that the philosophy of education pertaining to the poor only emerged in the middle to late 1770s in France, and that it had an inauspicious start (1981, p. 128-141). I find it occurring closer to the end of the century in Britain, and the lack remained into the 19th century. Several works well past the publication of WN were novel in specifically trying to understand the task of educating the poor. In 1792, Sarah Trimmer writes *Reflections upon the Education of the Children of Charity Schools* for that purpose. In 1796 John Ferrar, a philanthropist, writes *The Prosperity of Ireland Displayed in the state of the Fifty-four Charity Schools* in order “to show to the Legislature and the benevolent people of Dublin, the wide spread extent and happy effects of their charity” (Ferrar 1796, p. 1). He wishes to show that there was a growing body of knowledge to ensure the project of the poor was not in vain. Using 54 data points

of good effects, he seeks to thwart the lingering Mandevillian arguments (1796, p. 56). Similarly, Joseph Lancaster's 1805 work, *Improvements in Education, as it Respects the Industrious Classes*, was an effort that tried to make up for the lack of a philosophy. And Patrick Colquhoun in his 1806 work entitled *A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Labouring People* hopes to address the shortcoming.

Lastly, some feared riot and social strife would result from education. Riot was a very palpable concern, and one of regular discussion (Viner 1991, p. 283). Historian Paul Langford (1992) writes that "opposition to the schools was based on the assumption that it was absurd to invest money in a scheme which would fill children's heads with dangerous ideas and aspirations" (p. 501). Such aspirations would create social ambitions and resentments. Soame Jenyns writes in 1757 that ignorance "is necessary to all born to poverty and the drudgeries of life." It is the "only opiate" that would allow the poor "to endure the miseries" of their condition and to submit to the social and economic order (as cited by Bowen 1981, Vol 3, p. 143). And Playfair associates such discontent with social strife: "Reading frequently leads to discontent, and ill-founded ambition, and a neglect of business" (1805, vol. 3, p. 243).

Arthur Young's rebuttal to the education agenda of the French during the politics of the French Revolution is of the same concern about the dangers of education. He attributes the discontent in France to the danger of distributing republican ideas to the poor. "If there must be hewers of wood and drawers of water? Will not French horrors tell us, that to teach is to bewilder; that to enlighten is to destroy?" (1794, p. 166). Similarly, he writes, "What is Condorcet, Paine, Brissot, Rabbeau!!! What are they but

men who prove, that some education, some knowledge, some talents, are necessary to sink mankind into its lowest and basest state of depression and guilt?" (1794, p. 101).

And Chancellor Davies Giddy, in the famous defeat of an 1807 bill to fund education, channeled Mandeville nearly a century after *The Fable of the Bees*:

[Education] would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing countries; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors. (Giddy 1807, p. 798)

Although scholars today treat education as a self-evident good when reading the article, most of Smith's audience could be said to have had at best mixed feelings about it. Education was an uncertain and contested good. Mary Sturt (1967) writes, "In England there were many who saw dangers everywhere" (p. 4). From my account, it is only in the 1790s that one can begin to find comments suggesting the tide had turned, and that resistance was anachronistic. In 1792, Trimmer writes, "We may judge from the wonderful increase in schools supported by charitable contributions, that [the desirability] is at length generally decided in the affirmative" (p. 4). And in 1797 Eden, citing Mandeville's legacy, responds to him, "With respect to education, in general, I believe it is now admitted, on all hands, that intellectual acquisitions are beneficial to every class of the community" (p. 427). Still, despite this optimism, Playfair finds the issue of

desirability “undecided” in 1805; namely, “the fruit of the tree of knowledge seems to be a very dangerous species of nutriment, when distributed without care or prudence, or with too indiscriminate a hand” (1805, vol.3, p.243). In Smith’s time, it was still very much undecided. As Green (2013) writes, Smith is an early adopter of the desirability of education (p. 241). Taking all of these concerns about education into account, then, I find it hard to imagine a state role being put forward. In other words, I have a growing sense of skepticism.

To summarize, several themes can be seen in this literature. Education could destabilize the economy. It could lead to a social destabilization of ranks. It could lead to riots. On the other hand, the poor were inherently indolent and unable to be morally improved. There were too many conditions necessary for learning to occur. There was no solid philosophy of education pertaining to the poor. And, finally, the poor laws had sobered may toward government abilities.

Against such a backdrop, philosophers found no ground to comment at all in this period. Joseph Priestley, who may have been the “most considerable English writer on educational philosophy” between Locke and Herbert Spencer (Schofield 1997, p. 121), is perhaps the best example of ignoring the poor (Green 2013, p. 238). Priestley writes extensively from the 1750s through the 1780s to improve education. But his subject is the higher ranks. For them, in Lockean fashion, he sought to situate education toward more useful ends. Recognizing a lack of a curriculum in the wide expanse between mundane counting houses and the abstract sciences, Priestley writes in 1765 that “the whole plan of education, from grammar school to the finishing at the university, should be calculated”

(p. 2). And, to be sure, it was to be calculated for the use of “gentlemen” (1826, p. 1). His education included commerce, modern instead of ancient history, constitution and laws, modern languages instead of ancient languages, algebra, geometry, logic and metaphysics. Priestley’s audience was future statesman, lawyers, merchants, military commanders, and landowners (Priestley 1765, p. 9). Green writes, “The main preoccupation of men such as Priestley was clearly not with popular education but with the education of their own and other middle-class children” (2013, p. 238). Priestley did not consider his philosophy of education to apply to laborers. And of the poor in general, in a 1788 lecture he finds great fault in providing for them through legislation, and was generally inclined to think, “In general, if no provision was made for the poor by law, those who were the most deserving of relief would find it sooner than they now do, in the charity of the well-disposed” (1826, p. 304).

Among the leading philosophers on education, education for the poor was outside the framework of thinking. George Turnbull advanced the positive theory of education, yet he focused just on the highest ranks and seems to have had his reasons. In his 1742 work, *Observations upon Liberal Education*, he explicitly states that the important ingredients that enable moral development through education are “time and means,” as well as “solitude” for contemplation, and “conversation.” Finally, the student needed to be “exceeded [i.e., exempted] by an advantageous birth from drudgery to their backs and bellies” (2003, p. 322-323). He also requires his student to have not just information, but exposure to high quality Socratic teaching. Turnbull has a positive theory of education that precludes the poor. And Davyd Fordyce’s *Dialogues Concerning Education* (1745)

was not different in that regard. Green concurs broadly with my observation, stating that the “pedagogy [of reformers], like Rousseau’s, spoke of the education of the privileged child” (2013, p. 238)

The rise of a discourse of education for women shows a movement toward inclusiveness. But it too does not affect the discourse on the poor until Mary Wollstonecraft in 1793. Samuel Whyte’s *Thoughts on the Prevailing System of School Education, respecting young ladies as well as gentlemen* (1782) and Reverend John Bennett’s *Strictures on Female Education* in 1787 do not go as far as Wollstonecraft’s post-French-Revolution proposal would go, and do not yet seek to include all the ranks. The poor remain, by comparison, still excluded from the richer discussions of pedagogy.

A submission to John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-1799) identifies the pattern I have outline here. The author identifies Milton, Rousseau, Locke and Priestley as “eminent modern philosophers” who had discussed education (1799, Vol 21, p. 316). But the author complains:

The attention of these writers has not been minutely directed to the education of the lower classes of mankind, and their systems require more leisure and opportunity than the poor can command, and are not calculated for that universal and easy diffusion. (1799, Vol 21, p. 316)

Smith, then, in 1776 faces an environment in which his intellectual peers had not yet built an argument for the education of the poor. There was a fault line in society. While the majority took part in charity either as donors and recipients, the small minority who could influence legislation were opposed to the prominent social experiment. Jones

(1938) writes, “There was no conception of popular education as the foundation of a common citizenship and little belief in it as panacea for the ills which flesh is heir to. Instead, the conviction that the education of the poor was economically unsound and socially destructive was well entrenched” (p. 13).

Philanthropists and the Desirability of Educating the Poor

While philosophers were disinclined to the issue of educating the poor, others were not. Education historian Mary Sturt (1967) writes that “the debate on the desirability of education went on from about 1750 to 1833” (p. 4). In particular, it was the clergy who took up the positive view of the desirability of the poor against those men of letters who did not. And the clergy had great success in convincing the growing numbers of the middle class to emulate the rich of old or to try to surpass the virtue of the higher ranks of their own time. The sermons of the time reveal that public benefits had been discussed clearly throughout the 18th century.¹⁰ For instance, the sermon by Bishop George Lavington in 1746 makes a strong appeal based on public benefits. The world would “be overrun with ignorance and viciousness” if it were not for “the wise and benevolent Design of these public-spirited Societies, for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and Christian Liberty” (1746, p. 11). These are educational charities that he mentions. In continuing on the topic of these educational charities, he writes of the duty of his upper ranks, and he appeals to their “final interest” before God, such that they might “throw in their Portion to the Relief of the Poor” (p. 13; 15). The benefits are that the poor may stop being a burden to their neighbors, may become more useful and industrious, may relieve

¹⁰ See Farooq 2013 for a detailed account of the role of clergy.

the parish of its duty under the Poor Laws, may become less envious, and may be broken of the “Habit of Idleness, Begging, and Thieving” (p. 16).

The clergy remained firmly within a charity paradigm when they discussed education. A 1755 account by the Society of the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the largest network of charity schools in Britain, lists every Bishop that preached before it from 1704 to 1755 (see Hayter 1756, p. 85-87). Tracing these Bishops’ views on education, one finds a strong adherence to charity. Even after Smith, the clergy remained focused on charity solutions in their sermons. The imagination or ambition of the clergy was limited to local and voluntary remedies. The sermons, identifying a public benefit, never rise to a political-economic point of view of asking for the state machinery to assist.

Richard Price is an example of the spirit of the time. Price was a dissenting minister, moral philosopher, and political activist. His emerging politics and interest in social reform is perhaps best indicated by a sermon presented in 1790 in acclaiming the French Revolution and showing a desire for a similar transformation in England. The sermon prompted Edmund Burke to enter the fray, and led to Mary Wollstonecraft to refer to it as “utopian reveries” (Faulkner 1997, p. 1-4; 9). But before then, he was known as a philanthropist focused on education for social reform. He offers a 1766 sermon *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Soul* for the benefit of charity schools in which he calls the education of the poor children the “design of charity.” He adds that “there is no reason to doubt but that [charity] has been the means of doing much good, by rescuing many young souls from ignorance and wickedness” (1799, p. 26). He concludes that “it

deserves therefore your encouragement” (1766, p. 26). Government, as true amongst all the clergymen that I can identify, is not mentioned by Price.

Price’s discussion of the duty of benevolence is particularly edifying for our discussion:

[Benevolence] is one of the first of all the virtues, nor is anything more necessary to the culture of our souls, than that we should endeavor as far as possible to practice it. The care we ought to take of our souls, consists chiefly in strengthening within them the principle of benevolence, and in forming them in habits to charity and goodness. (1766, p. 20)

For Price, charity is a duty that God expects of all. Charity belongs to the providential design of the world: “Such is the universal dependence established by the Creator of the states of being on one another, that the whole course of nature seems as if contrived on purpose to give us opportunities for improving in this part of virtue” (1766, p. 27). This view of the religious duty of charity was common at the time, and it foreclosed a wider discussion of the means of provision.

Bishop Jonathan Shipley provides another religious perspective. Viner calls him the “most liberal and unconventional of the Anglican Bishops” (1991, p. 299). Shipley was friends with Benjamin Franklin, and had voiced considerable disagreement with the policies of George III toward the colonies. In a sermon, he offers views that resemble the concerns that Smith held regarding the dissolution of society where “men are easily divided into an infinite number of employments for the wants and conveniences of society” (1792, vol. 1, p. 83-84). He asserts that education is the only thing that

constitutes the difference between the ranks. And he finds fault in the selfishness and loss of public spirit in the divided interests of men in the pursuit of wealth. There are aspects of this text that would seem to resemble the statist language to be discussed in Chapter 2. For instance, he uses the common metaphor that society ought to be seen as a family. Despite such language, Shipley contemplates social reform solely through the paradigm of charity. The selfishness he witnesses may “interfere with the most important obligation; it may obstruct the exercise of charity and benevolence” – which he defines as an “obligation” (1792, vol.1, p. 99). Shipley sees social reform as an agenda aimed at changing the behavior (and charitable behavior) of the upper ranks.

In a sermon from 1777, addressed to the society which inspired the largest network of charity schools in Britain, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), Shipley recommends that the SPCK incorporate more industrial skills into their curriculum (which they did from time to time), to “effectively obviate an objection against Charity Schools” (1777, p. 48). He makes it clear that “the present State of Affairs, with respect to our Time, seems to require a Continuance of [charity’s] Care and Application” (1777, p. 48). Therefore, Shipley not only support charity schools, but seeks to strengthen their credibility.

Minister and philanthropist Griffith Jones reveals a broader picture of the disinclination to turn to government in a series of publications in the mid-century. From 1749 to 1765 Jones published testimonials related to the state of education in Wales. The testimonials regularly lament the shortfall in beneficence and discuss the challenges. But the shortfalls only provoke calls for more benefaction. One testimonial reads, “We

earnestly hope, and pray God, that the Zeal, wherewith charitable Persons have hitherto supported [charity schools] may provoke others to assist them, that it may be still carried on, more and more, to Perfection” (1749, p. 4). In Jones’ last publication, in 1765, there is still silence about a possibility of government aid.

Similarly, the philanthropist Jonas Hanway writes of the struggle that charity schools face in attracting enough beneficence. His solution is to distribute the educational responsibilities across a wider base of personnel. He would not just rely on teachers. He would ask masters of apprentices to require apprentices to follow a religious curriculum and to log their reading of the bible in a booklet, which would then enable apprentices to attain a “certification” of catechism as an accompaniment to their apprentice years (1766, p. 115). “Obedience to government” would be the particular objective of this literary and religious training (p. 116).

It is important to note the pattern among clergy lends support to the idea that issues in education were treated separately. Finding the education of the poor to be desirable to society did not lead to the belief that government should provide it. Struggles to maintain voluntary benefaction did not arouse appeals to the government for aid. Passion for a cause did not equate to seeking all means to make it happen.

This separateness of the issues can be seen throughout the history and even beyond Smith. In a specific historical debate that I will discuss in Chapter 2, Priestley responds to a 1765 proposal for government control of education by John Brown. Priestley very clearly separates the issues, and treats them individually. He writes:

I agree with him, in acknowledging the importance of education, as influencing the manners and the conduct of men, and that reason without instruction is a blind and sometimes a dangerous principle. I also acknowledge, that a uniform plan of education, agreeable to the principles of any particular form of government...would tend to establish and perpetuate that form of government, and prevent civil dissensions and factions in the state. But I should object to the interference of the legislature. (1768, p. 75)

Priestley makes the point that there are three issues that should be disentangled and assessed on their own merit. Though sympathetic to the government objectives and curriculum, he strongly rejects government interference. Passion and prudence are judiciously employed.

Others who respond to this same debate would separate out the issues in a similar manner. To be discussed later Thomas Sheridan will carefully keep the issues separate. And Reverend Samuel Parr, that defender of charity schools, outlines numerous very important public benefits from educating the poor in 1780. He writes:

[Education] will enable them, when they have reached manhood, to employ their moments of leisure innocently and agreeably. It will render them less suspicious and less profane; less discontented with their lot, and less ferocious in their passions; less envious, I should hope, of their superiors and, I am sure, less disobedient to the laws. (1828, p. 191)

But as for Brown's suggestion of government control, Parr would not go so far as to follow him:

In forming useful and worthy subjects of any government, some kind of early instruction is necessary. But the direct interference of governing powers in the prosecution of this work, is a subject of very nice speculation; and perhaps in the present state of things, it were better to be content with protection, which implies a sort of tacit approbation, than to ask for assistance, which might involve us in unforeseen difficulties. (1828, p. 185)

Parr finds merit in the object of Brown's proposal. But, for reasons that will be explained later, he is unwilling to concede a direct role for government in controlling education.

We saw in the last section that philosophers failed to engage positively the issue of the poor. I suggest a prerequisite to being open to or even discussing a possible role for government is thus lacking. In this section we saw that the clergy and philanthropists who found the education of the poor to be desirable did not conceive of a role for government. Priestley resists largely based on liberal jurisprudence. Parr resists based on an abundance of caution, and because he observes that charity schools already (and uniquely) delivered quality instruction to the poor (1828, p. 258). Lavington, Price, Jones and Shipley do not appear to conceive of the idea of government provision; instead they appear to be firmly of the mindset that charity was a responsibility given to their rank by God. Together, they show that the intellectual talents and moral leadership at the time was determined by a mindset that precluded further inquiry into the role of government.

A History of Charitable Zeal in Scotland and England

Many scholars believe that Smith presents a governmental model. In chapter 3 I will scrutinize the textual origin of that belief. In short, Smith describes an option to resolve the problems of moral degradation. And this option (although it is not clear it is the only option or that it is the option he favors, I will argue) bears resemblance to the Scottish system. The Scottish system is one enforced by law and partially funded through local payments by heritors, or landowners. That is, he would seem to have offered an option that is a governmental model which would have been familiar, at a minimum, to his British audience. The parallel between this particular option and Scotland's official system renders it easy to go along with the appearance that Smith is advocating for government intervention. He would seem to be hewing to a status quo. Thus, he is not proposing something new, but an expansion of something familiar. Smith is traditional, "tinkering" with policy as Samuel Fleischacker (2004) writes, rather than taking radical steps into a new politics (p. 245).

If an interpretation gains credence from the perception of the status quo, it becomes important to identify what the status quo actually is. And I argue that what one must identify is not the legal status quo but rather the psychic construct – that sense of familiarity or comfort which can influence our sentiments or attitudes or manners of contemplation. There is a *de jure* as well as a *de facto* version of the status quo. Laws contribute to our sense of the familiar. But so does tradition and habit. There is much competing for our sense of familiarity or comfort. The official driving speed limit and the acceptable speed limit is a common example. As one reads Smith's proposal, I argue one ought to seek to identify the psychic or *de facto* status quo of Smith and his reader.

Competing for the *de facto* status quo is the spirit, momentum, and the saliency of these other options. As Green (2013) writes, “If ‘national education’ never quite took root on English soil during this period [before the French Revolution], there was an alternative policy that was more adaptable to the domestic political climate, and that was ‘voluntaryism’” (p. 256). I only disagree with Green choice to call it a “policy.” I suggest it was a mindset – and one precluding policy discussion. In prior section, we got a sense that charity was a sort of status quo. And here I explore that possibility.

In this section I aim to demonstrate that it was an early tradition of charity that had led to the development in Britain of a strong system of charity schools and in Scotland to a system of “parish schools” often attributed directly and exclusively to an education act in 1696. Charity had come to create a widespread and effective mental framework by which to discuss education of the poor. Charity had become a kind of status quo for discourse on the poor in the realm of education. This framework had two centuries to develop before Smith wrote about education, and it had taken on a very substantial form in the 18th century. It represents a different status quo than is generally referred to in Smithian literature. Despite a law encouraging a government system in Scotland, contemplating government in an expanded role would have been “speculative” on the island in Smith’s time – as Samuel Parr implied in 1780 in regard to John Brown’s early suggestion of government provision (1828, p. 185; 229). Charity had become a defining method to addresses education for the poor. To advocate for government would have been, perhaps surprisingly, radical.

Scotland's experiment with education began with John Knox's *First Book of Discipline* (1560). It aimed to promote the culture of schooling, whereby literacy and the faith could be taught. It sought that every church would have a teacher. It outlined an entire system that would deliver certain students up the ranks to a university education. Although the Parliament rejected the plan, it was the product of men of public spirit and influence. The continual preaching of the value kept up interest in schooling. Through the 1600s the Scottish government took interest in expanding access to education. It passed acts in 1616, 1633, and 1646. The acts were little heeded, and in 1696 Parliament made another attempt to coerce local heritors to provide for their parish (Scotland 1696, p. 52). The 1696 act is generally referred to as the start of the Scottish system, as that it began to have a larger influence.

The act by the Scottish Parliament in 1696 required the public to provide support for education. It imposed on heritors the requirement to build one school per parish. And it required them to pay for one school master at a rate below the given ceiling. The first provided for the fixed cost. And the second was meant to ensure that some subsidization would be made to variable costs without eroding the merit of a fee system. The entire act is provided in Appendix III. The substance from the October 6th act reads:

Our sovereign lord...ordains that there be a school settled and established, and a schoolmaster appointed, *in every paroch not already provided*, by advice of the heritors and minister of the paroch. And for that effect, that the heritors in every paroch meet and provide a commodious house for a school, and settle and modifie a sallary to a schoolmaster, which shall not be under one hundred merks nor

above two hundred merks, to be payed yearly at two terms Whitsunday and Martinmass by equall portions, and that they stent and lay on the said sallary conform to every heritors valued rent with in the paroch, allowing each heritor relieff from his tennents of the half of his proportion for settling and maintaining of a school and payment of the schoolmaster's sallary, which sallary is declared to be by and attour the casualities which formerly belonged to the readers and clerks of the kirk session. And if the heritors, or major part of them, shall not conveen or, being conveened, shall not agree among themselves, then and in that case the presbitrie shall apply to the commissioners of the supply of the shire, who, or any five of them, shall have power to establish a school and settle and modifie a sallary for a schoolmaster, not being under one hundred merks nor above two hundred merks yearly, as said is, and to rent and lay on the samen upon the heritors, conform to their valued rent, which shall be also valid and effectuell as if it had been done by the heritors themselves. (emphasis added)

The act requires that a parish organize, where they had not already done so, to provide a “commodious house” and a salary between 100 and 200 merks. The payment falls on the landowners, who in turn are permitted to directly require their tenants to reimburse them in half. The act leave the decisions as to specifics to be determined by those same heritors, and if failing, then to a local church commission who can decide for the heritors. The remainder of the act, seen in Appendix III, discusses penalties. It is important to note that the act specifies very little and recognizes that it directs to do what some places had already done. It gives tremendous leeway to local decisions by those

responsible to pay for it directly. And as historian James Scotland (1969) has explained, the results were, indeed, quite disparate – ranging from “dirty hutts” to a well-maintained 36 by 16 foot building (p 62-64). Sometime, there was no new building at all, but merely a grant of access to an existing building (p. 63). And often it would consist of a small cottage for the teacher to live in and a section of, maybe, 16 by 8 fee for the school – usually with a dirt floor, and only a small window with no glass in it (p. 63-65). The results are a product of variable social interests among heritors as part of a social dynamic that included the ministry and the congregation.

The history behind the act shows it to be the derived from the religious and political negotiation of the years following the Glorious Revolution. It sought to use education to perpetuate Presbyterian doctrine and Scottish identity. Its objective was to limit English religious influence and Popery (Anderson 1995, p. 3). And then, when Scotland united with England in 1707, the concerns of identity were augmented. The union had come at great political sacrifice, but Scotland could take consolation in the fact that it retained an authority over its cultural identity and civic society (Anderson 1995, p. 2). By the 1720s Scotland managed to establish such an identity around university, church, and school (Allen 1993, p 6). Education came to be a part of national pride.

But the 1696 act looms too largely in discourse. Smout (1969) has asserted that the defining task of modern historians of Scottish education has been try to properly estimate the act’s influence on outcomes. 19th century writers and historians, writing in the heated debates of national education, had foisted a considerable amount of nostalgia and romanticism upon their description of it. In truth, there are two systems to try to

situate into a discourse at the time: a charity system and the parish (governmental) system. The charity system has been given little attention by Smithian scholars, and as Smout was writing, it had also received little attention from historians of education (see also Johnson 170, p. 97). Alternatively, the legal system has been noted frequently by Smithian scholars. It is important to understand their intertwined histories.

In Britain, there is an important history of charity to consider. Charity had captured the imagination in the 18th century and – empowered by increasing wealth among the middle ranks – had created an enthusiasm and zeal for social and moral improvement. The periodicals of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele demonstrate how inspiring charity schools had been in the early part of the century. In 1711 Steele writes that charity schools demonstrate “the greatest Instances of public Spirit the Age has produced.” And Addison calls the charity schools “the Glory of the Age we live in, and the most proper Means that can be made use of to recover [the nation] out of its present Degeneracy and Depravation” (as cited in Bygrave 2009, p. 71). Jonas Hanway in 1766 marvels that Britain “abounds” in charity schools (p. 111). The zeal, as a new development in society, had inspired many.

With the legislation being little more than a prompting to local decision making, the status quo (especially in regards to the poor) was significantly marked by a spirit of charity, or what was called a “zeal” – a local and dynamic religious enthusiasm from moral leaders working closely with the community (even for projects that were lawfully mandated “parish schools”). The SPCK ascribed to themselves the transmission of zeal among parishes (Hayter 1756, p. 7). Reverend Samuel Parr writes favorably of it in 1785,

“The Clergy of Scotland have distinguished themselves by an uncommon diligence and zeal in the education of their children” (1785, p. 175). And John Brown distinguished zeal from legislation: “But that [the Poor Laws] can never stand in the Place of True Charity, will appear from considering them either in their *Formation* or their *Execution*. If they are formed merely on the Principle of Prudence and Policy, void of a charitable Zeal, they will always be rigid, and often of a cruel Complexion” (1762, p. 147). There was something occurring in this period that had little to nothing to do with the law.

The conclusion from the historians is that 18th century Scotland and England owed a great deal to charity schools and private markets (Jewell 1998, p. 41; Jones 1938; Lawson and Silver 1973, p. 181; Vaughn and Archer, 1971, p. 36; Green 2013, p. 256-260). Charity built much of the structure that eventually formed the foundation of the national system. Charity was an important part of the increasing literacy across the century. Many places in Scotland had only known charity schools despite the law. Even where there was a legal parish school, most still had to rely on charity alternatives. Education historian Richard Johnson (1970) writes that charity schools were “the real roots” of provision for the poor in the 18th century (p. 97).

Charity is representative of the spirit of the times. Charity schools can be distinguished from old endowments that had grown up through legacies and through designs of royalty, aristocracy, and wealthy landowners. Charity schools, through the new means of “subscriptions” tapped into the wide enthusiasm among the middle class to aid the poor. Subscriptions enabled one to donate small “voluntary contributions” in regular increments to a project. Subscription was conceptually novel – enabling quick

and easy contributions, flexibility, and small donations from those who had small amounts available. As the middle class flourished, so did subscription. As the middle class wished to rise in public stature and lay claim to the image of wealth, so did subscription. Charity schools captured the essence of growth and optimism of pre-industrial Britain. Bishop Lavington (1746) writes of the educational charities, “We must in justice acknowledge, that it is in great Measure owing to Persons of middle Rank, that Religion preserves a tolerable Footing among us, and these useful public Charities meet with such encouragement” (p. 15-16). As a result, whereas in the 17th century benefaction flowed from uppers ranks for the benefit of the middle ranks to attend grammar schools, across the 18th century charity flowed through a professional charity movement driven by small donations from the middle class to aid the lower ranks to attain literacy (Lawson and Silver 1973, p. 181). One can see this transformation in a conceited complaint of time: “When first brought into fashion, subscriptions were conferred upon the ingenious alone, or those who were reputed such. But at present, we see they made a resource for indigence, and requested not as rewards for merit, but as a relief of distress” (Goldsmith 1759, p. 91). In this transformation, charity subsumed large swaths of the public as either donors or recipients. And thus, charity became part of local community spirit and identity.

The historical record of Scotland’s education status in the 18th century is quite rich. A number of surveys were conducted, providing us data (even if spotty for certain inquiries), descriptions, and a sense of the tenor of the discussion. For example, the Society for the Propagation of Christina Knowledge (SPCK) conducted regular surveys

of the state of affairs throughout the century, and kept regular minutes of its meetings throughout the century. We also have the records of parishes which managed local education, and the correspondence between parishes and the state and the SPCK. At the end of the century, with an increased political interest, we get several broader studies which give us an impression of what the century had accomplished in Smith's waning years. For example, John Sinclair conducted the *Statistical Account of Scotland* in the 1790s provides testimonies of the state of education in the words of local authorities. Frederick Eden (1797) conducted a grand study of the history of the poor, which includes data on costs of living, a study of political actions, and a synthesis of the discussion surrounding education at the time. In 1818 the House of Commons were persuaded by Henry Brougham to conduct a survey of schools. And the state conducted another survey in 1834. In addition, we have the published accounts of sermons, and the many treatises and pamphlets of the time. Jones warns us that it is hard to reconstruct a precise picture of how extensive charity was until the 19th century. But she also finds there is sufficient evidence to say that charity had a "steadily maintained interest" (1938, p. 26), and constituted a "continuous movement" (p. 27). Testimonies imply that charity was increasing greatly, and was integral for the poor, and was representative of the spirit of the times. By the end of the 18th century, it had become a sizeable proportion of the whole school network.

The importance of charity can be understood from several perspectives. In the remainder of this section I will look at how charity blends with the parish system, such

that we must characterize what we observe as a product of a zeal beyond legislation. In the next section, I will look at charity within independent schools.

First, when we consider the number of parish schools in Scotland, it must be understood that many predate the 1696 act (as the act itself acknowledged). Parish schools had already had precedence due to strong local sentiment and local initiatives. Local initiatives of the 17th century included proclamations of Privy Councils, municipal by-laws, and a terrific effort by the kirk at all levels (Smout 1969, p. 450). As a result, in 61 out of 65 parishes in the three Lothian counties there was a school. Also in 57 out of 60 parishes in Fife there was a school (Smout 1969, p. 453). The pre-existing interest in education from the community and its leaders demonstrates that the national law, while changing local dynamics, grafted onto a natural sentiment already governed by local zeal, and manifest itself in a variety of combinations of charity, church, and local government.

Second, more was needed to make a school run than a “commodious house” and a salary which the law required. The system of hiring, scrutinizing, evaluating, maintaining, and ensuring attendance was labor intensive. It could only happen through the voluntary and organized members of the community. Such demonstrated effort in Scotland do not derive from legislation. It derives from local interests and voluntary efforts. In the 19th century the “parish administration” of the olden days was celebrated, but the administration was very much an undertaking of those motivated by the cause to donate their time and leadership.

Third, in the hands of local enthusiasts, the law became something it was never intended to be. The act was not motivated by an interest in the poor. But the kirk had long

seen to it to supplement the educational fees for the poor through private charity as part of their work in clothing and feeding their poorest community members (Smout 1969, p. 451). And the lay people (even the non-heritors), governed by their faith and concerned about social conditions, supported the efforts. Therefore, a given parish school rested on a broad base of financial supporters, exceeded the statute in scope, and varied based on the degree of local enthusiasm (Anderson 1993, p. 4; Stephens 1998, p. 33).

In 1834 a *Proposal for building twenty new parochial churches in the city and suburbs of Glasgow* clearly recognized that “Those who desiderate [i.e., desire] such a mighty good [must appoint] zealous minister and elders, whose cooperation is so essential to the success of any educational measures for the poorer classes” (1834, p. 11). In the hands of zealous church leaders, the church embraced the project beyond the law. The North-British review writes even later, “The Church herself, to a considerable extent, supplements deficiencies in the legal school provision by means of her ‘Education Scheme’”(1849, p. 573).

Fourth, the contributions of heritors also often exceeded the statute (Smout 1969, p. 457). Scotland’s General Assembly writes in 1833: “It is unquestionable that the Highland heritors have done much for the education of the Highland people, beyond what was required of them by the Parochial School Act” (1833, Vol 7, p. 14). The kirk, as the coordinating agency, proved itself able to secure investment by heritors for the purpose of locally defined goals instead of the statute’s austere ones (Smout 1969, p. 462). The extra gain came in the form of additional schools, higher salaries, or additional maintenance. Moreover, the relationship did not end with financial contributions. Once heritors

contributed, they too would begin to exercise influence on schools. They participated in supervisory boards, often applying great scrutiny to practices. Toward those in the community with financial means, pressure would be applied to pay the respective fees. And toward those without means, pressure would be applied to attend.

Fifth, the pay of teachers often exceeded that which the state set. The ability to attract a teacher to a rural community, or to house and feed him, required considerable funds that exceeded the lowly rates set by the law – especially over time as prices changed (Sinclair 1799, Vol 21., p. 307; 454). A shadow price can be reconstructed. First, in the 1760s we have examples of the communities looking for funding that would have allowed them to offer three times the legal amount for an instructor (Withrington 1988, p. 168). In 1802, Christison, in seeking a raise, felt that the market rate to attract teachers would be “about twice as much” as given 50 years previously (1802, p. 18). And when an 1803 legislative act opened the salary cap, the direct heritor contributions increased rather quickly by 50 to 100% (Smout 1969, p. 458).

The results often exceeded the requirement of the statute, but the results certainly exceeded what one would expect given the poor enforceability of the statute. Land taxes had always proven difficult to enforce. And British politics showed a preference for custom and excise taxes in the 18th century (O'Brien, 1988, p. 2; Nye 2007, p. 70; Mathias & O'Brien, 1976, p. 616).¹¹ In remote parishes, the authority was more likely to be dismissed by heritors. And in counties where land was owned by heritors who were

¹¹ Mathias and O'Brien (1976) estimate custom and excise taxes accounted for 57% of revenue in 1750 and 70% in 1780, as part of a long trend in the 18th century away from “direct” taxes such as land and income tax (p. 617). O'Brien (1988) explains that tax evasion was particularly pernicious in Scotland (p. 7).

absent, the authority proved even harder (Anderson, 1995; Scotland, 1970). Yet despite the difficulties of enforcement, the schooling grew consistently. A certain genuine voluntary interest comes forward again and again in this history of the so-called “parish system.” Although it was not until the 19th century that the law even approached its modest goal of one school per parish, it was accomplished through local zeal rather than through the mechanisms of the state.

Therefore, the character of the parish system should not be described as anything approximating today’s mindset regarding the national education system. It was a patchwork system, very much defined by the local zeal, a true product of law but mechanized through charity, and producing variable results highly dependent upon the zeal of charity.

Organized Charitable Societies

Thus far I have discussed a grass roots sort of community charity that was empowered by the law, and which confounds how we should characterize the “parish system.” But some of the most important gains in schooling across the century came directly from charity efforts *independent* from what I have thus far described as happening within the “parish schools.” To understand how charity schools could and would grow so significantly across the century, it is important to point out the sixth and most important shortcoming of the law. The law was hampered by the fact that it prescribed nothing but a single school regardless of parish size or population.

The problem is readily apparent. The lowlands had many small parishes in terms of land size. In the parish of Stirlingshire, the average size of the parish was 3 to 4 miles

in length and 2 to 3 in width. But Falkirk with 4,000 inhabitants was 6 by 4, and St. Ninians with 6,500 inhabitants was 10 by 6 miles (Smout 1969, p. 453). Beyond the smallest parishes, therefore, a single school proved to be an inadequate solution to service the entire parish. The parish needed private donors to fill the “gaps” (Chalmers 1830, p. 335). In the Highlands the problem was magnified. Glenorchy was 60 by 24 miles. Kilmalie was 60 by 30 (Smout 1969, p. 461). And given the nature of agriculture and husbandry, the populations were evenly distributed. The law, so written, was deficient upon arrival. In rural Scotland, population was too thinly distributed. In cities, it was too abundant to be supplied adequately by a single schoolhouse. The law represented a moral example, and little more for some parishes. The education committee of Scotland’s General Assembly writes in 1833:

If the parochial school establishment be of itself inadequate to the bounds of a parish in the lowlands, how much more inadequate in the more extensive parishes of the Highlands, where roads are infrequent and where communication is so apt to be interrupted by the broken and irregular nature of the ground. (1833, Vol. 7, p. 14)

Various solutions arose. For instance, the kirk sometimes split the legal funds (contrary to the statute) to provide less “fixed-capital” solutions (Smout 1969, p. 462; Withrington 1988, p. 167). At other times, it asked for more from heritors. But the real solutions came from independent charity effort, which manifested itself in independent charity schools within the parish. In Walls, the minister reported, “I don’t think there is one parochial school properly so called within the bounds of the Presbytery, that is a

school with a legal standing salary. But in my parish I have several little schools in different corners supported by the voluntary contributions of the inhabitants” (as cited in Withington 1988, p. 167).¹² The high literacy rates which Smith writes about, and which are substantiated by historians (e.g Stone 1969, p. 161), owes its success to a patchwork school system resting on voluntarism.¹³

The tradition of independent charity schools had a long history. In the 17th century many private citizen opened their homes to instruct a few students at a time. No law prohibited such practice. The church was often suspicious of such behavior, hoping to maintain control over the content of the education. But early in the 18th century, it was recognized that the efforts of private citizens complemented their own and filled a need. By the middle of the century, few complaints arose and the kirk exerted little influence to try to prohibit them. The last documented complaints by parish schoolmasters, according to Smout, regarding competition from charity schools occurred in 1748 in Aberdeenshire, 1757 in Stirlingshire and 1766 in Ayershire. In each case, the kirk chose to do nothing (Smout 1969, p. 455). The coexistence of private and charity schools alongside kirk-sponsored and administered parish schools was well-established by Smith’s time. If there had been animosity, it was of the occasional variety. The parish and private systems existed as self-aware complements to each other, as can be witnessed in records that refer to decisions made by one relative to the actions of the other (and documented well by Withington, 1988).

¹² In chapter 3, I will demonstrate the importance of the term “voluntary contributions.”

¹³ See Houston (1982) for a lower-end estimate (p. 98-99)

That charity schools could be viewed as complements to the parish school rests on the professionalism of the charity schools and the commonalities of their purpose. Within a few years of the passing of the Scottish act, moral leaders began to organize charity societies to also address the concerns of the social ills of pauperism, popery, and irreligion. The aim of charity schools was to improve the character of the idle, the licentious, the thieving, the drunk and the poor, specifically through a discipline achievable through Christian principles and reliant upon literacy. One of London's first charitable schools, set up in St. Margaret's parish in 1698, expressed its purpose in its founding document as such:

Several of the inhabitants of Westminster, having taken into their serious consideration the great misery that the poor children of the parish do generally suffer, by reason of the Idle and Licentious Education; their Nurses, or those what provide for them, generally suffering, if not encouraging, them to wander about and beg, by which Means the Evil Customs and Habits they contract thereby become, for the most part, the Curse and the Trouble of all places where they live and often by their Wicked Actions, are brought to Shameful and untimely Death; to prevent the like miseries for the future, in that said Parish...the persons hereafter... think it proper and convenient to erect a free school in the said Parish.
(as cited in Jones 1939, p. 44-45)

The founding of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in London in 1699 and a Scottish version in 1709 went a long way to expanding charity schools, and to establishing a professional image. The SPCK was founded from social

leaders inspired by the principles of English puritanism. The founders proposed schooling as an alternative solution to the disciplining force of the workhouse proposed by John Locke in his *Report to the Board of Trade* in 1697 and embodied in Humphrey Mackworth's bill soon thereafter. The language in their minutes from 1698-9 pairs well with that of the local charitable efforts (already cited) that were beginning to spring up:

It is evident to common observation that the growth of Vice and Debauchery is greatly owing to the gross ignorance of the principles of the Christian Religion... We, do hereby promise to pay yearly during pleasure... towards the setting up of a school within this parish. (cited by Jones 1939, p. 38)

The important contribution of the SPCK was not to be found in the direct establishment or management of schools, but in their aim to excite that "zeal" (as term that they too were apt to use). They did so for schooling ventures by local parishes, first in London and quickly throughout Britain. In the writing of one of their leaders, Robert Nelson, one can get a sense of the religious duty directing their purpose, and of the zeal they would seek:

I must particularly recommend to you the practice of charity... comfort your friends that mourn and are afflicted... reprove, prudently and quietly, all your companions where you find they transgress... As to their bodies you must, according to your abilities, relieve their wants, and supply their necessities, and in order for this purpose... dedicate and set apart a proportion of your gains. (Secretan 1860, p. 188)

Another distinct value they brought was their growing experience with the new technique of subscription, by which the middle class could donate weekly, monthly, or yearly to a fund what would be managed locally by volunteer members of the parish. The ensuing system of SPCK schools in England were decentralized in function. The particular school would be managed by the laymen of a parish, and, importantly, not under the administrative control of the church's higher authority, the Bishop. The SPCK, therein, became a new sort of political entity, the voice and image of a means to expand charity beyond the ancient endowments set up by men of rank.¹⁴ Within 5 years there were 54 charity schools aided by the SPCK just within London, and by 1727 there were 132 (Jones 1939, p. 57). Across England by 1729 there were 1419 charity schools that the SPCK claimed to have aided (Jewell 1998, p. 41).

Though the SPCK struggled in various places in England, the importance of the SPCK can be witnessed in the incredible enthusiasm and involvement of parishes where the SPCK took hold. The subscription system had enabled local communities to tap into the concerns and faith of the emerging middle ranks, instead of relying on long ago established and highly constrained endowments of the highest ranks. The minutes books of schools show a great pride, constant care and supervision from the lay people (Jones 1939, p. 46).

The charity schools also had a very public appearance. They were not shady undertakings in remote places. Sunday recitations by young students to a fawning and

¹⁴ It is important to note that the Bishops regularly addressed the SPCK and appear to have respected their parallel ventures and interests. The SPCK lists all the sermons preached to before it by bishops (Hayter 1756, p.85-87). Not a single year was missed between 1704 and 1755, when the account was published.

self-congratulating parish were a common occurrence. Starting in 1704 and continuing throughout the century, large annual public displays of charity schools were organized. These included parades, speeches, and the giving of awards. In 1704, a public event for 2,000 students was held. By 1782, there was a 12,000 student public display in front of St. Paul's Cathedral for all the public to enjoy (Jones 1938, p. 60). It was the kind of display which could equally provoke inspiration and contempt. The ceremonies got the ire of Mandeville and led to his brash criticism of it. And poet William Blake famously ironized the events in the 1789 poem, "T'was on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean/The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green."

The events of London may seem a digression to understanding how the Scottish Adam Smith may have understood the merits of charity. But, the display and parades of London go to show the public spirit of charity that was to flourish throughout the island, and into Scotland, in rather quick measure.

Elsewhere in Britain results would naturally appear mixed. London proved a compelling exemplar for the diocese of Lincolnshire, and by 1723 it boasted 26 charity schools (Jones 1938, p. 68). On the other hand, in the coalmining and factory areas, the opportunity costs were high. In the country, the farmers met the idea with resistance, and charitable subscribers were often insufficient. Yet, so long as the idea was met with zeal from the clergy, the challenges were responded to in diverse ways. In the industrial towns, clergy sometimes negotiated cooperative agreements to fund children's education in the off-hours of work. In the country, clergy sometime found support from local gentry. In university towns, clergy found the professional class receptive. In the resort

town of Bath, the aristocracy funded the schools and saw the literary performances as a form of entertainment during their stay. By the end of the first quarter of the century, there were 1419 schools educating over 22,000 students in England (Jones 1938, p. 72).

Richard Johnson (1970) calls the voluntary efforts of local communities the “real roots” of England’s national education (p. 97). And clergy were considered as the real experts in education (Gisborne 1797, p. 165). The continual evolution of charitable societies – eventually leading to the national societies of the British and Foreign School Society (founded in 1808) and National Society (1811) – eventually created the infrastructure through which the government provision was eventually channeled (Anderson 1995, p. 36).

The Scottish SPCK can be called an extension of that English spirit and the origin of the national movement of organized charity within Scotland. Organized in 1698, it soon took on the name of the SPCK, and was given charter in 1709. In Scotland its specific interest was the hostile and indomitable highlands, which had resisted Presbyterianism and had been a breeding ground of dissent (Szechi 2014, p. 13). Through the course of the 18th century, the highlander would grow as a threat on many fronts, and would cause great anxiety to lowlanders. The gloomy and hostile weather, the northerners’ stunted growth, their squalid conditions, their perpetual struggle to produce food from poor lands, their lack of adaption to modernization, their alleged paganism, their unintelligible language, their affections for Rome, their alleged sloth and superstition, and their familiar aggressiveness – all of these images of the north, perpetuated by travelers and immortalized in literature, left southerners ill at ease (Smout,

1983; Jones 1938, 168-172; Pittock 2009, p. 38; Sinclair 1799, Vol. 21., p. 338; Anderson 1777, p. 4-5). Reports of such a kind are more common in the latter half of the 18th century as more lowlanders took trips of curiosity to the north, but the same sentiments can be seen in the earlier testimonies from government officials, travelers, missionaries, and the SPCK itself. These testimonies would be reiterated in sermons as well.¹⁵

In the north, the 1696 act had always had trouble attracting interest. The SPCK answered a great desire of the people to help ensure that the correct religious faith might flourish in the north. The SPCK in Scotland organized by way of a different model than in England. From the beginning it was centrally organized, with the goal of establishing school directly in places of most dire need. The SPCK in Scotland maintained control of finances and administration, and its source of revenue was the lowlander population. It operated out of Edinburgh, where it had an audience for its cause. Regular sermons were conducted on its behalf within the churches of Edinburgh. The Church of Scotland gathered funds throughout the lowlands. And in Smith's time, the SPCK sought suggestions from the public for determining the nature and evolution of its purpose (Jones 1938, p. 206). The SPCK was national in spirit, and seen as a branch of the public, organized for the common good at the largest measurable unit.

The SPCK in Scotland might have met resistance if it were not for its careful practices. It saw its role as supplementing the legal system. It was careful not to undermine the efforts of the community trying to compel heritors to meet their legal due. The SPCK focused on areas where, despite the fulfillment of the law, a school still was

¹⁵See the SPCK's *State of the Society in Scotland* (1723; 1748).

not accessible due to the size of the parish. It also focused on areas which were particularly prone to Roman Catholic influence. By 1758, it had established 176 schools in such a manner. As an organization, it was very attentive of the influence of its presence, and of the politics of charity.

Evidence of the welcome attitude of the government can be seen in the ironic reversal of roles after the Forty-five. The SPCK can be said to have originally complemented the parish efforts. But in a particular new expansion of government schools based on wealth from the seized lands of Jacobite rebels, the government made the choice to build where the SPCK was not present. The government, in other words, was now complementing the SPCK (Jones 1939, p. 180).

The period after the Forty-five is indicative of how well-accepted the charities had become. The threat of Jacobitism could have spurred interest by the government to take control of the education system and to weed out all subversive elements of society. Indeed, there was talk to such effects. But the leadership of people such as Bishop Edmund Gibson a generation before helped build a relationship of trust between the SPCK and the government. In this period of new anxiety, the government resisted reacting negatively to the SPCK's size, influence, and funding (Jones 1964, p. 126-130).

To summarize, the SPCK held a prominent place in schooling within Scotland because of its reputation garnered from the pan-Britain presence, and because of its central organizational structure that worked diligently in the capital and across the lowlands to raise funds. In Scotland, it complemented the state efforts in the highlands,

and certainly gained prominence by its congenial relationship with the government. It also ushered in a new model of funding, which was imitated by others.

In addition to this summary, it is important to note that specific activity in the cities characterize the environment in which Smith wrote. Those who lived in the larger cities of Scotland witnessed an especially complex system trying to overcome the inherent deficiency of the laws in highly populated parishes. Edinburgh, in particular, is an important case study. In Edinburgh the problem of population density was magnified by the fact that the 1696 act was not enforced in burgh towns (Wright 1898, p. 28). And the city council of Edinburgh had resisted its own local taxation for the education of the poor. Therefore, the entirety of the provision of education for the poor in Smith's immediate environment in Edinburgh was done through charity and creative private solutions.

In terms of charity, the practice of founding trusts for "hospitals," many of which served the educational needs of children, was quite the fashion. The charitable efforts in Edinburgh in this time was one of fashion, and it could boast of having more endowed hospitals than any other city than London (Scotland 1970, p. 92).

In terms of private solutions, Smith likely witnessed many practices. The *Statistical Account of Scotland* identifies some. For instance, parents clubbed together to hire a teacher on their own (Anderson 1995, p. 8). They received aid from local patrons directly. They kept remunerations low by housing the teacher on a rotating basis in their homes. And they assigned teaching duties to those who were little more than boys themselves, recent graduates of grammar schools. "Adventure schools" had also played

an important role in the cities. The “adventure schools” had been a long practice. They were small fee-based schools, set up with minimal capital, often in a person’s home, and possibly run by elder citizens (Scotland 1970, p. 106). By the end of the century, there were over 80 in Glasgow (Scotland 1970, p. 110).¹⁶ Such schools filled in the gaps left behind by parishes and charities. In Edinburgh, Smith found himself not just in the capital but also in the headquarters of the most familiar professional charity organization, in the place where annual sermons and public displays were conducted, and where local charities were finding solutions with no aid from the municipality.

In Smith’s time, therefore, the non-governmental aspects of Britain’s education system was in a vibrant state, and in a respected form. The Scottish born Bishop Beilby Porteus makes such a point in *A Sermon Preached at the Anniversary of the Sons of the Clergy* published in the year that Smith published WN. He writes: “To [charity], in short, has long been, and still is, confided that most important trust, the education of youth; a trust which it is not a vain boast to say, they have discharged with fidelity and ability” (1776, p. 14). He claims that charity schools have produced the greatest results in Europe. And he concludes, “These known and undeniable facts are, we conceive, very unequivocal proofs of our good conduct and good estimation” (1776, p. 15). More comprehensively, he regards the number of charities he witnesses as “forming one noble comprehensive plan of national charity” (1776, p. 19).

By the end of the 18th century, the traditional parish schools were taking on a minority status relative to the private and voluntary dynamism (Anderson 1995, p. 25).

¹⁶ I have been unable to identify a number of adventure schools for Edinburgh, so I provide this figure as suggestive of a broad role.

And two decades later, the parish schools had dwindled to serving just a third of all children in schools (Anderson 1995, p. 39). In the 19th century the parish system would be romanticized as having accomplished much more than it did. However, even in the middle of the 19th century there are those who still adhered to the voluntary principle, and found it had merit. A passage in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* of 1849 reads:

More than enough is perhaps sometimes said as to the inadequacy of the provision for education made in the parish schools. The population has certainly enormously increased since 1696; but so also has the wealth of the country, and so also, along with the power, has the desire increased, of compensating, by voluntary efforts, for the growing disproportion between the legal provision and the actual wants of the people in regards to education. (1849, p. 573)¹⁷

Conclusion

The common inquiry is whether Smith's perceived advocacy is plausible relative to his jurisprudence, and whether his passion is the logical extension of his moral and social theory. The conclusion is generally that it does. Thus Andrew Skinner (1995) concludes, "Compulsion of this sort would seem to indicate a major modification to the claim of individual freedom, but it must be remembered that Smith's discussion of education in general is to be seen against the background of his analysis of the social consequences of the division of labour" (p. 87). He continues that the "real significance" of these consequences can "be appreciated only when seen against the background of

¹⁷ It should be noted, that this passage is quoted by the North British View (1850) as evidence of the delusion of many still (p. 265).

Smith's ethics" (p. 87). Quinn (2013) links Smith's concession to government back to Smith's ambition to achieve the promises of a liberal social order: "The rationale here is paternalistic, yet liberal in the sense that the type of character to be formed by education was not to be passive and thoughtless, but was, rather, autonomous" (p. 121). And Alvey (2001) identifies a value to education which is truly Smithian: "This education is not sufficiently provided by the private sector: moderation, a type of self- command (*which is integral to Smith's moral theory*), is a sort of public good requiring government support" (emphasis added) (p. 10). To the common inquiry as to whether Smith's philosophy demonstrates his concern about education and whether it can be made consistent with a proposal for government provision, I will give my full concurrence that it is plausible.

Many have also remarked on the vigor and strength of his position. Rasmussen (2008) calls the description of the social ills in the article "a long and severe passage." And he concludes, "[Smith] is certainly concerned with the problems that specialization can produce – and in fact this is one of his biggest concerns, as his harsh language demonstrates" (p. 109). Griswold writes, "Quite probably the most pressing problem Smith saw in commercial society, except for the old and persistent danger of religious fanaticism, was that of the dehumanization of the workers" (p. 292). And Haaksonsen writes, "The...discussion shows how strongly Smith felt about the issue" (p. 204n53). I similarly concur that Smith describes with great passion the misfortune of the lack of education, and that he calls his audience to action.

To these common views I can add that he takes positions that stand in opposition to dissenters in his time. The voices of opposition make some sense of the manner in

which he makes certain comments. For example, Smith writes, “But though the common people cannot, in any civilized society, be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune, the most essential part of education, however, to read, write, and account, *can* be acquired” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.54). That is, they are not hopeless. He writes of spending his whole life doing repetitive labor, “He naturally *loses*, therefore, the habit of such exertion” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.50). That is, rather than the poor being innately degenerate, there is an environmental reason that the laborer becomes lazy, ignorant, corrupt, and rash. He writes, “The education of the common people requires, perhaps, in a civilized and commercial society, the attention of the publick *more than* that of people of some rank and fortune” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.52). That is, his peers have disproportionately focused their efforts on the higher ranks. And he writes, “The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders” (V.i.f.61). That is, peace, not riot, should ensue. Smith, therefore, makes a statements about the desirability of education among the lower ranks – and he does in a way that shows he is aware of the common concerns, even if he does not provide anything more than a counter-assertion to them. The effect is that his article is unmatched in concern for the poor among British philosophers. Smith offers a new and profound voice among philosophers, but one familiar to philanthropists and those exposed to the work of the clergy.

Smith’s positive position of the desirability of an educated lower class must have been seen as startling and bold from a philosopher of his rank. But because of its familiar

content and tone it cannot be said to be radical. It mirrors what the philanthropists and clergy were stating. Had he gone further than such philanthropists and clergy? Had he also called for government involvement?

To answer begin to sow the seeds of doubt to that question, it is perhaps noteworthy, that Parr, a defender of charity schools, comments on Smith's article, stating:

Opposed as we are, by petulant wittlings, or chimerical theorists, we have the satisfaction, you see, to know the principle on which our charity schools are founded, is not without an advocate in a person who stands in the first class of political writers, from his clear and extensive views, from his copious and exact information, from the soundness of his judgment, from the liberality of his spirit. (1828, p. 186)

Smith's article is, therefore, understandable as operating with the debate of desirability of education and furthermore as it relates to charity schools, and not as an attack or dismissal of charity schools.

In conclusion to the history of this chapter, the environment I have described, requires us to ask a different question than what is commonly asked in the secondary literature. Many have asked whether Smith's perceived advocacy is plausible relative to his jurisprudence, and predicted by his ethics. But I feel that we ought to ask whether the advocacy ascribed to him can be made plausible relative to his times? Based on the history I have provided, I must be skeptical of government advocacy, and I must look to determine if there is some textual basis to further support such initial skepticism. Lawson and Silver write that education "was too important to be left to philanthropy" (1973, p.

235). But does Smith make a comparative argument against philanthropy? Does he explain when or why charity won't suffice? It would seem from this history that discounting charity and asserting the superiority of government would have to be a high priority in any article that would have an objective of government advocacy. But my reading of the article fails to impress upon me that he was dismissing charity – certainly there is nothing so overt as the environment would suggest is necessary.

I suggest that it may be too much to ask of the article, in his historical context, to both depart from his fellow philosophers on desirability and also seek to proclaim that the Scottish system must be expanded universally. There is some conflict between such a proposal and the spirit of the times. It ventures on being too insensitive to the tolerance-level of his audience, composed as it was of people who were still acting like “petulant witlings” about education. And it seems to give no heed to the vast system of charity schools, and what they had accomplished. We should, therefore, recognize the novelty of his passion for the poor more than is commonly done, and yet at the same time follow that passion only as far as both the text and the history permit. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, beyond this point, Smith's argument becomes less passionate and confident, and the environment more hostile.

Before reexamining the text from a skeptical perspective in Chapter 3, I will test an alternative hypothesis in Chapter 2. I will try to determine the degree to which statist ideas might have been emerging as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of charity as Smith wrote. There were such ideas, and Smith would have been exposed to them, especially in his travels in France. I am not interested in looking to understand possible

linkages between Smith and the French. Others have done so, and determined the intellectual linkages are inconclusive and/or weak (Rothschild, 1998; Hyard, 2009). I am instead interested in characterizing how statist ideas influenced British discourse, and whether these ideas can be said to have created a precedent or opening for Smith to assert government provision into the politics of his day. As we read his text closely, it will be important to know what others said about the role of government and how they said it. Then we might better grasp what Smith's text says about his posture toward government.

CHAPTER 2: DISCOURSES ON STATE INVOLVEMENT PRIOR TO SMITH

I have thus far pieced together the records to try to answer the question as to the nature of the intellectual environment Smith faced from the 1750s until he published *WN* in 1776. I have described the philosophers and intellectuals of the day as disengaged on the issue of educating the poor, and as suspicious that expanding access to education could destabilize the social, political, and economic order. At the same time I have portrayed the philanthropists and clergy as embracing education as a form of social control and moral salvation. There is a fault line among these groups (Vaughn and Archer 1971, p. 37). It is evident in the writings of the philanthropists. Hannah More writes with some contempt at the end of the century. She says of philosophers:

To love mankind so dearly, and yet avoid all opportunities of doing them good; to have such a noble zeal for the millions, and to feel so little compassion for the units; to long to free empires and enlighten kingdoms; and yet deny instruction to your own village, and comfort for your own family. Surely none but a philosopher could indulge so much philanthropy and so much frugality at the same time.

(1828, vol. 1, p. 127)

Contempt can be seen in the writing of the Samuel Parr in 1785. As it relates to education, he writes, “I will, without hesitation, pronounce [the critics’] reasoning so weak and so impolitic, that no man, who really acquiesces in it, can support his

pretensions to the character of a profound philosopher” (p. 192). Reverend John Howlett (1788) writes of the legacy of Locke: “Had he displayed no greater penetration in his moral and metaphysical researches, than he has done in the matter of civil concern [i.e., his recommendations for the Poor Laws], his name would not have come down to us with that celebrity it has now so justly acquired” (p.24). And in 1806, Patrick Colquhoun complains that the issue of the poor had not received much attention from people of rank:

The higher and noble aim of preventing those calamities which leads to idleness and crimes, and produce poverty and misery, by guiding and properly directing the early conduct of the lower orders of the community, and by giving a right bias to the minds, has not, as yet, generally attracted the notice of those who move in the higher walks of life; nor has its importance been sufficiently estimated, as it regard society at large (1806, p. 11)

In exploring the potential role of government in education, Smith took up an issue that his peers had generally been unwilling to give much attention. However, it would be inaccurate to say that Smith had no precedent in Britain on the issue of government involvement. The present chapter seeks to give as much credit as possible to the antithesis of my dissertation. Namely, it might be argued that if we cast a wider net, maybe we can see that Smith picked up on and was perpetuating a nascent paradigm shift not captured in the larger tenor of the discourse. Presently, I will lay out the examples of statist literature before Smith, and the reactions to it. I will show that within Britain there are few recommendations for government involvement in education. Much of it is searching and incomplete. What little there is, is highly rejected by those who comment

on it. And even the most radical reformers of the time don't go as far as it has been argued that Smith went. In Chapter 3, I will argue that Smith also very specifically rejects this early statist literature that I identify.

Very little attention has been given to the original sources of statist thinking in Britain and the reaction to it. Much more has been given to the period after the French Revolution and the 19th century (e.g. Vaughn and Archer, 1971; Anderson, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Musgrave, 1968; Sturt, 2013). But the origin of statist ideas in Britain before Smith, which are partly French in origin and partly home-grown, has not been well elucidated. I cast a wide net to identify statist thinking in Britain. The results do not erode my thesis that Smith would have been radical to recommend government provision. The results even gives character to the radicalness and provides us points of reference for discussing his construed radicalness.

The Influence of Montesquieu

The French had begun to consider government involvement in education by the middle of the 18th century. After the expulsion of the Jesuits, French magistrate Louis-Ren de Caradeuc de La Chalotais published *Essay on National Education* (1763). In an anti-Catholic spirit, he argued, "I dare claim for the nation an education which depends only on the state, because it belongs essentially to the state; because every state has as an inalienable and indefensible right to instruct its members; because, finally the children of the state ought to be educated by the members of the state" (as cited in Luckey 1912, p. 85). In 1768 Rolland, president of the Parliament of Paris, recommended to his colleagues a central system of education (Cubberly 1920, p. 510; Compayré, 1886). The

French *philosophes* also began to take interest in education after the expulsion of the Jesuits. Devising a secular means of education was foremost on their agenda (Green 2013, p.140). D'Alembert, Du Marsais, and d'Holbach all expressed interest in governmental provision. The French *économistes* also attended to issues of education. Although their interests were often more toward the technical education of farmers and labourers, they also tended to show an interest in government provision. La Rivière and Du Pont show this inclination (Hyard 2009, p. 76-83). Alexandra Hyard (2009) characterizes the French's interests: "It can be summed up in three points: education must be delivered not by families but by the state, it must teach all the members of a nation the natural laws; and finally, it must coexist with distinct teachings fitted for each class of society" (p. 84). Green (2013) distinguishes the French interests in a similar way: by their "secular rationalism, [and] their concern for liberty" forwarded by "a class which was soon to overthrow the Ancien Régime" (p. 141-142).

Still Chisick (1981) argues that reformers generally restricted their concerns to the middle and upper classes (p. 130). It is only in the mid-1770's that scholars and intellectuals began to ask themselves about education as it specifically pertained to the lower ranks. A series of essay contests starting in 1775 provides some evidence of the novelty of the idea (p. 128-130). According to Chisick, the new line of inquiry can be traced to a 1773 submission to the new literary journal *L'esprit des journaux français et étranger*, that complained of the lack of attention to the instruction of the lower ranks in published works. Chisick places the emergence of the specific concern about the poor at the same time that Smith's article is being conceived of.

What to make of these flourishing interests in France for the question of British discourse? As mentioned, Rothschild (1998) and Hyard (2009) both speculate about the possibility that the French influenced Smith. Hyard suspects that Smith had his interest piqued by the French ideas. But she does not find that he imported them in their spirit or detail. There is no parallel between Smith's plan and the French plans which were large, comprehensive, "top down," and highly secular (Hyard, 2009, p. 86; 90). Rothschild expresses similar views. There is also hardly any sort of human capital argument in Smith's account, whereas the French economists were strongly oriented toward functional instruction. But, as I mentioned, I am less interested in the potential linkages in ideas in a traditional history of thought inquiry. I am interested in understanding the pan-British environment, and how those ideas played out in the history of British educational discourse and thought.

To that end, education historian Jones (1938) finds that the idea of government involvement was highly resisted in Britain before the French Revolution. In comparison to the continent, she uses the expression that the idea of government provision "hung like fire" (p. 340). Similarly, as already mentioned, Green (2013) has recognized the resistance to statism. He writes that reluctance to permit intervention "is the most striking distinction between English and continental education" (p. 232).

Despite all these French figures, the proliferation of statist ideas on the continent leaves little trace in the British debate about government provision. I do not wish to deny that there was awareness in Britain of the nascent French interests. And I do not wish to

deny that the French certainly constitute a paradigm shift. And, lastly, I certainly do not deny that Smith, himself, would have had exposure to these ideas on his trip to France. But the British debate does not reference these French figures, the audience does not appear to be in the process of warming up to statist ideas, and Smith's text is so remarkably different from French plans that I find it unfruitful to examine linkages beyond what is already in the secondary literature. Finally, despite these numerous French thinkers discussing governmental provision in the 1770s, there is but one figure who seems to have made enough of a ripple in British discourse that his principles are adopted, and his name is mentioned. That figure is Montesquieu, whose work on the subject of education was already decades old.

The origins of statist educational discourse in Britain can be traced to Montesquieu. His principles characterize the debate. By the time Smith writes, the British had responded to it and seemed to have largely refuted it before the later figures cited above began to take interest. Montesquieu had an undeniable influence on the Scottish Enlightenment (Plassart, 2015), and yet, his important role in specifically influencing Scottish (and English) educational discourse has not been given much attention. In major works on the history of education in Britain, he is not mentioned (e.g, Vaughn and Archer, 1971; Sanderson, 1995; Musgrave, 1968; Sturt, 1970). There are, perhaps, two explanation for this lack of attention. First, French historians do not treat him as a major figure in the French history of education (e.g., Cubberley, 1920; Barnard 1969; Anderson, 1975). Those actively engaged in the revolutionary period steal the show. By extension, it may be that his role in Britain has also been overlooked (e.g. Rothschild,

1998; Hyard, 2007; Green, 2013; Anderson, 1995). Second, in Britain the accomplishment of national education is well over a century removed from the date of Montesquieu's proposal; as in France, he is overshadowed by later figures. But for our specific and unique discussion of identifying the preexisting statist ideas, Montesquieu forms the critical piece of the story.¹⁸

Book IV of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, is entitled "The Laws of Education Ought to be Relative to the Principles of Government." It was first published in 1748, and the first translated into English in 1750. His thesis is that a republican government could only persist if the people acquired an appreciation for the principles of republicanism. Per the 1752 translation of Montesquieu (which is the source I will cite throughout), "Every thing...depends on establishing this love in a republic" (2001, p.51). And a love in a republic was not a natural sentiment; it was at odds with human nature. It required virtue understood as "self-renunciation" or a "constant preference of public to private interests" (p. 51). Therefore, a republic needed a unifying agent to inculcate its people in this virtue. "To inspire [such virtue] ought to be the principle business of education" (p. 51).

The unifying agent would be government itself. Government would need to supply what economists call a "merit good," or a good that the public naturally demands an insufficient amount of. Therefore, Montesquieu writes, "Those who shall attempt hereafter to introduce such institutions as these [of education], must establish the community of goods, as prescribed by Plato...and the extensive commerce carried on by

¹⁸ Frank Fletcher (1943) is an exception on the silence regarding Montesquieu. He also finds Montesquieu to be the source of early British statism before the French Revolution, and a source that was rendered ineffectual by Priestley's remarks to Brown.

the community, and not by private citizens” (2001, p. 53). He bolsters his argument for central control by way of examples of the “extensive genius” with which legislators of the past have successfully achieved moral transformations of their people. Of the ancients, he follows Polybius’s account that a curriculum of music “tempered” and “softened” the manners of the war-trained character of the Greeks. The Greeks, who would otherwise have had demonstrated only “fierceness, indignation, and cruelty” came to express “pity, lenity, tenderness, and love” as well (p.56). Legislators had created a “harmony” (p. 56). “The ancient Greeks, convinced of the necessity that people who live under a popular government should be trained up to virtue, made very singular institutions in order to inspire it” (p. 52). Per Montesquieu, Polybius’ history was supported also by the opinions of Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus of Plutarch, and “of all the ancients – an opinion grounded on mature reflection” (p. 54).

This account of the Greeks and music would be reiterated by those who followed. Beyond that, the important characteristics of his argument which will play out in Britain are: the perspective that virtue was essential to support institutions, the claim that the ancients got it right, the claim that there is a single agent who can identify the curriculum, and finally the rhetorical use of a metaphor that the community is a family.

M.G. Jones (1938) writes that Montesquieu had only influenced John Brown’s 1765 and Thomas Sheridan’s 1756 publication (p. 340). Fletcher (1943) is of the same opinion that he did not change many views (p. 143). However, in terms of his influence on John Brown in particular, Montesquieu’s effects are far reaching in terms of

structuring the debate on government provision. References to Brown's views would persist well into the 19th century.

In 1765 John Brown provides a reinterpretation of Montesquieu for Britain. John Brown was a well-known figure in his day. He was a King's Chaplain, and a prolific writer. His most popular work, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757), provides a bitter critique of the morals and politics of his age (Crimmins, 1990). In 1763 he published *On the Duty of Charitable Distribution* in which he refutes Mandeville's criticism of educational charities. And in 1765, in *Thoughts on Civil Liberty, on Licentiousness and Faction*, he took a large step and began to prescribe government provision of education.

Brown's thesis is that "the chief and essential Remedy to Licentiousness and Faction, the fundamental Means of lasting and secure establishment of civil liberty, can only 'lie in a general and prescribed Improvement of the Laws of Education'" (1765, p. 156). His argument follows suit with Montesquieu's, "That for Want of a prescribed Code of Education, to which all the members of the Community should legally submit, the Manners and Principles on which alone the State can rest, are ineffectually instilled, and are vague, fluctuating and self-contradictory" (1765, p. 157). He continues, "Nothing then, is more evident, than that some Reform in this great Point is necessary, for the security of public Freedom."

But then Brown's argument takes a decidedly British turn. He addresses the century's endless concern with poverty and its vices. "The life of the uninstructed Poor in great Cities, is too commonly a horrid Compound of Riot and Distress, Rapacity and

Thieving, Prostitution and Robbery, Wickedness and Despair” (1764, p.111). British discourse on the poor from the very beginning of the century is quite replete with such characterizations of the poor and the worries of the demise of civil society through it. Such were themes that had occupied Brown throughout his career. Brown attributes the present moral state of society to the Protestant Reformation’s failure to complete its mission. “The great revolution...confined itself to the Reform of public Institutions [of the Courts]; without ascending to the first great Fountain of political security, ‘the great private and effectual Formation of the infant Mind” (p. 90).

Brown is not “dreaming of the perfect Republic of Plato” (1765, p. 159). Rather, Brown is looking to build an education with the great “material” that Britain had readily available to it: the strong, moral and Christian sensibility of the middle ranks, which had resisted the vices of the upper ranks, and which had been protected from the conditions that generated the vices of the lower ranks (p. 112-114).

The most famous rebuttal to Brown came from Joseph Priestley, who may have been the “most considerable English writer on educational philosophy” between Locke and Herbert Spencer (Schofield 1997, p. 121). Priestley published extensively, and was celebrated in his times. In the same year as Brown’s publication, Priestley immediately pounces on him for his government proposal, writing “Remarks on a Code of Education Proposed by Doctor Brown” and appending it to his 1765 work *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education*. Then, upon positive reception to “The Remarks” and upon the encouragement of his friends, he published his first broadly political work *An Essay on the First Principles of Government* (1768), in order to expand on his views of the role of

government. He also appends “The Remarks” to this latter work, ensuring even broader dissemination. In “The Remarks” Priestley demonstrates from a liberal perspective the flaws of Brown’s argument.

Priestley makes several counterarguments that, purloined by others in the ensuing decades, clearly define the debate. First, assigning authority to government kills innovation. “Education is as much an art as husbandry, as architecture, or as ship building” (1768, p. 77). Look at the “data,” he writes. “Of all arts, those stand the fairest chance of being brought to perfection, in which there is opportunity of making the most experiments and trials, and in which there are the greatest number and variety of persons employed in making them” (p. 78). Priestley is describing the natural improvements that occur in the free market. Conceding it to a single agent of government is to fix it in its infancy. “Every man” knows that education is clearly in its “infancy;” moreover, nobody could possibly determine when anything has reached perfection anyway. To concede it to government, regardless of government’s merit, would be “like fixing the dress of a child and forbidding its cloaths ever to be made wider and larger” (p. 80).

Second, concession to government, for whatever sense of public utility or expediency, comes at too great a cost. A single education creates “one kind of man” and “uniformity is the characteristic of the brute creation” (p. 85). Such brute creation cannot possibly be suited to a society that values the exchange of ideas and that depends upon them for its improvement.

Third, education by a single authority, outside of our own choices, violates our most sacred rights. Priestley writes: If there be any natural rights which ought not to be

sacrificed to the ends of civil society...it is even more natural to look for those rights among those which respect a man's children because nature has generally made them dearer to him than himself" (p. 92). He finds that "the blessings of civil society...may be bought too dear. It is certainly possible to sacrifice too much, at least more than is necessary to be sacrificed for them, in order to produce the greatest sum of happiness in the community. Else why do we complain of tyrannical and oppressive governments?" (p. 48).¹⁹ Conceding education to government ought very much (especially in light of history) be held as a dangerous prospect.

Priestley set the tone of responses to Brown, as I will demonstrate later. But, as noted by Jones (1938), who finds Montesquieu's impact limited, Montesquieu did have some positive impact on at least one other prominent writer before WN: Thomas Sheridan. Although he is, in general, more positively influenced by Montesquieu than Priestley is, we see a similar pattern of prudence. Fletcher (1943), using a metaphor of a bird that wanders far from land on its flights, calls Sheridan the "stormy petrel of education in England, Ireland, and Scotland" (p. 303). Sheridan was an ambitious actor trying to raise the standards of British theatre and elocution. Through his radical political methods he gained considerable notoriety. Sheridan had proposed schools and organized societies with the intention of improving the art of oratory, expunging Gaelic in favor of English, eliminating non-English accents, and adapting education to the British constitution. Sheridan wrote an early work in 1756 called *British Education; or the*

¹⁹ Jeremy Bentham acknowledges that Priestley is the source of his "greatest happiness principle" (Schofield 1997, p. 207).

Source of the Great Disorder of Great Britain which attracted attention and is relevant to statism.

The Sheridan-Montesquieu link is revealing more for what it isn't than what it is. Sheridan concurs with an early statist curriculum imported from France. The objectives: "First, that the education of youth should be particularly formed and adapted to the nature and end of its government...Secondly, that the principle by which the whole community is supported, ought to be the most strongly inculcated on the minds of every individual" (1756, p. 35). However, Sheridan does not recommend that government control the curriculum or provide funding. Such talk is missing. He appears, then, to be motivated by Montesquieu only on the basis that Montesquieu's *objectives* are praiseworthy. As with Priestley, Sheridan does not allow such praise to lead him into statism.

Also, it must be noted that Sheridan is entirely contemplating education for the higher ranks. He clearly states he is laying "before the Public a Plan of Education for the young nobility and gentry of this country." It is these gentlemen who are, he writes:

Born to be legislators, to be the bulwarks of our constitution; to fill up posts which require wisdom, conduct, and the most improved ability; to animate the notion to the whole body of people; to be an example and model to all; the fountain of manners and service of principles; if their education is defective, or bad, the whole constitutions is affected by it. (1756, p. 25)

Both Brown and Sheridan find the upper ranks to be terribly corrupt and to be a source of threat to the maintenance of the country. But whereas Brown wishes to build a universal education based on a moral curriculum of the middle class, Sheridan wishes

only to directly fix the upper classes, and to have their example flow downward toward all other ranks. Sheridan, like the many discussed already, did not scrutinize the quality and accessibility of education for the poor. As an example, Sheridan demonstrates that Montesquieu's ideas were judiciously adopted.

One can see the same pattern in his other works. In 1757 in *An Oration Pronounced before a Numerous Body of Nobility and Gentry* Sheridan went on to discuss the means by which such a new curriculum might become a reality. I will focus on two exceptionally illuminating passages, showing how rooted in the tradition of voluntary solutions that even a radical such as Sheridan may have been.

First, Sheridan addresses how a new curriculum for the higher ranks might be put into place (and he is still specifically focused on the higher ranks),²⁰ he writes:

What...would be the most likely method to make such a Design prosper? I know but of one, which Experience in the like cases has warranted, a Method to which the chief Improvement in this Country, in other Points, have been owing; I mean a Union amongst Gentlemen of Fortune and Understanding, to promote the Scheme with their interest, their Counsel, and personal Attention to it, in its Progress. In short, *a Society* established for the Improvement of Education, upon the same Plan with the many other excellent Societies now subsisting in this Kingdom. (1757, p. 18)

²⁰ As previously mentioned, it was often difficult to discern who subject of writers' treatises on education were since it was implied that the treatise would be about the upper ranks. It takes until page 13 in this publication for Sheridan to make it clear he speaks of upper rank education.

Here Sheridan seems to hint at a leadership role from an independent charitable society. “Societies,” he finds, “is the Method by which some of the most beautiful schemes...have for many Years past been successfully conducted. Not to mention those in England, we have here, in the Dublin Society, the Linen Manufactory, the several Charitable Societies, and the University, a remarkable Instance of Royal and Parliamentary Munificence” (1757, p. 29). He encourages such societies to take leadership, and he directs the legislature to “attend to more pressing Exigencies of the State” (1757, p. 29).

The munificence he speaks of can be understood by looking at the history of these societies. The Dublin Society was, and remains today in the form of the “Royal Dublin Society,” an independent charitable society. Its website today provides a history of its independence, and writes, “The Society draws its strength from its independence and impartiality; it relies on its own resources to fund its activities; and on the voluntary input and support of its Members who give of their time and expertise to serve on its Council and Committees.” The Linen Manufactory similarly appears – although I cannot be definitive about it – to be a private trust (Kearsley 1804, p. 509). Sheridan, appears then to be looking for great leadership from the community of private citizens, which is made even clearer when he writes:

Amongst the Inducements to Individuals to become members of such a Society, it will not be the least, that they have the Sanction of one of the best Parliaments that ever sat in England. Nor is there a Prince of Wales wanting of equal hopes,

who would probably not think himself dishonored by presiding over such a Society. (1757, p. 30)

Therefore, Sheridan's response to Montesquieu is to take his concerns about republican education seriously, but to not adopt his government control. Sheridan adheres to the solution of voluntary societies, and identifies a role for government which would be protective and encouraging to such societies. His position is representative of the time in which there was a flourishing of organizations and societies in the newly emerging public sphere.

In the years following Brown's publication there would be more dissent in the style of both philosophical treatise and political tract. By way of example, an article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1765) responds to Brown. It displays a fierceness in its attack. The author interprets Brown's views to be that "conscience stands in need of a guide." The author then retorts, "The question is, what is the proper guide of conscience?...Rational habits and principles ought to be infused to preclude absurdities. But it may surely be asked, who is to determine what is true and what is false?" (Urban 1765, p. 52). The author continues:

[Brown] proposes a prescribed Code of education [based on religious principles]. But supposing this prescribed code had taken place when popery was established among us?...And might not the establishment of such a code at that time have been supported by the very same argument? Are we sure that by the establishment of this code we shall perpetuate unlimited truths, or falsehood? (Urban 1765, p. 53)

The challenge is simple. It exemplifies the method of the author, who repeatedly seeks to show the failures of logic. The text verges on anger and incredulity at the naïve proposal that Brown made. The example is noteworthy for it represents a different kind of voice. While Priestley's response is a philosophical treatise which eventually served as the platform for a larger treatise on government, this author's response might best be called a political tract in the style of a pamphlet. It hones in specifically on the flaws, and it give Brown no credit.

To conclude this section, these writings seem to generally capture the extent and manner in which Montesquieu affected the discussion of education in England before Smith. Montesquieu produced some broad interest in the topic of education. He produced an intellectual forum for how education and state formation might work hand-in-hand, and he inspired republican thinkers to the topic. He fueled some of the anxieties associated with the transition under way since the Glorious Revolution, and he provided a new way to view the long-running British concern about poverty and pauperism. Yet, Montesquieu's preference for government provision does not broadly influence attitudes in Britain. His voice – at least as it is transformed by Brown and characterized by Priestley – will be revived in debates after the French Revolution. But in the years before Smith, he had been strongly refuted. As education historian P.W. Musgrave (1968) writes specific to the period leading up to WN, “Strong arguments against the provision of education by the state were based upon the claims of individual liberty in so crucial a sphere as education” (p. 8).

Views from Radicals and Utopians

Brown and Priestley were particularly prominent figures irrespective of the debate between them. Brown's 1757 publication *Manners* was printed 6 times within the first year, and made him famous (Crimmins 1990, p. 69). Priestley, was the most prominent British writer on education since Locke (Schofield 1997, p. 121). But in looking to identify the sources of major social reform (to include education) they can hardly represent the broader movement. Nor are they the major figures identified for a foundation for 19th century reforms. In the first three decades of the 19th century, reforms for national education were spearheaded by radicals in the rationalistic spirit of Bentham, and in the democratic spirit of "parliamentary agitators" such as Arthur Roebuck, Thomas Wyse, and George Grote, and their "occasional Whig allies" (Green 2013, p. 254). And before them, as Green (2013) writes, "The first pioneers of middle-class reform in England, and those perhaps closest in orientation to the continental reformers, were the radicals... These were the small coterie of radical industrialists, scientists and rationale non-conformists who congregated around the Lunar Society and other literary and philosophical society with spring up during the 1780s" (2013, p. 237). Green includes Josiah Wedgwood and James Watt in that group. Therefore, knowing that future discussions of national education would be built on principles of rationalism, democracy, and utilitarianism, it would be of value to inquire whether their predecessors may have entertained government provision of education. Did the radical thinkers from the mid to late 18th century, such as the most vigorous advocates of democratic-

republicanism, entertains a larger role for government in a way that has not been identified in the discourses inspired specifically by Montesquieu?

To try to give a complete picture of statism in education before Smith, and in my effort to determine the best way to characterize Smith's interpreted views, I find it worthwhile to see how he compares to those writers who were making the most dramatic social proposals for reform in his day. How does he compare to those who were considered radical? And how does he compare to democratic utopian writers? As Viner writes, utopian literature, in particular, is "a good place to look for evidence of the existence of current hopes for social change which would have been embarrassing or hazardous to disclose publically in plain language" (1991, p. 298).

I understand, and will use the term "radical" in a manner similar to other scholars of the period. There is a distinction between social reformers and radicals. In the 1790s, radicals were often associated with revolution and must be distinguished from those who showed adherence to "loyalist" continuation (Goodrich 2015, p. 8-9). But the spirit of radicalism must also be seen as more diffuse, especially before the French Revolution. Radicals would be seen as committed to reform at the level of the English Constitution (Goodrich, p. 9). Jenny Graham (1999) adds that it is specifically a strong "republican" spirit which demarks radicals from other reformers (p. 16-27). And Mark Philip (2014) identifies radicals as those seeking to battle corruption by way of "newer, more universalistic, democratic and populist ideological commitments" (p. 26).

I find that there do appear to be the rumblings of statism based on a more home-grown, distinctly British reasoning in the republican spirit of the age. Among the writings

of the radical democratic-republican and utopian writers, one begins to see some modest interest in expanded access to education, and partly, some warming to the idea of government subsidization. But there is not much, and it is not particularly confident or expansive.

In seeking out statist ideas among these writers, I am not building a thesis that these writers may have influenced Smith. I concur with D. Winch that we ought to think of Smith as “anti-utopian” (Winch 1993, p. 87). But these radical and utopian writers provide a point of reference for assessing Smith’s radicalness, and for further establishing the intellectual climate of the time.

What I find is that these following examples don’t reveal what one might expect if one is to believe that Smith was merely advancing a nascent argument. Though they identify some rumblings of statism, mostly they do not. Moreover, they appear much milder than even Smith. They suggest Smith would be making quite a large leap, even beyond what the radical social reformers would have made.

To begin, the Scottish-born Whig politician James Burgh is an important radical figure to consider. Burgh was a well-known and prolific writer, as well as an educational theorist. His work, *Thoughts on Education* (1747) was used by Bishop Hayter as a guideline to instruct his royal pupils. In the 1760s Burgh became disenchanted with his initial efforts to seek social reform through appeals to aristocracy, and found himself joining the most radical fringe of republican thinking. His biographer Carla Hay (1990), writes, that Burgh was “one of England’s foremost propagandists for radical reform” (p. 90).

Burgh's example demonstrates how limited even a radical social reformer may have been in terms of government involvement in education. Burgh wrote frequently of education. But his writing very much shows him immersed in a discourse exclusively for improving education for the upper rank. His early works, *Thoughts on Education* (1747) and *Youth's Friendly Monitor* (1754), only address education for the upper classes, and makes no mention of government. Education for the upper classes was even a sort of end state – precluding the need to consider education for the poor. Burgh writes:

For a man of great wealth to spend his whole income without bestowing a reasonable proportion of it upon the truly indigent, is embezzling what was only entrusted to him, not given to him; a great estate being properly a stewardship committed to a particular person for trial of this charity, and his abstinence, as poverty is a trial of another set of virtues. (1747, p. 15)

In these early works, Burgh, a son of a Presbyterian minister, preached for the higher ranks (and its text is very sermon-like) to maintain and nurture the system of ranks so as to secure the wealth of the country. The education he prescribed was directed at instilling the spirit of charity in the upper classes. The proper use of wealth was “necessaries and conveniences” and “relief of the indigent” (1747, p. 16).

In later writings, he flirts with government provided education. Of particular interest in his corpus for our discussion is a utopian fictional work in 1764 entitled, *An Account of the First Settlement Laws, Form of Government, and Police of the Cessares*. While Hay (1979) writes that the work had been ignored (p. 103), my purpose is to give as much credence to the possibility that statism was emerging before Smith. To that end,

Burgh's utopian work is an enigmatic candidate for a nascent statist view. The work is an exchange of letters from a representative of a fictional, ideal country. In it, Burgh has his representative of the Cessaes write:

It has been frequently observed that when the education of children is entrusted to their parents only...they have, either through ignorance, or bland indulgence, rendered them intractable, stubborn, and conceited, or indolent and effeminate, lovers of ease and pleasure, and impatient of labour. (1764, p. 63)

Problem defined, he continues, "Therefore, our laws enjoin the senate to build a public school in every parish, and to appoint proper masters and mistresses for them, whither all Parents and guardians are obliged to send their children at such ages, and for so long a time as the senate directs" (1764, p. 69).

There is little doubt that Burgh's utopia has a legal basis for government provision. And by the phrase, "in every parish," the Scottish system of Burgh's personal experience seems to have been identified with the ideal. However, there is little reason to think Burgh has the provision for the poor any more in mind than he did in his non-fictional writing. My thinking may appear surprising since he writes that "all Parents or guardians are obliged." But the counterargument presents itself easily in the history of thought and in the manner of discussing education. Chisick (1981) points out that the authors of education in France in this period did not bother to identify their subject groups well, requiring one to determine from context who their broad terms described (p. 131). An essay contest in France in 1779 to determine a means to educate the poor ended with no winner, when it was determined none seemed to have identified the poor as their

subject group (1981, p.129). I find the same to be true in Britain, thus requiring attention to the context of the passage by Burgh.

In the example from Burgh, he likely only has the upper class in mind. This circumscribed set of people that he has in mind can be perceived by focusing on the problem that he is trying to remedy. The problem Burgh's character faces in his society is an effeminacy and conceit – those spoiled qualities of children owing to a lack of exposure to less sympathetic judges found in the outside world. By indicting such qualities, Burgh signals he is criticizing the upper ranks in a discourse common to the debate about the value of domestic education. Such qualities were a common concern regarding the upper ranks. In France they were denounced as a *mollesse*, a softness, slackness, and weakness, implying effeminacy (Chisick 1981, p, 200). In England, there was a long tradition of criticizing and worrying about the men of higher ranks for being as effeminate as the French (Goodrich 2005, p. 8). In 1757, John Brown, in his popular work *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, complains of “vain, luxurious, and selfish effeminacy” among the upper class (1757, p. 191). Paine and Wollstonecraft would continue the tradition after the French Revolution (Goodrich 2005, p.48, 51, 95). Therefore, Burgh likely had only this select group of the upper ranks in mind when he used the term “all,” just as his earlier writing presume to address issues that affect “all” but which only effect the upper classes.²¹ Therefore, while his utopia contains government provision – and I do not want to entirely downplay that fact – it is a

²¹ The debates in the end of the century that included Burke, Eden, and others are informative here. Much effort had been expended to determine classifications of the poor. The effort coincides with a more inclusive sense of who constituted the people who fell within the “all.” Dean (1991) provides a brief and informative account of the discussion regarding classifications of the poor at the time (p. 26-34).

very limited sort of provision, and one not terribly different from the system of endowments that already served the upper classes

Also noteworthy about Burgh's utopian proposal is that it appears to take inspiration from charity schools as much as it does the parish system. He writes, "The children are brought before the assembly [after church service in April], and examined by the governor in those branches of knowledge, in which they have been instructed, and the governor publically distributes rewards" (p. 117). What he is describing is hard to deny as resembling the large, annual celebratory public displays held by the charity schools throughout the century. Endowed grammar schools of the upper classes did not engage in such public displays. This inclusion of a practice by charity schools suggests a positive attitude toward them and their public profile. And it means that his utopian portrayal ends up borrowing from both traditions. I do not claim to know fully what Burgh's intentions are in this passage, but only point how ambiguously expressed his statist ambition might have been even in this fictional utopian account which would have permitted greater indiscretion.

Thomas Spence provides another interesting view of a radical and occasional utopian writer in Smith's time. Spence was a teacher and bookseller, known as being obstinate and abrasive, and eventually becoming imprisoned for sedition in the 1790s (Dickinson, 2004). The degree and manner of his radicalness can be seen in a lecture he gave, and distributed as a pamphlet in 1775, called *The Rights of Man*, which caused him to be expelled from the Newcastle Philosophical Society. In this lecture, Spence argues for a redistribution of land and property toward greater equality. Seeing land-ownership

as the basis for existing political power and economic potential, he wished to expand those privileges through dividing existing property among all its constituents. His ultimate aim was to create the property conditions that would enable a highly inclusive local and highly democratic governance.

It is his extensive list of local government's duties that I want to direct our attention to. Although Spence is advocating comprehensive reforms, he makes no mention of education. His list of duties includes:

Maintaining and relieving [the community's] own poor and the people out of work; in paying the necessary offices their salaries; in building, repairing, and adorning its houses, bridge and other structures; in making and maintaining convenient and delightful streets, highways, and passing both for foot and carriage; in making and maintain canals and other conveniences for trade and navigation; in planting and taking in waste grounds;...in providing and keeping up a magazine of ammunition; in premiums for the encouragement of agriculture...and, in a word, in doing whatever the people think proper. (1793, p. 12-13)

This passage from Spence, because he is both a teacher and as a radical republican, should command our attention for a moment. It is remarkable that he, of all people, did not include education in this list of public works. He had written about education previously, and he had showed himself an enthusiastic of education. And starting in 1785 he began to republish this pamphlet with additions. And yet, he never

adds anything more about education. Education – if he intended it to be a public works – would have to be inferred from the “whatever people think proper” addendum to his list.

In his other publications, government provision of education remain absent – with one notable exception, which it is of justice to direct our attention to. In his utopian *A Supplement to the History of Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1782, one of his characters states “each child resembles a king” – implying that everyone has the potential to be important for the country. He then implies that because of such indeterminate potential, his country had given every child access to a parish free-school (Spence, 1782). It is a notable exception to his silence about government involving itself with education, and it shows the democratic roots of Spence’s thinking. Yet, as a teacher and founder of a school, it must be concluded that Spence made little effort throughout his radical writings to make access to education an important part of his objectives.

Henry Brooke is another writer generally considered to be radical in his time. He was a playwright who attained notoriety in 1739, with the publication of *Gustavas Vasa: the Delivery of his Country*, in which he celebrated a Swedish figure who liberated Sweden from Denmark. The praiseworthy account represented a sympathy for parliament over royal prerogative, and caused the play to be suppressed, making Brooke a political figure whose works would continue to attract attention and scrutiny (Leerssen, 2004).

His 1765 fictional *The Fool of Quality* has characters who display certain radical thoughts similar to Spence’s. One character states, “I look upon the money amassed by the wealthy to have been already extracted from the earnings of the poor, the poor farmer, the poor craftsman, the hard-handed peasant, and the day-labourer” (1906, p. 346). He

would appear to be a good candidate for universal education. And educational reform is discussed in the book as well. But the discussion again limits itself to familiar debates concerning quality and content, and is done so only in the context of the upper classes. He is interested only in the virtue of the private tutors and the moral content of the curriculum for the upper classes. Brooke writes, “An education in the midst of sensuality and deception...or the corporeal indulgence and mental imposition can be no very good friend to the virtues” (1766, Vol. 2, p. 161). Also, “Were tutors half as solicitous throughout their academies, to make men of worth, as to make men of letters; there are a hundred pretty artifices, very obvious to be contrived and practiced for the purpose” (1766, Vol. 1, p. 216). Brooke’s views on education were not different than the intellects of his time, as explained in Chapter 1. Social reform limited itself to making education for the upper ranks more useful and less corrupt.

To conclude this section, the more radical social reformers at the time took some interest in education, but did not fully embrace the government provision, and when they did do so, they appear to not have applied it to the lower ranks with much confidence. These writings do not significantly alter my thesis, and possibly strengthen it. A wide study of social reformers did not reveal many examples of those even interested in education reform. And those who are interested, do not make the kind of proposals one might confidently identify as popular or universal education. The construal of Smith would seem to have gone further than these radicals.

The Legacy of Brown, Priestley, and Montesquieu in British Discourse

In this present section, I will show that commentaries after Smith reveal that the Brown-Priestley exchange remained the focal discussion, the framework by which one would enter the discussion about the proper role of government. Before the French Revolution, no other British or French source seems to register as relevant. One Swiss source is mentioned but discounted. After the French Revolution, Brown and Priestley remain focal, and those seeking yet broader authority for statism would have to look beyond Brown to foreign sources or distant legacies in British history.

Reverend Samuel Parr, writing in his footnotes to a 1785 publication, identifies Aristotle, and then jumps to two modern works that discuss government provision: the essay of Brown, and an essay published by “The Society at Berne” in Switzerland. Parr’s commentary reveals that he felt such works had not and could not inspire statism in Britain. Of Brown, Parr writes that Priestley “has fairly and fully confuted the positions” (1785, p. 184). He continues that Brown’s essay is “a subject of very nice speculation,” but that it would be “better to be content with protection” (p. 185). Of the Swiss proposal, he writes that it could only have had been considered relative to the “peculiar and confined government of that country” (1785, p. 184).

David Williams writes within the framework, and sides with Priestley as well. Williams writes often of educational reform. Fletcher states that he, along with Priestley, is the “potent voice” in education at the time (1943, p. 130). In *Lectures on Education, Read to a Society for Promoting Reasonable and Human Improvements* (1789b), Williams argues against giving curricular control to the state. He starts off generally: “No philosopher, sincerely in the interests of mankind, would wish to give any thing in

government the domination of principle; which may be the instrument of general injustice and misery” (1789b, p. 42). Here he is concerned about Montesquieu’s principles of republicanism being inculcated by the government. He continues, “Attempts have been made to convert this domestic occupation [of education], into a political employment” (1789b, p. 44). He continues, “And, if it were the ultimate object of every state to preserve its constitution at all events, it would be prudent to submit education to its power. But the object of political states, is the security or happiness of its citizens” (1789b, p. 44). In regards to happiness, he finds fault in the Montesquieu-Brown argument.

Echoing Priestley very closely, he writes that the first problem with government curriculum is that a uniform education is damaging to diversity and innovation. “If the instruction of youth have been strictly and scientifically referable to the ruling principles of particular states – would Harrington, Sidney, and Locke have written on government?...If only to produce such men...education should be withheld from the grasp of the magistrate” (1789b, p. 45). Also echoing Priestley, he writes of the rigidity and “perpetuity” of governmental forms of education as harmful to the dynamism of ideas (p. 46). And, finally, in a replication of Priestley’s resentment of giving too much to government, Williams writes, “Happiness of society [would be] sacrificed to the security and permanence of institutions” (p. 47).

In 1793, William Godwin utilizes the framework of the Brown-Priestley debate in his *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Godwin’s objective is to refute Mary Wollstonecraft’s call for national education in the previous year. He begins, “It is worthy

of observation that the idea of...superintendence has obtained the countenance of several of the *most zealous* advocates for social reform” (emphasis added) (1793, vol. 2, p. 203). Godwin, in other words, finds Wollstonecraft to represent a fringe voice in political discourse – but a threatening one for certain. And he takes his refutation of her seriously. Godwin’s response to Wollstonecraft is to replicate (without attribution) Priestley’s response to Brown for a new generation. He directs us to consider the proposal more pragmatically, to consider the “data” and what it predicts (a term Priestley used as well). Godwin’s qualms regarding the proposal are the same three that Priestley has. First, government provision means a “permanence” and rigidity to a science that is still in development. Second, government’s curricular control will “support prejudice” (p. 210); “government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand” (1793, vol.2, p. 208; 213). Third, the application of a singular education plan will cause a loss of “the best attribute of man, the moment he resolves to adhere to certain fixed principles” (p. 212).

Others, who are more favorable to the idea of government provision after the French Revolution, summon the Brown-Priestley exchange and Montesquieu as their entry point to statism. Henry Yorke’s 1794 *Thoughts on Civil Government: addressed to the Disenfranchised Citizens of Sheffield* is an example of a post-revolution statist proposal building such a continuity. Yorke calls the period during the French Revolution one of “empathic distress,” a period “when factions, by the violence of their own fermentation, stun and disable one another... and a time when plain sense, and downright honesty, have the only chance to get uppermost, and introduce reformation” (1794, p.5). He is under the impression he is witnessing the loss of republication spirit and the first

signs of a political collapse which Montesquieu foretold. He sees the lower ranks losing out to these factions and wishes that they can get access to the “information” that has “been concentrated within the circles of rank in fashion” so that they might better represent themselves (1794, p.13). His goal is to “restore Society to a State of Brotherhood” (1794, p.14).

Yorke recognizes that a call for national education will receive a poor reception. And here he mentions the legacy of the Brown-Priestley debate. Twenty years after WN was published and thirty years after Priestley’s attack on Brown, Yorke writes, “I am fully aware of the severe animadversions which certain moderns have thrown on the above plan” (1794, p. 15). His identification of the animadversions are Priestley’s. Yorke’s modification in light of the animadversions is to offer a humbler curriculum than Brown or Montesquieu.

In *The History of the Poor* (1797), Frederick Eden similarly summarizes the views on statism in education in the 18th century. By 1797, several British proposals for national education had emerged in the last few years, but Eden provides a small and familiar list of important characters. He identifies Brown’s essay as the start of the inquiry about government provision (Vol. 1, p. 422). He identifies Montesquieu as the inspiration for it (p. 424). Seeking a deeper heritage of positive sentiments toward providing education, he mentions early 17th century British politician Henry Wotton, who served in the House of Commons from 1614 to 1625. The reference to such a far-removed source provides some support for my opinion that there is little else to turn to for authority.

Eden's position in the debate is to propose government provision. He sees Priestley as the authority bearing against advocacy: "All [of Brown's and Montesquieu's] principles and reasonings have been roundly and vehemently objected to, and most of them refuted, by modern writers; these objections, I apprehend, are faithfully and fully collected and stated by that political, as well as polemical, veteran, Dr. Priestley" (1797, Vol. 1, p. 426). His proposal, as a result, is careful and defensive. He renames the tax for education a "bounty," and then backs even further away from that potentially contentious label, stating "it should not even be called a *bounty*...It is doing no more than every liberal-minded man delights to do" (Vol 1, p. 429). He is stating that government involvement is just another way to do what is already being done through charity, and thus won't be much of a violation of liberty. He thus feels he is able to construe his proposal as "the most distant idea of Government interfering" (Vol. 1, p. 430).

A document in John Sinclair's *Statistical Account* in 1799 is very illuminating for lamenting that there are not other commentators on the issue of government provision. Mentioning Milton, Locke, Rousseau, Priestley, and "many others," the author writes:

While they have carefully selected and arranged the best materials of knowledge, they have overlooked another point not less essential, the means of disseminating those materials. One gentlemen of this country, indeed whose early patriotism, has not gone unnoticed, and two or three natives of the continent, whom at the particular juncture, it is unpopular to name, and perhaps dangerous to praise, have endeavored to direct the public attention to this important subject. (1799, Vol 21, p. 317).

It is uncertain by 1799, who the British authority is who he has in mind, but Brown, whose work is very patriotic and who is the counterpoint to Priestley (whom the author names) would be a good candidate. More importantly, the author affirms a very limited set of discussant on the issue of the means of provision.

Finally, Dugald Stewart in *Essays on the Spirit of Legislation* proposes a strong role for government in his lectures from the first decade of the 19th century. In doing so, he also makes mention only of Brown and the Society of Berne as recent representations of government proposals (1855, p. 52-54). Stewart finds that Priestley's objections do not apply to the lower orders, on whom "the stability of every government essentially depends" (p. 54). Finding moral degradation among the lower ranks to be an urgent concern for the country, Stewart reasons, "In order to provide a radical cure to these evils, it is necessary for government to bestow...a systematic attention on the Education of the people" (p. 49). He then goes on to show that by "systematic attention" he means provision. In order to arrive at his conclusion, it is important to note, half a century later Stewart has to try to find a solution to Priestley's refutation of Brown.

Stewart also identifies a foreign source and an older British source of inspiration. He mentions first Marquis di Beccaria and his 1764 work *An Essay on Crimes and Punishment*, as a demonstration of the interrelationship between "Ethical Philosophy and the Science of Legislation" (p. 49). And, like Eden previously, Stewart mentions 17th century English politician Henry Wotton. Both inform him that attention to moral development is "one of the most effectual objects of legislation" (p. 50). Stewart has to look far afield for exemplars of statist thinking.

The exchange between Brown and Priestley is, thus, the familiar referent to these later generations. For those who concurred with Priestley, the debate appears to have been resolved. Priestley was the winner. They reject the new modified version of statism found in Wollstonecraft and Yorke by summoning the lessons of Priestley. For those favoring statism after the French Revolution, Priestley's refutation weighs on them and they dissociate themselves from the degree of radicalness that Brown and Montesquieu represented.

I thus conclude my account of the state of discourse on education as Smith wrote his article. Although I have tried to be extensive in my search, I do not claim to have identified all writing about government provision before Smith. I have looked at prominent social reformers, and I have followed histories with an intention to discover more cases. Yet, I feel comfortable stating that given the wealth of writing on social reform, and the dramatic attention to education throughout the century, there is little attention given to the education of the poor, and little attention given to the idea of government involving itself in education at any level. Charity had provided for much of the education for the poor. Charity remained respected by many. Charity was the expected solution. Moreover, charity belonged to the tradition of duty and obligation. The upper ranks maintained the system of ranks, as predestined. Charity was the upper ranks' tool, their religious duty, and the divine function of their birth. As Jones (1938) writes, "The eighteenth century was an age of well-defined social distinctions...Expressions of patronage on the one hand and of subservience on the other...were then common form and were recognized as such" (p.4).

Mostly Silent about Smith

But what about references to Smith in these later years? The Brown-Priestley framework would make sense before Smith wrote on education; but, afterwards, it would seem that Smith should have become a new authority. If the common interpretation today of Smith as an advocate of government provision has merit, it would seem that those engaged in the project of a new paradigm of education, would turn to Smith as an early authority too. The answer: there are surprisingly few who mention Smith.

Most refrain from mentioning Smith in their proposals for government. But, admittedly, there are many possible reasons not to mention Smith. An advocate might be inspired by some other publication of foreign origin. That would appear to be the case with Wollstonecraft, who writes that she found Talleyand's *Rapport sur l'Instruction Publique* of 1791 to be a "very sensible" approach to education, from which she "borrowed some hints" (1792. p. 387).²² Or perhaps, an advocate's aim is more secular than Smith's might allow. Henry Yorke's *Thoughts on Civil Government: Addressed to the Disenfranchised Citizens of Sheffield (1794)* might be such an example. His motivation is to push out the influence of religion, which he feels has contributed to factionalism and the rage of party.

Or perhaps an advocate is motivated by concerns of sedition and injurious ideas in the curriculum – concerns that don't come through in Smith's article. West (1964) writes of one strand of statism in the 1790s:

²² Although she had been influenced by TMS's moral philosophy, she does not discuss Smith's views on education, or WN.

The French Revolution caused such nervous reaction in England that the means of communication of knowledge of all kinds became suspect. Hostile government actions against the press, the paper tax (referred to by J. R. McCulloch and James Mill as a tax on knowledge), together with the dislike of combinations, corresponding societies, and political pamphlets of the Tom Paine variety, were all symptomatic of the official climate of opinion. (1964, p. 468).

What I find is that throughout the period of dramatic debates on social reforms, people advocate for government provision and yet do not mention Smith. By way of example, Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (1795) is an example of a reform proposal that stems from a loyalist and an older tradition of patronage, instead of one of parliamentary reform. He is representative of those whom Philip (2014) distinguishes as battling "old corruption" instead of seeking for "displacement of older frameworks" (p. 26). He does not mention Smith.

The philanthropist John Ferrar in *The Prosperity of Ireland Displayed in the state of the Fifty-four Charity Schools* (1796) appeals to legislature, claiming that for the purpose of expanding educational access for the poor, "it would not be in the least burdensome to grant a small tax" (1796, p. 50). Patrick Colquhoun in his 1806 work entitled *A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Labouring People* is open to government provision, though nothing that would be so "extensive" as to be a "utopian scheme" (1806, p. 12). Colquhoun was a local magistrate of Glasgow and had interaction

with Edmund Burke, Adam Smith and notable others (Yeats 1818, p. 51). He too does not mention Smith.

Sinclair's *Statistic Account*, which is rich in nostalgia for the Scottish parish system is a massive 21 volume series of testimonies from each parish in Scotland. Despite the work being occasioned by nostalgia for the parish system and considerable pride, Smith is not mentioned as a supporter of the Scottish governmental model. Nor later is he mentioned in the even more nostalgic discourse which can be seen in *Educational Statistics of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1833, vol 7):

The Parochial School appears as the nucleus of the whole system [of diverse schools]; and it is remarkable, that the tendency of all the others, as their importance and their efficacy increase is to a state of endowment resembling what belongs to the universal pattern of the Parochial School – a circumstance that appears to speak unequivocally to the realm of a Parochial school establishment. (1833, 5)

Similarly, the *Proposal for Building Twenty New Parochial Churches in the City and Suburbs of Glasgow* (1834) provides another example that might compel a reference to Smith. “Schools may be built and endowed by Government, or they may be built and endowed by private philanthropy, still...they would remain to a great extent naked architecture, but for such a Parochial agency” (1834, 11). And Andrew Rutherford's 1848 *The Necessity of a Reform in the Parochial School System of Scotland* is another example, in which he calls the parish system “a great national blessing.” Smith is not mentioned in any of these works.

There certainly can be many reasons for such writers refraining from mentioning Smith. But it is striking that although Smith today is seen as an advocate of government provision – and by some as the first advocate (e.g. Musgrave 1968, p. 8; Sturt 1967, p. 4) – those in the 18th century did not gravitate to him.

There are, however, a few exceptions. Eden cites Smith as an authority. Eden discusses the Brown-Priestley debate and explains his own position. He finds that Brown's worries are well-founded and his intentions honorable. Eden too is worried that there might be a "destruction of order, and [a] dissolution of government" (vol. 1, p. 427). When it comes to discussing the source of funding, he turns to Smith. Eden, proposing to introduce a new tax, make reference to V.i.f.55 of Smith's article – the paragraph in which Smith mentions establishing a school in every parish. Eden finds the passage equates to governmental support. Then he writes, "What better way to [help the labouring poor], than by establishing, as Adam Smith proposes, in every parish or district, a little school...? He proposes to have it rendered thus moderate, by the Public's paying the master partly, but not wholly" (vol 1, p. 428). Therefore, Eden reads Smith as many scholars do today.

On the other hand, Parr, the defender of charity schools, cites Smith too. Bygrave has commented on Parr's interpretation of Smith. Bygrave (2006) believes Parr cites Smith "in support of the state 'encouraging' rather than 'directing' or prescribing the provision of education" (2009, p. 69-70). Parr's text is admittedly prone to digression, serpentine sentence structure, and colorful language, rendering its meaning often allusive. However, in the following passage, Parr finds Smith to be a champion of charity schools.

We have the satisfaction, you see, to know the principle on which our charity schools are founded, is not without an advocate in a person who stands in the first class of political writers, from his clear and extensive views, from his copious and exact information, from the soundness of his judgment, from the liberality of his spirit. (1828, p. 186)

Here, in these two examples we have anecdotal evidence of an issue that I will explore further in Chapter 3. There is a subtlety in Smith's article that permits a variable reading. Interpreting what might have been Smith's intentions may depend upon entering into the historical context and recognizing what was implicit knowledge and the manner of discourse at the time. Today there is a general coalescence to the interpretation that he advocated government provision, but in the process there is much chaff produced – material dismissed as *unintentionally* vague, ambiguous and awkward. In these two examples, the subtlety lent to disparate interpretations. Whether there is anything to the actual text that makes it plausible that he favored charity over government will be the topic of Chapter 3. And to that end I will explore the chaff.

CHAPTER 3: TEXTUAL SUPPORT FOR CHARITY AS A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TO GOVERNMENT

In the article “Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Education of Youth” Adam Smith describes the moral degeneration of the poor caused by the division of labor in a way that has been described as “harrowing,” “disturbing,” “dramatic,” “uncharacteristically animated,” “highly coloured,” and “grim.”²³

Of the laborer “whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations,” Smith writes:

The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. Of the great and extensive interests of his country he is altogether incapable of judging, and unless very particular pains have been taken to render him otherwise. (V.i.5.50)

Smith concludes the paragraph, “This is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it” (V.i.f.50). Government has been summoned to attend to the problem.

²³ Muller (1993, p. 149); Young (1997, p. 200); Himmelfarb (1983, p. 56); Hill (2007, p. 343); Eden (1797, Vol. 1, p. 420); Heilbroner (1973, p. 249).

The interpretations by scholars today tend to hew closely to the sentiments that Smith “pleaded for,” “advocated,” “urged,” “demanded” and “strenuously argued for” a partial state provision of education for the poor.²⁴ To challenge either Smith’s choice of government as provider, or his strength of conviction would be to stand apart from most of the literature, and would require a substantive reinterpretation.

In Chapter 1 and 2, I showed how hostile the environment would have been to a statist position, and how generally unwarranted such a position would have seemed to his audience. These realities I described as the *de facto* institutional setting for contemplating or arguing policy action. In the current chapter I look at the textual evidence that would support an alternative interpretation of the article. I lay out the textual support for believing that Smith is generally consistent with his times, that he is not *advocating* for government provision, and is instead likely favoring the free market and what I will call an “approximation” of the free market found in the institution of charity.

Review of the Literature

This history of Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrates that the model through which scholars have attempted to understand Smith’s advocacy might require some modification. The dominant model for explaining Smith’s advocacy has been the modern day concept of “market failure.” Smith describes the third duty of the sovereign as:

erecting and maintaining certain publick works and certain publick institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of

²⁴ Hyard (2007, p. 90); Ross (1984, p. 183); Robbins (1965, p. 90); Freeman (1969, p. 179); Rasmussen (2008, p. 110).

individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the
expense to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may
frequently do much more than repay it to a great society. (IV.ix.51)

This description resembles the modern criteria for government to intervene in a failing
market.

Market failure – or more accurately market weakness – occurs when the natural
decisions or financial capacities of consumers and producers lead to an inadequate
amount of market production and exchange. Producers and consumers makes decisions
based solely on their personal benefits. But if there are “positive externalities” or
additional benefits to bystanders (society) from the private decisions of producers and
consumers, then public happiness and welfare may be improved by assisting producers
and consumers to exchange more. Here is the rationale to stimulate the market. To make
the case for government intervening where markets are “weak” in this manner, it needs to
be demonstrated that private agents themselves cannot produce enough – perhaps due to
lack of capital, lack of profit incentive under current business models, of lack of
consumer interest and finances. It also needs to be demonstrated that there are indeed
public benefits. In the present case, the lower classes’ education needs to be a good thing
for those who would have to contribute to financing it. In short, insufficiency and public
benefit are the basic minimum demonstrations (the two parts) of the textbook concept.

This model of analysis has been frequently applied to make sense of Smith’s
article, and to validate the appearance of a governmental proposal. To the first part of the
argument, many have been explicit. Quinn (2013) points out that “there did not seem to

be a market for educating the poor” (p. 120). And Muller (1993) claims that Smith was “writing at a time when there was no general education” (p. 148). Based on the history I have provided, such comments are an overstatement, but they articulate the requisite concern of insufficiency or uncertainty. More nuanced market-failure statements can be seen in Alvey (2001), who writes, that the virtue of “moderation” is the public benefit that is not “*sufficiently* provided by the private sector” (emphasis added) (p. 10). Jack Russell Weinstein (2013) writes that Smith found it “*unlikely* that a school made up of largely poor and working-class students can be driven by tuition” (emphasis added) (p. 202). And in an oft-cited article, Skinner (1995) asserts that the market “could not guarantee” provision (p. 73). Each of these passages imply that Smith had a threshold for certainty and accessibility in mind.

The second part of the market failure premise – that of the public benefits – has received much more attention than the specifics of the weak market. Weinstein (2007) reminds us that Smith “must show that education serves some integral civic purpose” (p. 62). The secondary literature has, indeed, very assiduously shown what is integral about education. I discern four categories of benefits of education which have been identified in the article, and each is given broad elucidation and inspired discussion: overcoming self-estrangement, inclusion in citizenship, improvement in social order, and maintenance of social hierarchy.

In the interest of space, I will provide only a representative example of each my categories of public benefits. I will footnote the richer discourses on the topic, and then I summarize the benefits in Appendix I.

Regarding self-estrangement, Weinstein (2007) writes, “A society only has perfect liberty if its members are actually capable of changing their trade when it pleases them” (p. 66).²⁵ Regarding citizenship and enfranchisement, Christopher Winch (1998) writes, “Education allows for the development of society alert enough to examine critically the claims made by self-interested bodies and individuals” (p. 371).²⁶ Regarding social order, A. Skinner (1995) believes education will make one “act as a responsible citizen,” and renders one less prone to intemperance (p. 88). And Ross (1984) writes that Smith, throughout WN, is “haunted by a fear that religious passions and therefore fanaticism and faction can become a threat to the stability of society” (p. 182).²⁷ Finally, in regards to maintaining traditional hierarchy, Muller (1995) writes, “As the respectable behaviors of the lower orders made them feel capable of obtaining the respect of their social superiors, they would become more deferential toward their superiors” (p. 150).²⁸

The integral public benefits have drawn considerable attention. In Table 1 in the Appendix, I outline what others have written. The table aims to provide some sense of the degree of attention that has been given specifically to the topic of benefits. In the table, I have used the authors’ own language where concise enough. I have also added a column indicating in a simple binary fashion if the commentator adheres to the statist interpretation or not. The symbol of a “+” indicates a strong affinity to the common

²⁵ For a discussion of the types of alienation in regards to Smith, see Lamb (1973), West (1971; 1975a; 17975b), and Hill (2007). For fuller discussion of this benefit, see also Rothschild (1984), West (1964) and Weinstein (2013).

²⁶ See Freeman (1969) and Haakonssen (1989). For an opposition point of view see Harpham (1983), Freeman (1969), and Fleischacker (2004, p. 246)

²⁷ See Fitzgibbons (1997a;1997b), Griswold (1999), Donald Winch (1978). An oppositional point of view can be seen in Bygrave (2006) and Viner (1991).

²⁸ See Green (2013, p. 241).

interpretation. The symbol of a “--” indicates *some* qualification to that common interpretation. I have been generous with the “--” symbol. In reality, one might attribute a clearly enunciated disagreement with the common interpretation to only a few of the commentators in this table (e.g., West, Friedman, Mueller, Klein).

A Different Purpose of the Article

I assert that, in an exploration of the text that has remained somewhat peculiar to many scholars, we should resist interpreting his method as one of building a market-failure argument. I assert that an interpretative skepticism will go a long way here to identify an alternative explanation for why he discusses public benefits. Perhaps the most important historical fact on which we might base our skepticism is that in the age of benevolence there is nothing unusual about discussing public benefits of education. It was the generalizable method used to advocate for charity. This method can be seen in various degrees in the writings of every clergy member and philanthropist cited thus far in this dissertation. Viner (1991) confirms the pattern, “The charity sermon was periodically addressed to the upper classes and had as its primary function to persuade the prosperous to continue, and in moderation, to improve on their past record of contributions to charitable purposes” (p. 285). Viner describes the method as emphasizing “the extent to which giving was religiously or morally obligatory or *socially beneficial*” (emphasis added)(p. 285). Similarly, Jones (1938) writes, “The utilitarian value of the schools was kept well before the public in sermons” (p. 13).

Therefore, one might be inclined to say that public benefits are necessary but not sufficient for government intervention. But I think even that familiar logic is inadequate

to properly characterize how his identification of public benefits would come across in his time. In a time when the pattern was to *not* make a link between public benefits and a government mandate (in the time before a strong familiarity with “market failure” and before massive government scope), a discussion of public benefits is perhaps not even an indicator of a positive posture toward government, but instead *exclusively* an indicator of a positive posture toward education.

If we are to treat Smith’s article as having any purpose of persuading his audience of the merit of *government* intervention, then it would be logical that in the presence of alternative means of subsidizing the poor, Smith would do more than merely identify public benefits. That is, he would also feel compelled to argue that government is superior and that the alternatives are inadequate. A market failure argument is ultimately an act of persuasion embedded within the given culture and discourse, and must address the preconceptions and concerns of its audience.

As argued thus far, the preconception of the time for many was that charity was an effective means. I have identified the praise of many. In 1780, Reverend Samuel Parr, as a representative of the praise, goes so far as to call charity’s capability a “fact” (1828, p. 276). Does Smith provide an argument able to discount the “fact” that things were already in capable hands? Parr also makes promises for even greater effectiveness: “Charity schools are in their infancy” (1828, p. 232), but “charity schools, like other institutions, advance slowly to perfection” (p. 221). Does Smith provide an argument that charity, in being not yet perfect, is inhibited from becoming so? In Smith’s time, such

arguments would seem to have to be part of any advocacy for a model that would supplant or depart from the model of charity.

I argue that Smith, indeed, does not make a strong case for government, as his audience would require. Smith is very intent to argue for the desirability of the poor having an education – as any philanthropist would argue – but he is not committed to a particular means to do so. He demonstrates equivocation when it comes to the means of provision, and he even gives us reasons to believe he favors the free market and charity.

As such, we ought not to be surprised that Parr, the philanthropist, reacts favorably to Smith’s article. Parr views Smith as having offered support to charity schools. Citing specifically V.i.f.61 (the paragraph dealing most overtly with public benefits), Parr is pleased to write, “Adam Smith states so forcibly and fully the advantage” of education to society (1828, p. 192). But, unlike today’s scholars who focus on benefits, Parr finds that Smith validates the project of charity. He writes:

Opposed as we are, by petulant witlings, or chimerical theorists, we have the satisfaction, you see, to know the principle on which our charity schools are founded, is not without an advocate in a person who stands in the first class of political writers, from his clear and extensive views, from his copious and exact information, from the soundness of his judgment, from the liberality of his spirit. (1828, p. 186)

This chapter demonstrates that there are numerous and significant textual inconveniences for the statist interpretation. These inconveniences have received little elucidation. They appear occasionally to leave scholars ill-at ease, but they have not

proven able to derail the statist interpretations. Smith's text in the article has been called "awkward" (Berry 1997, p. 145), "vague" (Weinstein 2013, p. 186), "unspecific" (Kennedy 2005, p. 228), "muddled" (Stanfield 2005, p. 1), and lacking "conviction" (Cropsey p. 2001, p. 106). In addition, Alan Peacock (1975) writes that the article offers "not much practical guidance" (p. 561). And Hyard (2007) writes that the article is "more critical than constructive" (p. 90). And yet, in each case, these authors have repeated the common interpretation that Smith advocated for government provision. I argue, that although shrouded by ambiguity and awkwardness in a modern day context, a number of passages reveal themselves as meaningful in an inconvenient way when viewed in historical context. The passages suggest that Smith was equivocal about the source of funds necessary to attain these public benefits, and that he even seems to favor charity. His confidence regarding the desirability of an educated lower class has been conflated with his prudence regarding policy.

Campbell writes, "Perhaps realistic thought on the possibility of *other kinds of social institutions* has been hindered because of the polarization around the dichotomy of purely voluntary market choices and collective-coercive group decisions. It has been assumed that the only alternative to market processes is collective group decisions" (emphasis added) (1967, p. 575). In this chapter, I argue that the third option, charity, is present and give some favor in the article itself.

Reservations in the Literature

The market failure/public goods model has been widely applied to understand Smith. But it is contested model among public-goods scholars. Tyler Cowen (1985)

argues “Nearly every good can be classified as either public or private depending upon the institutional framework surrounding the good and the conditions of the good's production” (p. 56). And James Tooley (1997) writes of contemporary research on education, “Clearly [education] could have desirable externalities, including all the ones commonly listed, such as education for democracy and social cohesion, equality of opportunity or equity, law and order and economic development. However, there is nothing in the public goods literature which shows that these externalities need state intervention in order to ensure their provision, and I have pointed to the various ways in which, without the state, it seems much more likely that they will be provided more successfully than with the state” (p. 112).²⁹

Voices such as Tooley and Cowen, while representative of larger group of dissenting public-goods scholars, are too infrequent in general public discourse to have threatened the comfort-level people have with the public goods/market failure rationale.³⁰ But I don't think it can be disputed that Cowen's and Tooley's caution to concede duties to government, and their emphasis on how legal frameworks influence the capacity of markets is consistent with Smith's general sentiments in WN. Therefore, I must ask: have our methods of analyzing Smith been skewed by contemporary political economics, by the textbook version of the public goods paradigm? If the market-failure paradigm had become widely debunked over time and had become seen as an embarrassment of times gone by, would scholars still be inclined to strongly associate Smith with it? Perhaps not.

²⁹ See also Friedman (1997).

³⁰ Disputing the public goods/market-failure paradigm is the central objective of Randy Simmons's textbook-like work for the theories of public choice; *Beyond Politics: The Roots of Government Failure* provides a very current view of the state of discourse.

By way of example, the scholarship regarding Smith's views on the value-theory of wages indeed suggests scholars would seek to at least partially dissociate him with debunked paradigms (e.g. Fleischacker 2004, p. 129).

In this chapter, I will maintain some skepticism in regard to Smith's adherence to the market-failure paradigm. Others have shown a similar skepticism, and I will seek to determine if there is substance built upon their skepticism. And what have these other scholars said? They have taken one of two approaches, and often both. First, they have treated the "public goods" paragraph (IV.ix.51) as merely a framework for analysis rather than a determinant of his conclusion. They have discerned evidence of a general pattern of analysis within Book V so as to demonstrate that the market-failure model was inconclusive and inadequate for him across a wide-swath of issues. Second, they have been much more willing to emphasize the harsh criticism that Smith has for endowments in the article. An endowment is a purse of money established for funding part of education. It generally pays salaries unconnected to market demand and market judgment of the product. It is government's and many third-party's means to fund education. Such a harsh criticism cannot simply be wiped away when facing the question of how to improve access for the poor.

Regarding endowments in the article, West, who has attended to Smith's article more than any other scholar, concludes: "Smith was ultimately so heavily critical of the way in which any element of 'subsidy' was in danger of being squandered, that one often gets the impression he believed they were typically non-productive, if not counter-productive" (1990, p. 98). David Friedman (1997) similarly writes, Smith's "conclusion

is that while it may be legitimate for government to subsidize education, it may be more prudent to leave education entirely private” (p. 47). And Lynn (1976) writes that Smith has a “marked caution about the capacity of government to manage anything other than the Post Office adequately,” and that on education he “oscillates” and “shifts” between funding options, eventually providing “no final solutions and little practical guidance” (p. 372). Lynn concludes, “His uncertainty is understandable here; one has the impression that he really favored market-like price equivalents in most cases but recognized the pragmatic reality” (p. 372).

In each of these comments we see prudence conflict with some justification for government involvement. There is a separation between good intentions and good policies. What is “just” might still require a “burden-of-proof” of its efficacy and efficiency.³¹ Each of these writers suggest that Smith’s conclusion on the matter is open-ended, instable, dependent upon emergent conditions, and ultimately requiring validation.

Rosenberg, Peacock, and West in separate works invert the way we should view the article. For them, the merit of the fee-system (that aspect of Smith’s proposal which maintains an element of the free market) is the essential lesson and purpose of Smith’s article. Namely, whatever one may wish to do to make education more accessible, the fee system must be retained, for it limits the corruptibility of the institution. Rosenberg

³¹ Charles Griswold (1999) writes, “A burden-of-proof argument suffuses Smith’s writing in political economy; the state may intervene in all sorts of ways, but those who would have it do so are required to show why it should in this particular instance, for how long, and in precisely what fashion, and how its intervention will escape the usual dangers of creating entrenched interest groups and self-perpetuating monopolies (p. 295). Griswold’s burden of proof has been cited by Fleischacker and Craig Smith. Laurent Brubaker (2006) gives an excellent survey of instances where Smith feels the work of “reformers and moralists is more often harmful than helpful” and where “efforts to intervene are either impotent or pernicious” (p. 172).

(1960) writes, “Smith’s critique of educational institutions – especially universities – is entirely consistent with the general principles [of his corpus]” (p. 568). The fee system is what will render subsidized elementary education less corrupt (p. 569). Peacock (1975) writes, “The problem of maintaining [market-like] incentives in non-market oriented activities... is one of the dominating themes of that part of the third duty which is concerned with public institutions” (p. 560). Of education, Peacock writes that Smith faced a “dilemma” of how to fund schools without producing corruption: “Smith never resolves the dilemma, although he is aware that he is making a powerful case for an educational system financed by fees” (p. 561). And West (1977) writes, “The general content of Smith’s third duty to the sovereign was, with few exceptions, the search for new forms of property rights that would better enable *private organizations* to produce public works” (emphasis added) (p. 14). West finds there is much more consistency of thinking in Book V than Smith is given credit for.³² The government functions much more as a “stage manager” for the private market rather than as a “leading actor.”

Specific to education, West (1964) writes that Smith had a “preference for private enterprise in the provision...of education.” He continues, “Adam Smith had argued that the competitive market principle had not been allowed to operate properly in the first place due to the hindrance of endowment” (p. 471). The government role might best be to permit the free market to work more smoothly. The following actions might be considered: improvement of tax laws, improvements in banking conditions, provision of incentives, and the provision of moral leadership.

³² V. Brown (1994) has called Smith’s analysis “*ad hoc*,” for instance (p. 159).

Finally, Warren Samuels (1977) encourages us not to seek definite policy guidance in Book V:

I would argue that he provided not a set of immediate policy solutions or presumptions but a framework within which, given that it postulates and legitimizes a market economy, there can be no unequivocal or conclusive a priori determination of practical policy issues. It is Smith's message that these issues need to be worked out through the principles of approbation, disapprobation, the impartial spectator, and so on. (p. 204)

In other words, the article contains the material for how to assess options, but does not determine best policy. Smith is extricating himself from the expectation that he is to take a position. He might instead be choosing to be "protreptic." That is, Smith is not advocating or arguing; rather Smith is seeking – as Griswold (1999) believes Smith does in TMS – "to refine the way we judge and feel, and perhaps to encourage us to act in a certain manner" (p. 49).

In each of these more reserved comments, what is *not* being discussed are the public benefits. Such benefits are acknowledged, but they do not govern the commentator's analysis.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the textual evidence that may support and strengthen the cases made by these scholars that Smith offers reasons to doubt his advocacy for government, and that he favored charity. These scholars have cited little textual evidence from within the article in support of their views. But there is much in the article that can be cited. Presently, I will lay out the key textual references to

make the following points: the article rejects the Montesquieu strand of reasoning; it provides consistent criteria by which to judge government (with a tendency to find it to be a poor choice); it offers charity as an alternative solution to government; it distinguishes charity as having specific traits that might make it superior to government; and the article is sufficiently vague to allow an inference that Smith would prefer to limit government to a protective role instead of a direct role.

Rejecting the Nascent Statist Thinking

The first inconvenience of the statist interpretation is that he does not signal support of the new line of thinking as represented by Montesquieu. Rather, Smith rejects it and not lightly.

He begins by challenging Montesquieu's empirics in the same way that those who already rejected Montesquieu did. But he also makes a generalizable point about empiricism. Montesquieu claimed a music curriculum produced a positive impact on the morals of the Greeks. Since government agents were responsible for choosing the music curriculum, government was therefore capable of involving itself in education. Smith disagrees:

Notwithstanding, therefore, the very respectable authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Polybius, and notwithstanding the very ingenious reasons by which Mr. Montesquieu endeavors to support that authority, it seems probable that the musical education of the Greeks had no great effect in mending their morals, since, without any such education, those of the Romans were upon a whole superior. (V.i.f.40)

Smith's refutation of Montesquieu's empirics has flown under the radar. I have not found a single mention of it in my survey. And, as I will show, it is not a fleeting refutation. Smith is not just saying he is unconvinced of Montesquieu's example. The tone of the passage is just the beginning of a larger criticism of a tendency of which Montesquieu is merely representative.

Respectable authority and ingenious reasoning will be subject of his criticism for the next quarter of the article. The mention of Montesquieu is a part of a discourse on how to make sense of ancient society. It has a thesis: we tend to misunderstand what we observe, and we also tend to rely on intellects of rank who are prone to the same misunderstanding. In TMS Smith introduced the discourse. We have a tendency to see beautiful effects and to believe they derive from wise intentions (II.ii.3.5). And philosophers are inclined to construct beautiful but false explanations of the world (IV.I.2; V.2.15; VII). In this section of the article on education, Smith employs his thesis to refute the common views of the ancients. I will look at three separate moments in this section on the ancients in which he stresses the folly of our authorities and the error of our tendencies as it pertains to education.

He finishes the Montesquieu example by stating where the historians and philosophers have gotten it wrong. "The respect, *of those antient sages* for the institutions of their ancestors, had probably *disposed* them to find much political wisdom in what was, perhaps, merely an antient custom" (emphasis added) (V.i.f.40). Here Smith is explaining the confusion: the observer was predisposed to see reason and design in what had evolved naturally. And, he continues: "Musick, it was proposed, *at least by*

philosophers and historians who have given us an account of those institutions, to humanize the mind, to soften the temper, and to dispose it for performing all the social and moral duties both of publick and private life” (emphasis added)(V.i.f.39). Each time, then, Smith inserts a clause of attribution, to remind us who is to blame for our false impression today: our biased authorities. It is an accusatory stance, and one extended from his account of roads and canals in Book V. I am thinking in particular of his view of those who praise China’s central administration of roads and canals, in which he writes:

The high roads, and still more the navigable canals, *it is pretended*, exceed very much every thing of the same kind which is known in Europe. The accounts of those works, however, which have been transmitted to Europe, have generally been drawn up by weak and wondering travelers; frequently by stupid and lying missionaries. If they had been examined by more intelligent eyes, and if the accounts of them had been reported by more faithful witnesses, they would not, perhaps, appear to be so wonderful. (emphasis added) (V.i.d.17)

Smith’s method here, which he will apply at least twice more on the topic of education, is to reveal as quacks those trusted authorities who praise government projects.

Smith provides two more examples of getting it wrong regarding ancient education systems. Each additional example further demystifies the impression that wise intentions produced the results. In paragraph 44, he provides a lengthy account of the history of civil law in Greece and Rome. It constitutes the fifth set of data points of how ancient civilization handled education. Previously he explored military education, music and dancing, literacy and math, philosophy and rhetoric. Here he explores legal

education. In his account, Greece and Rome are juxtaposed. In Greece, cases were determined before a large body of judges. As a result any given judge felt no compulsion to protect his reputation and to temper his views; he was protected by the anonymity of being in a large mob of justices. Because of such behaviors, the law never became a respected science that one might study. On the other hand, in Rome often a single justice decided a case. Having to consider their reputations, such justices would “shelter themselves under the example, or precedent, of the judges who has sat before them” (V.i.f.44). As a result, less factious justice was served, and law became a respectable subject of study.

Smith’s ulterior motive comes through in the end. “The superiority of character in the Romans over that of the Greeks, *so much remarked by Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, was probably more owing to the better constitution of their courts of justice, than to any of the circumstances to which those authors ascribe it” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.44). The historians have misled us again – and again it was specifically Polybius, who was Montesquieu’s authority. Smith’s alternative interpretation is that the Romans did not enjoy superior character as an inherent trait; they merely had greater institutions, which then reliably encouraged better character. One can find a parallel to such a view of institutions in Book IV’s focus on mercantilism: “I mean not, however, by any thing which I have here said, to throw any odious imputation upon the general character of the servants of the East India company...It is the system of government, the situation in which they are placed, that I mean to censure; not the character of those who have acted in it. They acted as their situation naturally directed” (IV.vii.c. 107). Smith’s

interpretation shows the consistency of his purpose in the article. The article starts off with a criticism of the institution of endowments – a bad institution that has produced terrible quality and curriculum in modern Europe. Now, approaching the end of the article, he reiterates that institutions determine results. Passion, good intentions, and ambitious designs of legislators *do not* predictably produce intended results.

In the last example he writes, “The abilities, both civil and military, of the Greeks and Romans, will readily be allowed to have been, at least, equal to those of any modern nation. Our prejudice is perhaps rather to over rate them” (V.i.f.45). What have we overrated? Have we overrated their results? The statement is written, I suggest, to evoke the impression that we have indeed overrated the results. But, with some irony his answer is different. He continues, “But except in what related to military exercises, the state seems to have been at no pains to form those great abilities” (V.i.f.45). Therefore we have overrated how much those abilities were a product of legislators consciously attending to them. We give the ancient authorities too much credit for producing the results which were, in actually, not of their design.

I think with this last statement we see his thesis of this section of Smith’s article. His response to Montesquieu ought to read: the revered cradle of civilization had experienced wide access to education because government specifically avoided getting entangled with it. His description that follows regarding the natural recursive process of the market in education constitutes, then, what Smith feels is the proper interpretation of ancient civilization after we discount quackish authorities:

The demand for such instruction produced, what it always produces, the talent for giving it; and the emulation which an unrestrained competition never fails to excite, appears to have brought that talent to a very high degree of perfection. In the attention which the antient philosophers excited, *in the empire* which they acquired over the opinion's and principles of their auditors, in the faculty which they possessed of giving a certain tone and character to the conduct and conversations of those auditors they appear to have been much superior to any modern teachers. (emphasis added) (V.i.f.45)

In responding to Montesquieu, Smith engages in the task of disabusing us that accomplishments of ancient civilization be construed as the product of control and management. And to hammer home the point he ironically inverts the natural hierarchy of ranks; in this passage, the teachers in a free market end up becoming the legislators holding domination over consumers in a sort of “empire.” Smith’s treatment of Montesquieu is what Griswold would call “protreptic” (1999, p. 96-197; p. 58n39). That is, Smith makes a lesson out of Montesquieu. Rather than just dispute him, Smith trains us to recognize the patterns of our thinking and to judge better.

To wrap up his discussion before asking what we should do with the poor, Smith emphasizes his skepticism of government intervention, this time by ironizing two common mistaken beliefs about the goodness of the modern European education system. First, he writes, “Were there no publick institutions for education, no system, no science would be taught for which there was not some demand” (46). There are multiple negatives which, through the act of untangling, create the ironic impact. When rewriting

it without the artistry of negatives, it becomes clear that it is an ironic jab at public schools: Were there no endowed schools, only the sorts of instruction which would be demanded would be supplied. Smith verifies my interpretation in the next sentence, “A private teacher [as opposed to a public one] could never find his account in teaching... a science universally believed to be a mere useless and pedantick heap of sophistry and nonsense” (V.i.f.46). Endowments have been, in no uncertain terms, a terrible institution for modern Europe.³³

In case the irony was missed, Smith gives another example in the next paragraph, this time within the sphere of women’s education. “There are no public institutions for the education of women, and there is accordingly nothing useless, absurd, or fantastical in the common course of their education. They are taught what their parents or guardians judge is necessary or useful for them to learn; and they are taught nothing else” (V.i.f.47). What is a simple assertion in the first sentence is made ironic in the second: guardians, in their excessive control of their daughters, in their suppression of women, have ironically saved women from governmental education. The final sentence of the paragraph mocks his male reader, “It seldom happens that a man, in any part of his life, derives any convenience or advantage from some of the most laborious and troublesome parts of his education.” Men, who have supposedly benefited from endowed schools have actually achieved little.³⁴ It is such an account that Smith leaves us with when he asks if we ought

³³ At least one commentator has failed to untangle them, and interpreted this passage as an affirmation of some value of public schools. Citing the passage, Weinstein (2006) writes, “University education is of poor quality but the only option in many courses of study” (p. 110n64).

³⁴ Buchan (2006) fails to acknowledge the juxtaposition which produces the irony, and he criticizes Smith for being far too optimistic about the state of female education (p. 114).

to give any attention to the poor. It cannot be said he affirms the propriety of the nascent statist thinking in Britain.

Equivocation in the Article

Another major textual inconvenience is the equivocation that occurs in the “Conclusion of the Chapter.” Despite Smith summoning government to attend to education, his final thought on the subject is hard to rectify with the statist interpretation. He puts his thoughts into a two sentence paragraph, balanced in equipoise. Smith writes:

This expence of the institutions for education and religious instruction is likewise, no doubt, beneficial to the whole society, and may therefore, without injustice, be defrayed by the general contribution of the whole society. This expence, however, might perhaps with equal propriety, and even with some advantage, be defrayed altogether by those who receive the immediate benefit of such education and instruction, or by the voluntary contribution of those who think they have occasion for either the one or the other. (V.i.i.5)

This passage offers a concise and direct comparison of options. And in this rare formal moment of Smith interpreting Smith, we see nothing like advocacy or certainty. Instead, we see a highly equivocal statement, between government provision and the free market. Smith may be accepting that a government provision could be just. But the passage does not come across as a strong endorsement of justice, and it is not clear what he means by justice. Finally, government provision might be inferior by the measure of propriety – which again should cause us to wonder what he means by justice.

There is much to consider here. A few things seem clear up front though. First, it clearly is not a ringing endorsement of a policy. Second, if I may be light about it, the passage clearly is not clear. I will take a moment to reflect on three peculiarities of the passage and how they might characterize whatever endorsement there is: the lack of strength of his first clause, the uncertain use of the term justice, and the relationship between propriety and justice.

Regarding the strength of his endorsement of government, Smith has chosen to state that government schools may be pursued “without injustice” rather than to state that they are just. The double negative is cumbersome and provoking. By way of juxtaposition, he does not encumber the fee-system with a description of being “without disadvantage,” or “without impropriety.” With the use of the double negative, therefore, Smith seems to be making two points: government provision might rise above injustice, but the standard prediction is, or ought to be, that government intervention would not. These two points require the advocate of government provision to be on the defensive, and to make a strong case against the presumption of injustice. Smith has not done the job for the social reformer. The social reformer may need to make the case again (or better), and continue to make it over and over.

In which manner will government provision rise above injustice? In TMS Smith discusses three variants of justice: ‘commutative justice,’ distributive justice’ and what might be called “estimative justice” (TMS, VII.ii.I.10). Each way of speaking about justice has its own means of analyzing the situation, and each reveals why his endorsement of justice is not stronger. Commutative justice “consists in abstaining from

what is another's, and in doing voluntarily whatever we can with propriety be forced to do." Taxation might avoid an injustice if it meets two very high conditions. First, it must not violate one's property. Is this possible? Theoretically, almost. The existence of public benefits means that the person taxed might be remunerated in benefits equivalent to the tax. However, the arithmetic needed to measure benefits and the bureaucracy needed to apply taxes with such precision would likely be a worry of Smith's. There is dead weight loss of administration and there is the very probably case of inaccuracy. Such considerations would weigh against a standard of commutative justice. Commutative justice is precise "like the rules of grammar" for Smith, not "loose, vague and indeterminate" (TMS, III.6.11). Idealistic Pigouvian arithmetic, I think, is not in accordance with his definition of commutative justice.³⁵ I am wary of using commutative justice to read this passage or, if doing so, of qualifying it strongly with what is to come in the rest of the passage.

Another high standard that the policy would have to meet is that it would have to avoid violating individuals' "principle of motion." Using the analogy of a chess board, Smith writes, "In the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might choose to impress upon it" (TMS VII.ii.2.7). The very existence of charity shows there is already a principle of motion in society. Charity allows one to substitute time instead of

³⁵ Jeffrey Young (1997) writes of Smith's policy that there is "no indication that this requires anything more than a marginal infringement of natural liberty (to keep teachers' salaries low, for example)" (p. 200). But given the grammatical sense of commutative justice, even a marginal infringement would be a reason not to endorse education by way of commutative justice. If Smith were applying commutative justice, he would perhaps have written that government provision may be "without a *gross violation* of justice," rather than that it may be *altogether* "without injustice."

money, to have control over the precise use of the money, to be an ongoing judge of performance, and to contribute as one uniquely can. Taxation combined with government control would almost certainly violate such a motion. Such considerations also would likely prevent Smith from relying on commutative justice as a rationale for government provision.³⁶

What about distributive justice? Distributive justice is described as “the becoming use of what is our own, and in the applying it to those purposes either of charity or generosity, to which it is most suitable” (VII.ii.I.10). Such justice originates in the virtue of the person, and takes advantage of the unique capacities of the person. In a passage often cited as Smith’s rationale for advocating government funding, he writes:

The civil magistrate is entrusted with the power not only of preserving the public peace by restraining injustice, but of promoting the prosperity of the commonwealth, by establishing good discipline, and by discouraging every sort of vice and impropriety; he may prescribe rules, therefore, which not only prohibit mutual injuries among fellow-citizens [i.e. commutative justice], but command mutual good offices to a certain degree. (TMS II.ii.I.8).

Many directly allude to this passage (e.g. Weinstein 2013, p 197; D. Winch, 1978; J. Young 1997, p. 133; p. 198-199) or would seem to be inspired by this passage (C. Smith 2014, p. 266; Winch 2004, p. 118), seeing it as Smith’s permission slip for government to act outside of the strictures of commutative justice. The sovereign might

³⁶ James Otteson (2011) writes, “His concern arises from the questions of who is in the best position to judge for an individual what the best use of his resources are. Smith will answer that legislators, statesmen, or other distant third parties are typically not in good positions to make these determinations (p. 92).

have permission to coerce us to use our resources. Craig Smith calls the sphere of “police” as defined by the “desirability of the good” toward specifically “easing social life.” (2014, 266). And he finds that “urgent necessities” systematically validate such activities by government. Fredrick Eden in 1797 would write about government provision of education: “It is doing no more than every liberal-minded man delights to do...and differs from the voluntary benevolence of a solitary individual, chiefly by its being more efficient, from being combined with the like benevolent exertion of other benevolent men.” (Vol 1, p. 429). Eden is suggesting that the government is merely providing a smoother bureaucratic means for disparate individuals to use their personal resources. Eden would seem to argue from a distributive justice perspective.

However, Smith follows the passage above by writing that such an act by the legislature “requires the greatest delicacy and reserve to execute with propriety and judgment.” A consideration of the difficulty and rarity of delicacy likely weighs on Smith. And such considerations would weigh on his 18th century readers according to Donald Winch (1993), who writes that his readers were much more sensitive to the delicacy needed to avoid a “spirit of systems” (p. 87). Such actions by the legislature can lead to abuses. Distributive justice might be his rationale here, but it would serve for a very discerning and cautious discussion about government actions.

The third form of justice might more confidently explain the entirety of the passage – it absorbs the discussion of distributive justice into it and it makes sense of Smith’s comparative analysis. Estimative justice, which Smith finds to be conceptually the most extensive, is to be understood as follows: “to value any particular object with

that degree of esteem, or to pursue it with that degree of ardour which to the impartial spectator it may appear or deserve to be naturally fitted for exciting” (TMS II.ii.I.8). If government provision might avoid injustice, it would do so because the positive law is something the impartial spectator would approve of. That is, the impartial spectator may find the public and private benefits worthwhile, and in that way (and in only that way) we may say that government provision of education is just: it is worthy of the impartial spectator’s esteem. Such a claim of injustice does not absolve government provision of violations of justice, and does not set the groundwork for a generalizable rule for government action in the political sphere of distributive justice and imperfect rights. As a judgment of the impartial spectator, it would be a single judgment – one-off, time-sensitive, temporal, and highly conditioned.

The estimative justice choice for understanding this sentence may enjoy some advantage. It is a viable alternative to the rather implausible pretension that Smith is defending government provision as free of violations of liberty. It also renders more intelligible the rest of the passage and the article.

In terms of intelligibility, first, estimative justice, by its association with the judgment of the impartial spectator, is assessed in terms of *propriety*. When Smith, then, states in the second sentence that the free market “might perhaps” be equal to government in terms of propriety, he would be making a direct comparison between options along the same criteria of estimative-justice. A direct comparison is appealing because it points us back to the article – an article that does not address commutative justice – in search of what might determine propriety, and relative propriety. It suggests we align ourselves

with the impartial spectator, which is equivalent to suggesting we consider the issue with a view that is “acute and comprehensive.” And in doing so, there is much to be found in the article. In the next section, I will argue that Smith systematically, as his method of operation, provides material in the article by which to acutely and comprehensively judge of propriety on the issue of educational provision.

Second, estimative justice can explain the equivocal tone of the passage. Elsewhere Smith writes that the “rules of virtue,” which importantly reveal themselves only through estimate justice, will merely “present us with a *general idea* of the perfection we ought to aim at, rather than afford us any certain and infallible directions for acquiring it” (emphasis added) (III.6.11). Smith’s description of the product generated by the mechanism of estimative justice is, then, similar to how we might describe the current passage in the conclusion of the chapter: it too, as a product of contemplation and assessment, avoids giving any certain and infallible directions. As Samuels has suggested, there is no fixed solution in Smith’s article. It poses options against each other and has a tone of equivocation. The passage is “loose, vague, and indeterminate” as estimative judgments will be. It “concludes” that both the free market and government might be proper, but that the free market might be, perhaps, more proper. Such a statement sounds like highly qualified judgment contemplating many circumstance and conditions.

Some of those who have cited the passage in the “Conclusion of the Chapter” have expressed a much more qualified interpretation of Smith’s position resembling what I suggest. I have already cited West and Friedman interpreting Smith as conflicted

between justice and prudence. Others include Paul Mueller (2015), Jack High (1985), Charles Leathers and Patrick Raines (1992), and Dan Klein (see D. Henderson, 2010).

Furthermore, a couple of education historians also seem to particularly stress that Smith's concession as highly contingent. For example, Thomas Mackay (1898) writes that Smith "is opposed to endowment and favours the expense of education 'by those who receive the immediate benefit.' ...But failing this arrangement he seems further to agree...that there is no injustice in exacting the general contribution from the whole society" (emphasis added) (p. 33). And P.W. Musgrave (1968) writes, "He considered that state intervention might be necessary if private enterprise failed...Therefore, when by the early nineteenth century some voices demanded more education, there was *in the final resort a theoretical position* to which appeal could be made" (p. 8). While such statements approximate the market-failure rationale so prevalent in Smithian literature, they are still distinct in so far as they characterize the article as containing a highly contingent argument (maybe even just a theoretical one) rather than an advocacy. Smith was merely building a framework in which to contemplate options.

Most have not cited the passage in the "Conclusion of the Chapter." West (1977) laments this fact: "The penultimate paragraph of this long section on public works deserves more attention than it generally receives" (p. 16). Some who do attend to it only take note to the first part and overgeneralize it as advocacy (e.g. ver Eecke, 2013, p. 14). The passage, though, is a significant inconvenience for the statist interpretation. There is no pleading or urging for government to take the lead. The passage prompts us not to a

specific conclusion but rather to consider by which criteria the impartial spectator might judge.

Criteria of Propriety

Another inconvenience for the statist interpretation is that Smith systematically provides us with his criteria by which to judge of propriety. What should the criteria be? Efficacy? Cost efficiency? Quality of instruction? Utility of curriculum? Universality?

He is very direct at the beginning. He asks, “Have [endowments] contributed to encourage the diligence, and to improve the abilities of the teachers?” (V.i.f.3). By way of a psychological explanation of how endowments affect teacher performance, his answer is a definitive no. “Endowments...have diminished more or less the necessity of application” (V.i.f.5). Smith is not asking a limited question about universities, nor framing his answer as limited to universities. Universities are merely his most compelling example of corruption. Therefore, if wondering what the criteria are, Smith himself judges first according to the quality of instruction.

Smith’s decision to choose quality is not an unfamiliar one. It was very much in the spirit of the times, which saw a crisis in the education system for the upper and middle classes (e.g. Burgh, 1747; Brooke, 1766; Buchanan, 1770; Knox, 1781; Priestley, 1826). Similarly, his causal explanation is not entirely novel either. Endowments had been a subject of criticism throughout the century for various reasons. Turgot had offered a similar line of reasoning which prompted discussion among intellectuals (to be discussed). And criticism similar to Smith’s can be seen in the writing of, for instance, Thomas Sheridan:

It is certain, that we have no public Schools of Reputation in Ireland, notwithstanding there are many large Endowments; too large, indeed, which has probably been the Occasion of their Ruin. For the Professors of them, finding their Stipends sufficient to furnish them, not only with the Necessaries, but with all the Comforts of Life, have no Spur to their Industry, and naturally prefer a State of Ease and Tranquility. (1757, p10)

Similarly, Oliver Goldsmith (1759), writes, “All our magnificent endowments are erroneous... We seem to confer them with the same view, that statesmen have been known to grant employments in court, rather as bribes to silence, than incentives to emulation” (p. 87).

Smith, in short, establishes a familiar criteria of judging by results, not intentions. Such a criteria should, upon reaching the equivocation in the “Conclusion of the Chapter” inform our evaluation of options. Just or not, endowments may produce bad results.

There is a second question that is asked in the article. He allows what might be seen as an imagined interlocutor to enter the discussion. Vivienne Brown argues that Smith employs a dialogic structure at times in his corpus (1994). While Brown emphasizes the practice in TMS, Fleishacker (2004), in a section called “Obstacles to Reading Smith,” provides a demonstration of the practice in WN (p. 4-11). I feel a dialogue is very much present in the article. At the conclusion of his direct analysis of endowments, a short paragraph ensues comprising the following countering assertion. “The parts of education which are commonly taught in universities, *it may, perhaps, be said* are not very well taught. But had it not been for those institutions they would not

have been commonly taught at all, and both the individual and the publick would have suffered a good deal from the want of those important parts of education” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.18). Set off as short paragraph at the conclusion of his direct treatment of endowments, the sentence is the natural counterargument stemming from the notion that something is better than nothing. It would seem to be a natural passionate response to Smith’s highly damning assessment. It is also, likely, a preexisting one in actual public discourse. It will actually be the response John Stuart Mill has in 1833 to Turgot’s and Smith’s line of reasoning on endowments: “The wisest person is not safe from the liability to mistake for good the reverse of some inveterate and grievous ill” (1859, p. 24). In other words, Mill feels that abandoning faith in endowments is not a good, but a worse kind of bad.

The ensuing discussion is Smith’s response to his interlocutor. From paragraphs 19 to 37, Smith engages in a lengthy history of the philosophy of Europe – a history that appears to be digressive. But it ends at the half-way point of the article, which is a short paragraph of one sentence tying us back to the ongoing discussion. It reads: “Such have been the effects of some of the modern institutions for education” (V.i.f.37). The statement is ironically cool and composed – given the effects he has just described. And what were the effects? While previously he addressed quality, here he shows that the curriculum itself has been radically altered by the institution of endowments and privileges. The privileged influence of the church has contributed to the fact that “Metaphysicks or Pneumaticks were set in opposition to Physicks” which then led to the curricular development in which “the proper subject of experiment and observation, a

subject in which a careful attention is capable of making so many useful discoveries, was almost entirely neglected” (V.i.f.28). Instead of a useful science, there was a “cobweb science” of “subtleties and sophisms” (V.i.f.29). Emphasis was placed on happiness in the afterlife, thus leading the discipline of moral philosophy to become “by far the most corrupted” (V.i.f.30). Using usefulness as a measure, he then summarizes that “the greater part of what is taught in schools and universities...does not seem to be the most proper preparation for that [real business of the world]” (V.i.f.35). Therefore, that which is taught in a system marked by endowments may be of little worth.

But perhaps, as his interlocutor suggests, it is better than nothing. By Smith’s account of the rise of metaphysics and ontology in lieu of physics, one ought to be inclined to think that he would disagree with his interlocutor. These sciences might have done real damage by way of altering how morality is discussed and employed in social relationships and power politics. Endowments have also led to a chain of events which created the phenomenon of sending one’s kids abroad to receive a more useful education. And in sending children abroad, society did become worse for the wear. The children return “unprincipled, more dissipated, and more incapable of any serious application” (V.i.f.36). In other words, there has been damage done to the moral fabric and productive spirit of society. Smith’s answer to his interlocutor: Something is not better than nothing in this case; something may be worse than nothing.

As before, Smith expresses another familiar view of the effects of sending young men abroad. It is Sheridan again who writes:

It is not a fact that after the age of twenty of thereabouts, a gentleman, tho' ever so desirous to finish his education, cannot find the means of doing it in England?

And has not this reduced all parents, who wish to see their sons accomplish, to the necessity of sending them either to foreign academies, or to travel? Both which have been attended with the worst consequences. (1756, p. 29-30)

And the matter of travel abroad was also raised by Joseph Dennie and John Elihu Hall, editors of *The Port Folio* who write, "In those distant climes, their morals were unwatched, and their political principles corrupted" (1808, p. 172).

Smith, then, turns the mirror back to his interlocutor. The interlocutor ought to recognize the familiar problem of seeking out opportunities abroad, and of being pained by what becomes of his sons. The current debased education system, so much the subject of worry in his time, is a direct product of endowments. Smith is connecting the dots.

Smith answers his interlocutor. But he also answers his own question posed at the beginning of the article, which is again a broad statement encompassing all endowments: "Have [endowments] directed the course of education towards objects more useful, both to the individual and to the publick, than those to which it would naturally have gone of its own accord" (V.i.f.3)? Most certainly not. Therefore, the criteria he is applying in judging of institutions is the probability of achieving utility and efficacy, as would happen in a natural market, and of maintaining the moral fabric and productivity of society. Again, while his examples are set at the university level, his questions are broadly asked and generalizable.

To conclude, although the article is equivocal, we are given a strong sense of what is important for Smith. It is a voice that was common in society at the time in the discourse of Locke and others: utility, moral development, and social cohesion. His favorable posture toward the free market in the conclusion of the chapter ought to be understood as based on these criteria and examples.

Charity in his Final Thoughts

But the most important aspect of the passage for the present inquiry is not the seeming equivocation along a public-private debate. Rather, amidst the hedging there is a third option. The third option is another major inconvenience for the statist interpretation.

After voicing his option of the free market, he writes, “or by the voluntary contribution of those who think they have occasion for either the one or the other.” There is some ambiguity as to what he means, but historical perspective clarifies it. The phrase “voluntary contribution” ought *not* to be read as a rephrasing of the voluntary exchange of the free market happening in the second option. This phrase has a specific meaning in its time. Today we would call it “charitable donation” and very often a discretionary kind employed for a given “occasion.” Therefore, the phrase would read that education could be defrayed through the occasional and recurring donations of those who assess the matter on an ongoing basis, and who deem there are benefits to have education and instruction more prevalent in their community.

West (1994) and Mueller (2015) suggest that Smith was identifying charity in this passage.³⁷ West directly interprets the passage in the voice of Smith in a fictional interview in which he assumes Smith's identity:

I deliberated long and hard on this issue and my final position on it should be observed carefully...I always wanted the parents, even poor parents, to pay fees covering some significant part of the costs, and if there was to be some non-parent support, I recommended voluntary contributions from the immediate neighbors. This was not therefore an argument in favor of state education as so many writers tend to believe. (1994)

I believe West is correct. And it will be a preference for charity replicated by others even as more and more people begin to contemplate what the role of government ought to be at the end of the century. For instance, there is a sort of equivocation favoring charity in a memorial to Scottish parish schoolmasters from 1782 reprinted in Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland* in 1799. It reads, "If the attention *of the public first*, and then of the legislature, be turned to his subject, resources will not be wanting for...the parochial schoolmasters of Scotland" (emphasis added) (Sinclair 1799, vol, 21, p. 341). In other words, we should appeal to the public for voluntary assistance, and then to the government if there is insufficient benevolence. Such a configuration might approximate what Smith is stating.

I will now offer some historical citations that illuminate the meaning, connotation, and unique institutional implications of the phrase "voluntary contribution." Numerous

³⁷ And historian Green (2013) states that Smith and Malthus "had been early supporters of charity schooling" and, thus, of popular education (p. 241). However, he does not cite this passage.

references attest to the commonality and clarity of the phrase “voluntary contribution.” It even has a formal designation. Sinclair’s *The History of Public Revenue of the British Empire* (1785) identifies the term “voluntary contribution” as a subcategory by which public works could be funded. The other categories are: land tax, excise, customs, feudal prerogatives, wine license, public offices, crown lands, church lands, plunder, and extortions (p 127-136). *The Parliamentary Register: or history of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons* (1781) also uses the term to designate donations. “The voluntary contribution of men and money during the late war, and the offer of supplies of provision, during the present, to Admiral Barrington, who refused the donations...has invariably testified to that most grateful attachment and regard to this country” (p. 242). The queen used the term in her second patent to the SPCK, “We...did, upon the narrative of the charitable inclination of many of her subjects, for raising a voluntary contribution toward the further promoting of Christian knowledge...appoint, ordain and declare said Contributors to be a legal [charitable] society and corporation.”

Historians of the time regularly make reference to voluntary contributions as a source of funding through donations. Robert MacFarlane writes in *The History of the Second Ten Years of the Reign of George the Third* (1782), “The proposals for a general meeting or congress were again taken in consideration...500l. was voted for the use of the said committee, all which the governor refused to assent to; it was therefore necessary to raise the 500l. by voluntary contribution” (p. 160). And Thomas Ruggles in *The History of the Poor* (1793) describes it as an alternative to legally enforced poor rates, “Box clubs or friendly societies have been glanced at, and recommended, as tending to

diminish the poor rate;...their fund is created by voluntary contribution among the members of the club while in health, to support each other by a weekly allowance when diseased or disabled” (vol. 2, p. 223).

The term was frequently used in relationship to the funding of churches and clergy. In Francis Sullivan’s *Lectures on the Constitutions and Laws of England* (1776), the church is funded not through tithes, but through discretion: “Each retained his possessions, and gave a voluntary contribution out of it at his discretion” (V.i.g.1). Smith’s two other uses of the term in WN both appear connected to the funding of churches. Of the colonies, he writes, “Tithes [which are compelled] are unknown among them; and their clergy, who are far from being numerous, are maintained either by moderate stipends, or by voluntary contributions” (IV.viii.b.20). Second, of clergy, “The teachers of the doctrine...may either depend altogether for their subsistence upon voluntary contributions of their hearers, or they may derive it from some other funds from which the law of their country may entitle them” (V.i.g.1).

Voluntary contributions as a category of funding can be connected to many projects and purposes in these times. In *A New Display of the Beauties of England* (1782), the term is used to explain how the road to Watford was funded. And in William Orem’s *A Description of the Chanonry Cathedral and Kings College of Old Aberdeen* (1791) the new tollbooth was funded via this familiar source. And most frequently it appears related to charitable schools and in the maintenance of the poor. Several quotes provided in this dissertation contain the phrase. Thomas Gilbert writes in *A plan of police: exhibiting the cause of the present increase of the poor* (1786), “As by a more

regular and constant Employment...and a proper Application of the various Charities given to the Poor, they may be subsisted with more Credit and Comfort to themselves...by their Labour, and the Voluntary Contributions of benevolent Persons” (38-39).

A Google ngram of its usage suggests that the term peaked in published usage around 1793. The period in which it was a familiar term was in the age of benevolence, before the expansion of the state into social welfare spheres during the 19th century. Smith wrote when the term was familiar and precise in meaning.



Figure 1: Google ngram of "Voluntary Contribution(s)"

Smith, importantly, also uses the term in a rather didactic manner. He emphasizes that contributions may be done as *occasion* deems. By doing so he emphasizes the discretion associated with the term. Ruggles (1793) writes in the same manner, “He [is] averse to leaving the poor to be maintained by voluntary contribution, or *accidental*

charity only; because they, having now for two hundred years, been maintained by a regular system of laws, enforcing contribution, thousand would perish” (emphasis added) (v1, p. 228). Bishop Bielby Porteus (1776) emphasizes the discretion as well: “As to the other two humane societies...these, I say, are entirely supported by voluntary contributions and subscriptions” (p. 20). There are two sorts of donations in Porteus’ account: voluntary contribution is treated as that which happens without prediction or any sense of promise or certainty; subscriptions are a committed form of recurring voluntary contributions. The SPCK describes “voluntary contribution” as “casual Benefaction,” and they tracked it separately from subscriptions (Hayter 1756, p. 6).

Although the term “subscription” was available to Smith, as was “donation,” Smith appears to exploit the discretionary connotation of the term “voluntary contribution,” even adding the word “occasion” to the phrase. I suggest here that he is doing so to draw a parallel between the act of voluntary donating, and the act of voluntary consumption or exchange. The parallel, which will be augmented with additional historical information in the next section, is that both are an act of discretion existing in the moment. Both are an act sensitive to ongoing conditions, and attuned to the merit of the project.

Voluntary contribution is the only non-market institution to aid the poor that Smith is elevating to a high position of propriety in the conclusion of the chapter. And in doing so, he makes a profound assertion into a species of politics that is mostly lost to us, and which juxtaposes his preferred solution against the endowments which he has been criticizing. In the next section I explain.

Endowments versus Charities

Britain had a long tradition of donations into an institution called an endowment, which must be distinguished from the option he wishes to elevate here to propriety. Endowments had been the prime subject of his criticism throughout much of the article. And they were also subject to great public criticism dating back over a century (Mackay, 1898). In the mid-18th century they had become the subject of a new kind of scrutiny owing to the politics of property and estates, and owing to Turgot. And while today they might both be understood as acts of charity, they were perceived among many to be fundamentally different institutions with different effects. There is an important issue regarding how they are structured, replenished, and operated as a funding mechanism.

For Smith, endowments are foremost to be understood as a certain funding structure. Smith writes that endowments arise from “local or provincial revenue, from the rent of some landed estate, or from the interest of a sum of money allotted and put under the management of trustees for this particular purpose, sometimes by the sovereign himself, and sometimes by some private donor” (V.i.f.2). He is saying that there are many initial sources of funds for endowments, and these sources match nicely to different kinds of schools. Endowed schools included Scottish parish (state) schools, which had been funded by local revenue and enforced by law; grammar schools established through endowments that had been set up by long-deceased rich benefactors usually for the benefit of middle and upper class citizens; grammar schools and universities set up by prior or current royalty using non-taxpayer funds; and parish schools managed off of the rent of seized estates of Scottish Jacobites. It is all of these endowed schools that Smith

criticizes when he describes the corruption of quality that occurs because schools have a stable fund from which to pay salaries to teachers. While such schools are both governmentally and privately funded, what they have in common is the specific nature of their funding and the corrupted characteristics they display. The nature of the funding is that they are not growing by means of ongoing voluntary contributions. They have somewhat of a static quality to their funding. While they may grow with additional legacies and wills, they are not being funded by weekly, monthly contributions by a discerning audience of small donors.

And what is the problem with such a method of funding? Historian Thomas Mackey in *State and Charity* (1898) attributes Smith's views on endowments to the "new revolutionary spirit of inquiry" into endowments caused by Turgot's contribution, "Fondations," in the 1757 *Encyclopedie* (p. 31). Smith and Turgot were received throughout the first half of the 19th century (e.g. by Chalmers and J.S. Mill) as kindred spirits by their politics regarding endowments. By Mackey's account, they saw the problems of endowments as analogue to those stemming from primogeniture, entails and engrossments as discussed by Smith at length in WN Book III.³⁸ Such endowments were often set up by the will and testament of a donor, and they tied up – either benevolently or mischievously – lands and money for specific causes and with exact uses. Turgot suggests they tend toward becoming "injurious." The problem with endowments, Mackay writes in paraphrasing Turgot, is that "however benevolent the wishes of the founder may have been, it is impossible to secure the like zeal and public spirit in the administration of

³⁸ See Bogart and Richardson (2009) for evidence of the significance of these topics in Smith's time.

his bequest. Also, the nature of the times and the value of money change” (Mackay 1898, p. 30). An endowment would eventually become insensitive to the times, to the changing needs of the subjects, and would often become managed poorly by those who had little inclination to their purpose. Jones (1938) also identified corruption of management to be linked to this form of institution (p. 54-55).

John Stuart Mill, writing in an 1833 essay in the *Jurist*, makes the same historical analysis (though disputing that the problem is inherent to endowments). “The evils existed...because those foundations were perpetuities, and because provision was not made for their continual modification, to meet the wants of each successive age” (1859, p. 27). Mill explains that such a negative view was “common to all the philosophers of his time (1859, p. 25).

Mackay (1898) continues by explaining that charities run by voluntary contributions are *not* subject to the same criticism: “In the argument of Turgot there is of course no condemnation of voluntary charity, so long as it is kept in control of the living generation...The spontaneous act of the living is, he seems to argue, the best guarantee we can have for a wise exercise of the spirit of benevolence” (p. 31). For Turgot, the discretionary nature of voluntary contributions overcomes the characteristic of the endowments that made them so worthy of condemnation. The living would be able to judge and respond to quality in a daily basis.

Jones (1938) describes the relationship between living voluntary contributors and schools in a way that comports with Turgot’s views. “Their contributions fluctuated with their approval or disapproval of the way in which the school was conducted and its funds

administered” (p. 52). The judgment of contributors established ‘standards of rectitude’ (p. 52). She cites one school as complaining “Everyone who gave us 2*d* would think he had the right to make what reflections he thought proper” (p. 52),

In Smith’s “Conclusion of the Chapter,” therefore, I suggest he draws a parallel between judicious payments in the non-market to judicious decisions by consumers. The advantage of voluntary contributions is that contributors act in a similar manner of exercising consumer discretion when donating. In charity systems, the funding stream will hinge closely on the merit of the teachers and thus act as a check against the laziness and indiscretion common when teachers are ensured of fixed salaries.

Here, then, Smith has achieved several ends. First, he has elevated charity to a possible position of higher propriety than government. Second, he has given charities some characteristics of the free market. That is, charity coffers fluctuate based on local sentiments and judgments of them. Third, he has lifted them out of the torpor which characterizes endowments. The last point is also an ironic one. “Ostentatious donations” (Bygrave 2010, p. 86) had produced a useless education system for the middle and upper class; humble and anonymous ones for those least appreciated had positive effects. Charities represent a new promising moral order, one made possible by the increasing wealth of the middle class, resting on and exercising natural benevolence, and being applied through the social judgment that is so important to his theory of moral sentiments. As he writes in TMS, “[Beneficence] is the ornament which embellishes” (II.ii.3.4). It renders society more “comfortable” (II.ii.3.3), and when it stems “from love,

from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem [as opposed to coercion, one might say], the society flourishes and is happy” (II.ii.3.1).

The pattern of juxtaposing endowments to charities occurs well beyond Smith’s time. A very immediate example in Priestley would seem to add credence to my interpretation. Citing Turgot, Priestley reaches a similar conclusion about the living and dynamic quality of charities. In his lectures published in 1888 he writes:

When the revenues are left to trustees, they will, directly or indirectly, find a benefit to themselves, or their friends, in the trust; and so many persons will become interested in the continuance of it, that, let the abuse of property be ever so great, a powerful interest will be formed against any reformation; such institutions may do much harm, before it be discovered that it they do no good. In most cases it would certainly be much better to provide *temporary* remedies for inconveniences, such as the relief of the poor, and the maintenance of places of education, &c. If [the poor] are supported by the *voluntary contributions of the living*, they will be properly superintended, and they will not be continued longer than they will be found to be useful. (emphasis added) (1826, p. 303-304)

Priestley demonstrates all three aspects of Smith’s conclusion which I have highlighted. Namely, endowments have a set of fixed interests unrelated to utility. Second, a form of charity exists that is temporary instead of fixed in nature and judged by living, discriminating voluntary contributors. Third, charities run by voluntary contributions are distinct and superior to those run by endowments.

Reverend Samuel Parr in a 1780 sermon also seeks to distinguish charities from endowments. He characterizes charity schools as having a local knowledge, having a flexible structure, and operating with a keen sense of utility. He writes that the charities are funded through “the opinion of men, who, from local circumstances, have a large and correct view of the business they undertake” (p. 187). For Parr, charities have a spirit and quality that cannot be replicated in another form of management. And elsewhere he writes:

Accommodating...our measures to the different exigencies of different times and places, we [today] are at liberty to employ many expedients, which, in the distant and general view of the legislator, would be imperfectly provided for; and we avoid many inconveniences by which education would certainly be cramped, in consequence of rules indiscriminately prescribed and compulsorily enforced.

(1828, vol 2, p.183)

And how, specifically, do charity schools compare to the highly criticized “endowment”? Summoning Smith, Parr writes that there is “some consolation to us, that the objections [Smith] makes to the imperfect and unprofitable education of males, do not reach to our own plan for the instruction of these boys” (1828, p. 259). There are several noteworthy points to this passage. First, he too distinguishes charities from the much maligned endowments. But he does so in a different manner from Priestley. Parr suggests he would be pleased if charity schools would manage to obtain a permanent, stable, and independent sum of money – so long as the same people are involved and the tradition of local interest and management persists (p. 275-276). His distinction rests, then, not on

dynamic versus status quality of funds, but solely on the spirit of those who manage it. Second, it is noteworthy that Smith is Parr's reference when it comes to acknowledging the presence of a public criticism of endowments (1828, p. 259).³⁹

Finally, in 1819 Henry Bellenden Ker provides another example. Ker was an “energetic, innovative” lawyer engaged in efforts to reform corporate and criminal law. His work led to the acceptance of limited liability companies in the middle of the 19th century (Cornish and Cairns, 2004). In his work, *A Vindication of the Enquiry into Charitable Abuses (1819)* Ker engages in the political topic of endowments. From the title, it is apparent that the complaints of schools were being broadly applied, and had “subsumed” charity schools into an omnibus term “charity”. The term “charity” was often used as an “omnibus” term, sowing some confusion (Jones 1938, p.19). Ker, therefore, proceeds to categorize the schools between old endowments for the middle and upper classes, and charity schools for the poor. He then specifically criticizes just the endowments that served the middle and upper class. Part of their problem is their opulence, and the pride of the rich who meddle with them for their own vainglory (p. 110). But it is also their by-laws: “The absurdities of their rules and statutes inconsistent with the change of habits and opinions, have rendered the intentions of the founders absolutely effete, and their objects are unattainable in practice” (p. 110). Therefore, Kerr indicts the legal framework and the character of the donors for corruption. The effect on teacher performance is as one would expect and is consistent with Smith: “The instructor

³⁹ And third, it is unclear from his text whether Parr thinks Smith intended to criticize all third-party funded schools – to include charity schools – or just the traditional endowments. The immediate text either implies that Parr thinks Smith overstated his case, or that he indicted charity schools.

who receives the emoluments of his office, is well pleased it should be enjoyed without the counterpoising evils of trouble and fatigue” (1819, p. 109).

Ker’s solution is exceptionally revealing of the perceived superiority of charity schools from some at the time. His solution is to centrally control these disparate endowments which have had insufficient oversight, and to bring them under the administrative structure of the charity societies that had operated effectively under the mode of subscription charity. He writes:

[Many of these endowed schools], entirely useless in their present state, might be vested, without interfering with any great principle of justice or right of property, as a sinking fund...They might be rendered subservient to the purposes of the societies for the Education of the Poor, subsisting by *voluntary subscriptions*; the wisest and most effective mode of conferring benefits on mankind ever contrived by the united force of policy, benevolence, and religion. (emphasis added) (1816, p. 110)

In the long-running criticism of endowments, charity schools had emerged as a new and respectable form of third-party intervention. Smith was espousing a familiar faith in charities to overcome the corruption and ineptitude associated with endowments in the politics of his age. There is perhaps reason to believe that the slightness in which he treats charities is due to the implicit awareness of how the charity school movement had in the course of the century altered Britain dramatically for the better.

Charity at the Heart of his Proposal

Charity makes an appearance not only in the “Conclusion of the Chapter” but also in the very heart of his proposal for addressing the problems of the poor. As a further inconvenience for the statist interpretation, I suggest that his proposal of paragraph 55 (understood to be his proposal for government) is *also* more open-ended than generally believed, and is inclusive of charity. It embraces rather than dismisses charity. It sets up an equipoise similar to that in the conclusion.

Leading up to his proposal in paragraph 55, Smith summons government numerous times to “attend” to the topic education, and to “take pains” toward the topic. The summons are very vague, and thus paragraphs 55-57 would seem to be the clarification of the precise actions. He writes:

The publick can facilitate this acquisition by establishing in every parish or district a little school, where children may be taught for a reward so moderate that even a common labourer may afford it; the master being partly, but not wholly, paid by the publick, because, if he was wholly, or even principally, paid by it, he would soon learn to neglect his business. In Scotland the establishment of such parish schools has taught almost the whole common people to read, and a very great proportion of them to write and account. In England the establishment of charity schools has had an effect of the same kind, though not so universally, because the establishment is not so universal. (V.i.f.55)

In paragraph 56 and 57, Smith then offers two more items of action. In paragraph 56, we learn “the publick can encourage the acquisition of those most essential parts of education by giving small premiums, and little badges of distinction, to children of the

common people who excel in them.” In other words, Smith identifies small rewards as suited to the objective of encouragement.

And in paragraph 57, he identifies a third item – a formal test or demonstration of these elementary skills in order to obtain a license to conduct business.

The publick can impose upon almost the whole body of the people the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education, by obliging every man to undergo an examination or probation in them before he can obtain the freedom in any corporation, or be allowed to set up any trade either in a village or town corporate. (V.i.f.57)

I will focus specifically on paragraph 55, which is the one that speaks to a large amount of funding, and which I believe offers the fullest discussion of the inconveniences of his text. As for paragraph 56, I don't believe he specifically identifies government as the provider of badges of encouragement and small prizes. But the issue is minimal, and is analogue to what I will say about paragraph 56.⁴⁰ And as for paragraph 57, I concede it to be likely that Smith is describing a governmental interference in the market. Although private individuals operating through a chamber of commerce might pressure artisans and laborers to pass tests to obtain private certification, the language in this paragraph has the tenor of indicating an agent of government – specifically the phrase “village or town *corporate*.” Moreover, in the next article, he identifies a parallel probation requirement for higher ranks to hold government posts (V.i.g.14). As a

⁴⁰ It should be noted that badges and prizes were a common incentive employed in the charity schools.

negative reinforcement to obtain these essential parts of education, Smith may be willing to modify his resistance to laws that traditionally hinder labor mobility.

As for paragraph 55, it is common to assert that this passage constitutes his advocacy for government provision because it describes the Scottish system.⁴¹ The Scottish system – at least the legislated one – was funded through local taxation on landowners in accordance with the 1696 act. It was also known as the parish system. Smith writes that the Scottish model would be representative of “such parish schools” that he has in mind. Therefore, I concur that this partial government funding option is on the table as representative of what the public can do to ensure a school is established “in every parish.” If operated well – one could say *despite* endowments – the parish school might be both just and proper.⁴²

But there are two great inconveniences for the definitiveness of the statist interpretation in this proposal: textual vagueness, as well as a cool equipoise. As for vagueness, when he lays out this detailed plan of a school in each parish, he does not identify the agent as government. He identifies it as “the public.” The few who have noted this switch in agent would seem to have assumed that Smith intends the public to act through its parliamentary role in the creation of legislation – namely, supporting the bill and acquiescing to its imposition (Berry 1997, p. 145; also Hyard 2007, p. 86). A survey of the frequent use of term “the public” in Smith’s corpus demonstrates, though,

⁴¹ Those that specifically feel it worthwhile to mention that Smith models his agenda after the Scottish system include Fay (1930, p. 31); Ross (1984, p. 183); Himmelfarb (1983, p. 58); Muller (1993, p. 151); Buchan (2006, p. 113); A. Skinner (1996, p. 193); R.D. Anderson (1995, p. 27); Rasmussen (2008, p. 110).

⁴² Griswold (1999) writes that some action may be taken “as long of course, as the means chosen are carefully thought through” (p. 254).

that it is most frequently employed – even quite didactically – to include or even principally mean private agents working either intentionally through direct coordination or unintentionally through concatenation to positive ends.⁴³ I am not suggesting he distinctly uses it in the private sense here. It is more probable that he employs it to take advantage of its ambiguity. The public can naturally solve problems via government or via private solutions. The benefit of naming an agent with indeterminate actions can be understood when we note the equipoise.

In regards to the equipoise, after describing the parish system of Scotland, he immediately discusses England as relying on charity schools which have “had an effect of the same kind.” Here is the equipoise: Smith does not dismiss charity as an option; we are told only that it is the English way, that it has had “an effect of the same kinds,” and that it is distinguished from the parish schools merely by being “not so universal.”

Should we infer that charity, being “not so universal,” must be discarded? Can it be that Smith’s criteria for judging propriety – despite his emphasis on other criteria in the article – is now to be solely universality? Many scholars have felt that Smith’s goal is universal access.⁴⁴ If so, there is no equipoise. Charity loses by the imperfection of benevolence. Fay (1930) would be correct that “he extols the parish schools of Scotland, and gives honorable mention to the charity schools of England” (p. 32). But we should consider three aspects of the passage before we conclude that Smith ranks the options as

⁴³ I admit that one of the few exceptions likely stands just two paragraphs away (V.i.f.57).

⁴⁴ Those who overtly subscribe to universalism as the goal include Rothschild (1998, p. 211), Ross (1984, p. 183), Muller (1993, p. 151), Freeman (1969, p. 183) and (Pack 1991, p. 143). Rothschild (1998) writes, “The desired outcome is clear. It is that everyone, without exception, should be more instructed, and that no one should be in the grip of ‘gross ignorance and stupidity’” (p. 210).

Fay suggests: that which Smith states of universality, the tone of the passage, and also as the necessities of the art of persuasion.

Regarding universality, Smith's own stated goal is something less than universality; he identifies the target group for his proposal only as, "*almost* the whole body of the people" and the "*greater part* even of those who are to be bred to the lowest occupation" (emphasis added) (V.i.f.54). He is tending toward an all-encompassing group, and it may be true to state that more is better. But it may not be better at all cost and Smith seems to pragmatically accept here that there will always be a *lesser part* not provided for. There does not seem to be a perfectionism or universalism in this statement.

Regarding tone, there is indeed a certain indifference, a coolness when the options of parish schools and charity schools are brought side by side. I think this cool tone is crucial. It is the same kind of coolness we see when he places them together in the "Conclusion of the Chapter" paragraph. Although Smith has applied considerable heat to his portrayal of the problem and benefits, and has been called out by many as exaggerating, he turns toward coolness when presenting options.⁴⁵ Jones (1938) finds that the two options could stand side by side, and states that Smith recognizes "the numerical strength and wide extent of the charity schools in the third quarter of the century" (p. 26). The passage shows how "balanced and informed" he was (Jones 1938, p. 26). The passage does have a tone of balance.

Regarding the art of persuasion, Smith provides little reason to think he is parting ways with the tradition of charity. With charity as a known viable option (and for many

⁴⁵ For example, West (1964a), Kennedy (2005), Muller (1993) believe Smith exaggerated for effect.

as the current paradigm for the poor), a stronger emphasis would likely need to be placed on the Scottish parish system in order to identify it as the winner. Smith's assessment that charity is "not so universal" need not be seen as a criticism but could instead be seen as a prompting to make it more so. What is clearly missing are specific rationale for abandoning the tradition of charity.

Therefore, I suggest, that in an era of two systems accomplishing nearly the same effect, we should probably note the neutrality and cool tone of the two options placed side by side. They likely would convey that parish and charity represent the two known ways to "establish a school in every parish." I am not suggesting that Smith is being coy, only that he had no intention to dismiss charity, and that how he wrote this passage would have naturally communicated to his audience that he was considering both options. As Steven Medema and Warren Samuels (2009) write, "Smith [in general] was writing for a particular audience who, he could expect, took with him certain things...for granted, and likely did so about public, or legal, institutions" (p. 305). I suggest that the terseness of the treatment here is a result of the obviousness of charity as an option, even if "not so universal."

But how can my interpretation of paragraph 55 as being equivocal coexist with paragraph 57 (regarding tests and probation), which more clearly seems to suggest that government is the agent? Following the lead of West, I feel there is room to treat the question of government agency as separable. West believes that the three paragraphs can be viewed as separate proposals (online, p. 9). West does not substantiate his interpretation, but there are qualities of the paragraphs that are suggestive. Most

specifically, we should note their lack of prescriptive language. In each case Smith refrains from using the modals of “should,” “ought” or “must.” He merely tells us what the public “can” do. Again, this is a point that has flown under the radar. Therefore, the three passages have a certain indifference (or equivocation amongst them), like items of a menu. Smith appears to merely be identifying tools that are available to the public, rather prescribing them. As such, when we consider that what is important for Smith is measurable educational *results*, such results might be met by employing a single tool or a combination of tools, as situations permit. Compared to such an interpretation, it takes greater leaps of inference to think that Smith is prescribing anything, let alone prescribing the application of all three tools in combination.

The common interpretation, to review, has been to read that Smith summons government with the word ‘attend.’ And it has been common then to read paragraph 55 as providing the details of what constitutes the direct action implied by attention. But the common interpretation applies a chain of logic relying on a selective linguistic inferences: attend means direct action; the public means government; can means should. I, on the other hand, have pointed to the vagueness of the word “attend.” He is consistent in restraining himself to the term throughout the article. I don’t believe there is any trickery here; the term is merely an envelope in which the details of the plan will be presented. Once we open the envelope we find the agent named is “the public” which can operate legislatively or privately through charity.

Depicting Equivocation

At this point, I believe there is some plausibility that Smith appreciates the option of charity. But one of the questions that remains is that if Smith appreciated charity, why does he not commit to it? Similarly, if Smith regularly insists in the propriety of the free-market in WN, why does he still hedge in regards to its superior propriety in education? I believe we have an answer in Smith's disciplined acknowledgment of variability throughout the article. Smith's method has not been to condemn particular forms of schools, but to condemn the causal mechanisms of quality – mechanisms he identifies as the institutions of endowments and privileges. Such institutions occur in variable degrees in different school forms. And the variance, richly treated, in the article causes problems for policy decision.

In a key statement regarding endowments, he demonstrates two kinds of variability: “In every profession, the exertion of *the greater part* of those who exercise it, is always *in proportion to* the necessity they are under of making that exertion” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.4). The phrase “in proportion to” references the negative correlation between endowments and school quality. The correlation is the systematic and thus the *predictable* variability. It is the variability that one can fit into a correlation. In addition, the phrase “the greater part” acknowledges that there is a lesser part that does not fit this correlation. Such variance is the unpredictable variance – that which his theory of endowments cannot explain.

There are examples of Smith acknowledging predictable variance throughout his depiction of endowments. Although he is brutally critical of universities, he writes that amongst them, there is variance related to their variable reliance upon endowments. “This

course of philosophy is what still continues to be taught in the greater part of universities in Europe; with *more or less* diligence, according as the constitutions of each particular university happens to render diligence more or less necessary” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.33). And throughout the educational sphere, there is variance: “In modern times, the diligence of publick teachers is *more or less* corrupted by the circumstances, which render them *more or less* independent of their success and reputation in their particular professions” (V.i.f.45)⁴⁶

He also distinguishes universities from elementary (primary) and grammar schools by the logic of his variable causal mechanisms. In paragraph 17, he writes:

In England the publick schools are much less corrupted than the universities...

The reward of the schoolmaster in most cases depends principally, in some cases almost entirely, upon the fees or honoraries of his scholars. Schools have no exclusive privileges. In order to obtain the honours of graduation, it is not necessary that a person should bring a certificate of his having studied a certain number of years at a public school. If upon examination he appears to understand what is taught there, no questions are asked about the place where he learnt it.

(V.i.f.17)

The causal variable that distinguish public elementary and grammar schools from universities are the same he addresses throughout: the degree of reliance on fees or honoraries, and the privileges of certification authority. Public elementary and secondary schools do not rely as extensively on these factors for their maintenance. Therein, they

⁴⁶ Smith uses the phrase “more or less” five times in his analysis of endowments.

may not be as corrupt. Furthermore, at the far end of this range, just outside public schools, he places typical private schools – those schools fully funded by fees. In the end of paragraph 16, he writes. “The three most essential parts of literacy education, to read, write, and account, it still continues to be *more common* to acquire in private than in publick schools” (emphasis added). He continues, “It very seldom happened that any body fails of acquiring them to the degree in which it is necessary to acquire them” (V.i.f.16). Therefore, paragraphs 16 and 17 are an acknowledgement of the predictable variability of his causal mechanism across the whole range of schools from endowed universities to public schools to completely fee-based schools.⁴⁷

Smith also acknowledges unpredictable variance throughout his analysis. He writes, “*In general*, the richest best endowed universities have been the slowest in adopting those improvements [in the branches of philosopher]” (emphasis added) (V.i.f.34). In other words, that which Smith asserts can only be generally applied to universities. And in numerous other places, he explains that there is variability based on the variable behavior and character of teachers. He describes teachers as being driven by the same human impulse as all other professions, that is to “live as much at his ease as he can” (V.i.f.7). However, he acknowledges the imperfection of that base human impulse throughout. In paragraph 14 he introduces the “a man of sense” to acknowledge variability. And in paragraph 6 he discusses how reputation still is of “some importance” and that there are teachers of “some decency.” Throughout, there are plenty of examples

⁴⁷ It is important to note that Smith uses the term “public schools” in the familiar manner of his time, and this manner is different than current usage. See Appendix II for a further discussion and evidence of usage at the time – as well as an example of how misinterpreting the term influenced an early French translation.

of Smith hedging his language in the manner that Henderson (2006) discusses to be a common tool of his empiricism (p. 92-108). Qualifying or softening terms such as “seldom,” “frequent,” “sometimes,” and “the greater part” are frequently attached to his assertions in the article, acknowledging therein the imperfection of his causal mechanism in controlling human behavior. Endowments allow us to predict tendencies only.

Skinner (1995) infers variability in the chapter based on Smith’s corpus. Skinner finds Smith’s portrayal of teachers as perplexing “when we consider the emphasis which Smith gave to the point that all our actions are subject to the scrutiny of our fellows, together with the stress which he placed (in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) on our natural desire not just to be praised, but to be *praiseworthy*” (p.90-91). Aware of this other attribute of human nature, Skinner interprets the generally severe portrayal of teachers in the following way: “Smith believed that the diligence of the teacher can be *relied* on only where the stated efficiency criteria are met” (p. 91). In other words, one might get quality from an endowed school, but a fee-system will improve reliability of performance. For Skinner, Smith is merely attempting “to be logically rigorous” (p. 91), not absolute. Therefore, the irregular occurrence of virtue among agents might save particular endowed schools from the worst of the possible corruption. J.S. Mill (to be discussed) will make this point in defense of endowments in 1833 (1859, p. 25-30).

Private schools and charity schools have variability as well. Private schools are not immune from deceptive teacher behaviors. Smith writes of private schools:

If [children] are not properly educated, it is seldom from the want of expence laid upon their education; but from the improper application of that expence. It is

seldom from the want of masters; but from the negligence and incapacity of the masters who are to be had, and from the difficulty, or rather from the impossibility which there is, in the present state of things, of finding any better. (V.i.f.52)

The difference between the potential corruption seen in private schools and endowed schools, is that corruption is not systematic in private schools. It is product of the irregular occurrences of vice and ignorance, or a product of other institutions in society. Again, Smith's theory only predicts the *tendency* of private teachers toward quality. Any given school may be corrupted.

Charity schools, we might infer, would similarly suffer from such variability of human nature. Charity schools are just a loose approximation of the free market. Their quality would vary depending upon the ability of "voluntary contributions" to play the previously-defined judicious role which approximates the disciplining effects of consumers in the free market. As such, the success of charities depends very much of the persistent attentiveness of contributors, and the choices contributors make for curriculum and objectives and the information they have available regarding the school. Charity schools, by such logic, are an uncertainty. They may have a good track record, but they also ought to be seen as unstable – dependent upon continuing interest, ongoing funding, good intentions, and effective oversight. Therefore, charity schools are variously effective.

Between predicable variance, and unpredictable variance, we can understand Smith's equivocation when he has to speak of specific school forms in a policy

discussion. His equivocation can be said to be the product of the *overlapping ranges* of possible performance among the three options.

Figure 2 depicts what these overlapping ranges of school quality might look like. The figure is meant only to capture a notion, and not to claim precision. The figure shows a series of frequency distributions along a horizontal axis of propriety. I recognize that importing a mathematical language may do some violence to the philosophy it tries to explain, however, I believe that such statistical distributions are a useful way to portray uncertainty – which is what I am claiming is key to understanding his equivocation. The hump shows the modal or most likely performance result. The tails show the lesser probability that better or worse results might occur. The shape may show a neutrality around the modal prediction, or its shape may be skewed depending on the degree of prejudice we ought to lay into our predictions.

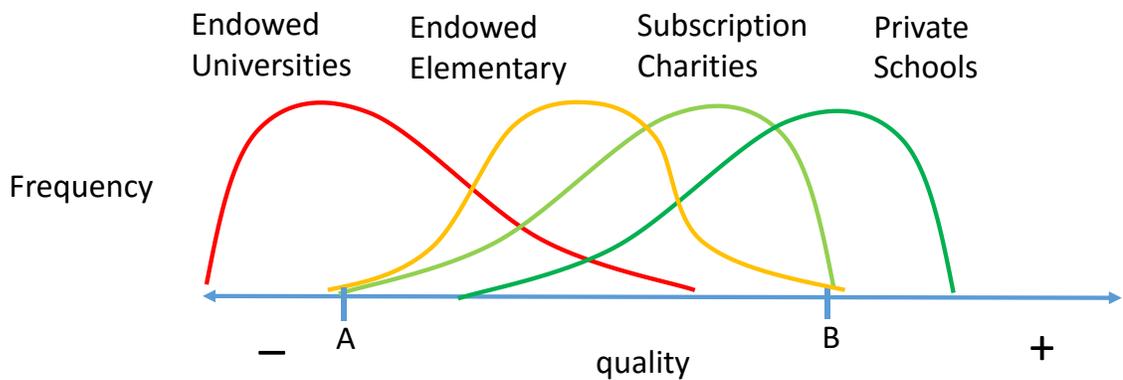


Figure 2: Depiction of Equivocation between Options

The distribution located in the most negative place in terms of quality and usefulness is that of endowed colleges and universities. He has been most critical of

them. They are negatively correlated to the size of their endowments and to their access to privileges, thus creating a range. As for the skew in their distribution, it is meant to show the particular negative posture that Smith seems to show toward them.

The partially-endowed elementary and grammar schools (to include “parish schools”) may be placed further toward quality, with their distribution tail extending well into quality. The shift to the right is based on paragraph 17, which distinguishes them as a class from universities. The important distinction is their lesser reliance on endowments and their lack of certification privilege. In addition, the simplicity of their curriculum might also account for their greater success. The removal of the skew is due to his awareness that they have historically achieved literacy. They venture into propriety and into his contemplation as a viable alternative.

Charity schools need to explain Smith’s equivocation about them. Therefore their distribution overlaps with the parish system. I have withheld shifting the distribution of the charity system in the portrayal, and instead have merely changed its shape, to show its hump occurring in the zone of greater propriety. The part above the parish system distribution represents the “advantage” they might have relative to the parish system. Private schools distribution would have the same positive skew, but their distribution would also be shifted further to the right, based on his overall positive view of markets, and because they are the model that charity schools merely approximate with their third-party donor adjudication process. They remain the ideal.

Therefore, we have here a series of overlapping frequency distributions. The end result is a picture of uncertainty in the range from A to B. That is, there is a range of

school quality in which all three school options may exist. Although the details of the figure can be disputed, I believe it captures the predictable tendencies of his causal analysis, as well as the dilemma that human and institutional variability causes for trying to determine policy.

Attention of Government

Another remaining question is: what can Smith possibly intend or imagine government actually doing by “attending” to education, if not providing for it? A few have noted a problem here in Smith’s language. Cropsey (2001) complains that “Smith can say no more than ‘it would require the most serious attention of government’” (p. 106). Gavin Kennedy (2005) writes, “He is unspecific as to what should be the outcome of the ‘most serious attention of government’” (p. 228).

In Figure 3, a Google ngram of the phrase “attention of government” shows that it surges dramatically in popularity starting in 1761, and peaked in popularity within published works the very year that Smith published WN. It appears to have been a fashionable turn of phrase. And it does not imply much.



Figure 3: Google ngram of "Attention of Government"

A review of uses in that time demonstrates that the phrase was used in relationship to a wide range of activities. For instance, it was used in relationship to plans to remove excessive tax farming in France (Talbot 1771, p. 186), to expand trade and introduce paper currency (Smollet 1764, p. 284), to relieve the nation of calamities associated with war (Leland 1773, p. 414), and to encourage religion and serve as a moral exemplar to religious virtues (Griffith 1769, p. 549). It is also frequently used by those I cite in this dissertation – and *not* to advocate for government provision. In its popular usage, it is imprecise and relies on further exposition. As a non-descript envelope, it had a familiarity, but its contents were not apparent from the surface.

As for what the government (as opposed to the public) might be doing by “attending” to the issue of education, if not directly providing, he does not give us much immediate concrete material to work with. But I don’t believe his silence should foreclose the possibility of him imagining a less direct role for education. Smith was on the front edge of a nascent interest among scholars to seek to identify a way for

government to serve as a stage manager (to use West's term) to aid charity and the free market. There was no blueprint for doing so. Efforts by others in the coming years to identify such an indirect role would offer nothing more in terms of concreteness, and would also use indeterminate phrases. Therefore, I don't think we would be in error to speculate, to cast our eyes more broadly across his corpus and across his contemporaries' works, to see what ideas might be within the envelope of "attention of government." Answers begin to take form when one considers how he uses the very broad terms of "facilitate" and "encourage" throughout his corpus.

In the article itself, on the topic of Greece, he rather quietly provides us an example. I have previously argued that he lauds the ancient governments for letting the ingenuity of private agents to determine the size and nature of the market. Government turned a blind eye, and in doing so, was more effective than modern governments were in intervening. However, amidst the slowly evolving natural development of the market for education, government did take an action, and one specifically akin to facilitating the establishment of a school in every parish. He writes, "The state, however, never seems to have encouraged them further than by assigning some of them a particular place to teach in, which was sometimes done too by private donors" (V.i.f.43). The statement is underhanded. It affirms that government did something; but it is well short of the kind of direct provision that generally come to mind. Here we see that government facilitates not through constructing schools anew, but by using public assets more efficiently. This act, it must be recognized, also fulfills Smith's proposal to facilitate the establishment of a

school. And I suggest that there is a touch of irony in terms of representing the glorious edifices of the foundation of Western civilization as mixed-use facilities.⁴⁸

In the ensuing “Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Instruction of People of All Ages,” there is a further flushing out of an encouraging role for government. First, government might encourage the study of science and philosophy “*not by giving salaries to teachers in order to make them negligent and idle, but by instituting some sort of probation*” (emphasis added) (V.i.g.14). The problems of endowments preclude them quite clearly here. And he gives a nod to the alternative, which has its obvious analogue in option 3 in Smith’s proposal for the poor. This clearly stated preference suggests Smith might prefer option 3 of probation and testing (paragraph 57) over direct provision (paragraph 55) – that is, if government were to get involved. The passage also lends some merit to West’s view that Smith’s proposal contains three separable options which might be pitted against each other in policy debate.

Second, government might be effective by suppressing its “dread” and “abhorrence” to certain forms of art, and by relaxing strictures against such art:

The state, *by encouraging, that is by giving entire liberty to all those who for their own interest would attempt, without scandal or indecency, to amuse and divert the people by painting, poetry, musick, dancing; by all sorts of dramatic representations and exhibitions, would easily dissipate, in the greater part of them,*

⁴⁸ This passage might be seen as the fourth effort to disabuse his contemporaries of the idea that the ancients accomplished great effects through direct design and central control. The temples and monuments which are emblematic of the greatness of ancient civilizations are here debased. They must not be seen as testaments to the intellectual achievements of the past, but rather as mixed-use facilities, constructed for other purposes and merely assigned for learning after the fact. In TMS he discusses the deceptive allure of ostentatious buildings (TMS I.ii.3.4); and here he may be disabusing us of the deceptiveness allure of the ruins of ancient Greece.

that melancholy and gloomy humour which is almost always the nurse of popular *superstitions and enthusiasm.*” (emphasis added) (V.i.g.15)

Here, then, Smith identifies a new way to deal with the “superstitions and enthusiasm” that he is worried about in final paragraph (V.i.f.61) of his article on the education of youth. Exposure to dance and the arts in a public forum would seem to act as an alternative to formal education for dealing with such a problem. That Smith would be offer multiple paths for moral and intellectual development makes complete sense given his kaleidoscopic portrayal of human development in TMS. Importantly, perhaps all that is needed to achieve the common end of optimism, peace and tempered feelings toward government of V.i.f.61 is to remove a law rather than impose a new one.

Looking somewhat further afield, in Book V Chapter II Smith describes the way government may operate through the tax system to “encourage” positive effects. “It might be of importance...that the abatement of tax should encourage [the farmer] to cultivate to a certain extent” (V.ii.c.15). He continues:

The principle *attention of the sovereign* ought to be to encourage by every means in his power, the attention both of the landlord and of the farmer, by allowing both to pursue their own interest in their own way and according to their own judgment; by giving the most perfect security that they shall enjoy the full recompense of their own industry. (emphasis added) (V.ii.c.19)

Here, very profoundly, Smith shows that the “attention” of government is merely to take those actions which ensure private agents’ security, which guarantee their

property rights, and which allow them to have confident expectations. These acts renders the people more productive.

In Smith's time, there would have been numerous "encouragements" to the market that could have been made for the ease of charitable organizations. For example, general corporation rights were not established at the time. That is, there was no means to efficiently obtain the right to undertake an activity in the manner that we have come to expect today (West 1990, p. 87-91; West 1977, p. 6-8; Wallis 2005, p. 223). Instead, a corporation, university, school, hospital, charity endeavor, or trade association was generally established by "special privilege," through a system of petitioning for direct approval of the highest level of government. "Incorporation, which is essential to modern business organization, was in the late 18th century and early 19th-centuries either a dispensation (favour) within the special gift of Parliament or a carefully guarded bureaucratic concession" (West 1990, p. 89).

The chartering of the SPCK in England was an example of a highly encouraging act of government. On the other hand, the chartering of the SPCK in Scotland was an example of the discouragement that could be attached to a privilege. Namely, per its charter, its entire operations could not exceed 2000 pounds in a given year (Jones 1938, p. 178). The efforts in Scotland thus were constrained. In 1760 a representative of the presbytery expressed his frustration directly related to the limits on salaries: "The necessities of life are now so high that no man qualified for the teaching of youth can live by the salaries commonly granted by the Society" (cited by Withrington 1988, p. 167).

Therefore, easier access to incorporation and obtaining a wider array of permissions would constitute significant encouragement.

Even when granted a special privilege, a school would face many challenges due to the immature corporation laws. A charity schools did not exist independent of the trustees who managed it. The permanence and the continuity of a charity independent of its trustees – which is part of the definition of the modern corporations – was not in place (West 1990, p. 89).⁴⁹ Therefore, a death of a key trustee could put the entire school in jeopardy as the legal standing of the school, and the ownership of funds, could not independently be affirmed. In such times, funds might be grabbed by others in the parish, or by the government itself. Similarly, because of the weak definition of the corporation, government often managed to intercept legacies that might be left of a charity school (Jones 1938, p. 54-56). The legal reformer, Henry Bellenden Ker, writes that confiscation was an irregular practice done through “admirable contrivance” in this sphere of poorly identified corporate rights (Ker 1819, p. 111). The SPCK describes both kinds of problems whereby funds were lost to the Society (Hayter 1756, p. 84).

The lesson of special privileges is that when Smith uses words like “encourage” and “facilitate” we ought to not immediately presume they imply a robust sort of government action such as construction of a school. Merely allowing a charity to exist required a specific positive action. One could say that the doctrine of *laissez-faire* before the concept of general corporation could not be followed by merely “letting be;” it

⁴⁹ James Hurst (1970) writes that in the United States, states began using more modern corporation concepts in 1780 and did so much more rigorously than England did over the course of the next 100 years (p. 8-9)

required at a minimum formal permission, fixes to property rights, and then letting be. Such is the reality that led West (1977) to argue contra Viner that *laissez-faire* is the wrong framework for understanding Smith; *laissez-faire* is a “non-Smithian world” (p. 652.) West writes:

The key historical fact is that in Smith’s time, large groups of individuals were so hindered by the absence of an appropriate variety of legal instruments with limits liability that much needed capital markets were blocked...Smith was generally arguing about the need for the introduction of such legal instruments as the most direct way of using new types of private enterprises. (West 1990, p. 88)

Beyond legal modification, we also cannot discount that Smith might have seen the role of government as providing some moral leadership or of vocally encouraging education. There was some precedent for people of rank serving an important encouraging role. The county parishes had resisted the charitable activities of the SPCK in England at first. It was not until the higher clergy encouraged the parishes’ cooperation did the SPCK begin to make an impact in more remote areas (Jones, 1938, p. 63-64). We see in such examples the people of rank use their moral authority for good. Sheridan, as previously discussed, had explored an institutional role for government prior to Smith, and seems to have gravitated toward figures of rank joining and promoting charitable societies.

On the other hand, there were examples in the early part of the century where government had been hostile to charity schools. For example, the Schism Act of 1714 was a blatant attempt to control the charity schools’ curriculum by forbidding any person

from keeping a school unless he were a member of the Church of England (Jones 1964, p. 131). The Close Vestries Bill of 1716 would have transferred authority and management of charity schools to an elected government body. In both cases, the bills never were implemented. While these were quite old events, they apparently were not forgotten – at least by those interested in the topic of education. In 1768 (half a century later), Priestley writes of the Schism Act, calling it “the most odious measure of the most odious ministry that ever sat at the helm of the British government, and which was providentially defeated the very day that it was to have been carried into execution” (1768, p. 95). Feeling that Brown had offered a plan that would equally destroy the system of charity, Priestley asserts, “Should these measures [similar to the Schism Act] be resumed, and pursued, Farewel, a long farewell, to England’s greatness” (1768, p. 95).

As for other contemporaries of Smith, we find more explorations of a less direct role for government. For instance, Priestley’s idea is to deal with the problem of school endowments through modifying laws that govern them. In his lectures published in 1788, he reiterates Turgot’s criticism of endowments and the unfortunate practice of benefactors setting strict guidelines for their legacies. Priestley’s method to correct for this practice is, first, to appeal to the better judgment and voluntary actions of the benefactors: “Let every person, therefore, bequeath his property to those persons in whose wisdom he can most confide, but do not pretend to direct them in circumstance in which he will never know, and therefore can never judge of” (p. 303). Second, Priestley recommends a new law when necessary: “The wisdom of states, is frequently obliged to interfere, and to check the caprice of individuals in the disposal of their property” (1826,

p. 303). Priestley's recommendation of government interfering with the transference of property may seem to go against the grain of my argument. However, the important backdrop to his proposal is that it is less of an interference than those being prescribed by others. Confiscation of inheritance and complete prohibitions against transference of property had been considered (Mackay, 1898, p. 24-27). In comparison, Priestley's interference is relatively mild. The role he considers is one that only aims to prevent injurious practices in transfers of money. Priestley's recommendation speaks to a period in which institutional reform was being sought out by active reflection.

In another example, Parr asserts that charity schools are doing very well without direct government involvement. He resists Brown's desire to give government control over curriculum:

The direct interference of governing powers in the prosecution of [Brown's] work, is a subject of very nice speculation; and perhaps in the present state of things, it were better to be content with protection, which implies a sort of *tacit approbation*, than to ask for assistance, which might involve us in unforeseen difficulties. (emphasis added) (1828, p. 185)

But in continuing, he is willing to make some concession to Brown that it is critical for correct principles to be taught and for injurious ones to be repressed:

To those who complain that charity schools are subject to the controul of private opinion, and not of public authority, we may make a yet farther reply. Public authority, though it does not patronize every attempt, or dictate every regulation, may, upon the discovery of great abuses, suppress what it does not endeavor to

direct. Beyond these limits, there seems to be no solid reason for its interference. (1828, 186-87).

Therefore, Parr entertains a role for government. It is one where government may apply some modest oversight, specifically to avoid injurious curriculum. Here we find then a search for a limited protective role for government.

A 1769 book entitled *A Treatise Concerning Moral Education; Intended for the Use of Parents, Tutors, &c.* by an anonymous French author (and reviewed in *The Monthly Review* in 1769), provides another interesting exploration of a role for government. The author writes of the French politics: “Philosophers, convinced of the necessity there is of the legislator’s concurrence in order to perfect the art of forming good citizens, have gone *so far* as to maintain that the best system of legislation and the best system of education are the same thing” (emphasis added) (1769, p. 531). The author characterizes government control of education as dwelling somewhere in the realm of radical. After much discussion, the author concludes that the proper function of the legislator must be limited to that of being a moral exemplar and to provide incentives:

If by rewards and distinctions granted to merit, a desire of obtaining them is excited in the breasts of citizens, all the youth...will apply themselves with ardour to the acquisition of virtue and talents; and if by the *attention of government*, young persons are surrounded with such objects as have a tendency to inspire them with good principles, and with examples worthy of their imitations, they must necessarily be carried along by the current of manner. (emphasis added) (1769, p. 531)

What does “attention” mean for this author? Government will provide incentives and example instead of direct provision. And the author continues that such attention “is *almost the only way* wherein it can apply its power, with advantage, for the benefit of all” (1769, p. 531).

Finally, Ker sought to place the government in a monitorial and facilitation role. He writes that “it is the interest of the legislature and the higher order of society, to bestow *attention* on the means of [the] prevention [of vice]” (emphasis added) (1819, p. 69). He names two agents who must give “attention:” government and private agents. The specific role for government is defined as protective rather than provisional: “Legislature should frame the laws with a view to improve the morals of the people...to assist [parents] in that duty” (70). The state’s role is to encourage charity, to take advantage of its infrastructure and administration, and perhaps to take aggressive steps to disassemble a system of endowments.

Therefore, it appears as if Smith was, historically speaking, on the front edge of an exploration of a role for government. Smith handles separable topics with different registers. Smith embraces the issue of the desirability of education for the poor, openly identifies public benefits, and describes them as a matter of great worry and consequence. In doing so, he writes in a manner that philanthropists and clergy had done (Bygrave 2006, p. 86-87). But on the issue of the role of government, Smith employs a language that is cautious and vague. This language is also representative of the time that had no blueprint for how government might guide without directing, and aid without meddling.

Smith's cautious and imprecise language would continue to be representative of the discourse over the following decades.

The Legacy of Smith Views on Endowments

I have stressed that Smith is favorable to charity and that he is contemplating a role for government that might include options other than provision. But I don't claim his message about charity is clear. It is subtle. And his equivocation is complex. As a result, the fine nuance in which I suggest Smith treated the subject was not replicated in the more polemical debates beginning in the early 19th century. The three options of government, fees, and charity became forced into a two-option debate that would be familiar to us today: government or private. Smith would be integrated into a new politics. But how, in this more polemical politics is Smith represented? Despite today's common interpretation, how he is integrated reflects what is most salient in the article. As I have suggested, there is no saliency in the article regarding a strong advocacy of government provision. And as I have just admitted, charity is not pronounced either. Therefore, it is his criticism of endowments that becomes his legacy. As such, he becomes cast as the advocate of the free-market.

David Williams is the first I can identify who specifically refers to Smith's views on endowments. Williams had attracted considerable attention for his views on republicanism in the 1780s and 90s. The respect he commanded could be seen from his invitation to submit his views to the French convention on the republican constitution being considered (Sonenscher 2008, p. 43). He saw the necessary solutions for stability and liberty to lie in what Hampshir-Monk (1979) calls "failsafe" institutions instead of

civic-humanist virtues.⁵⁰ Williams therefore is a very attentive institutionalist, and in reading Smith he gravitates to Smith's discussion of endowments. The lessons of endowments is what resonates for him, leading him to resist government provision of education.

Williams, as I explained to Chapter 2, resisted Brown's and Montesquieu's proposal, and replicated Priestley's response. He was concerned with government control of curriculum. But he also is concerned about funding. Here he introduces Smith into the discussion: "If you would deliberate on the utility of endowed institutions, consult Dr. Smith's *History of the Wealth of Nations*, who has treated the subject with ability and candor" (1789b, p. 46). Therefore, having rested his case about curricular interference, Williams summons Smith to stave off another form of interference: financial. For Williams, the lesson of Smith's article appears to be that of the impropriety of endowments.

Further discussion of endowments follow, with Smith becoming representative of criticism. Beginning in the 1790s, there was considerable discussion about raising the salary cap for teachers in Scotland – a cap that had been set by the 1696 Scottish law. Two publications show the continued worry about endowments, and may be suggestive of a similar influence by Smith. In 1792 the Scottish political economist James Anderson, who we know to have attentively read WN⁵¹ – at least from the perspective of trade –

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the institutional versus civic-humanist solutions at the time, good references are Hont and Ignatief (1983) and Iain Hampshir-Monk (1979).

⁵¹ Anderson's 1777 *Observations and the means of exciting a spirit of national industry* provides a well-known assessment of Smith's views on trade. Smith made a change to a comment on the value of corn after the first edition due to comments made by Anderson – according to a letter to Andreas Holt in 1780 (1976 WN, p. 515).

argues against raising Scotland's legislated salary cap for teachers. And he does so from the insight of how endowments work. "[Government subsidized education] would deprive a great body of the people of a considerable part of their property, for the sole purpose of encouraging idleness, without any prospect of benefiting the public in the smallest degree" (1792, p. 260). And also, "Men, who from a principle of humanity feel themselves disposed to befriend [teachers], ought to carefully advert, that, should [the teacher's] present demands be complied with, it would greatly increase the very evil they intended to remove" (p. 260). His line of reasoning pairs well with Smith's.

Another publication is also suggestive of Smith's legacy on the topic of endowments. Alexander Christison, a master of the High School of Edinburgh, writes *The General Diffusion of Knowledge: One Great Cause of the Prosperity in North Britain* at the height of the salary debates in 1802. Christison sees the raising of salaries as merely "rectifying" what had diminished in real value since the 1696 act (1802, p. 15-19). But in order to overcome resistance to the idea of raising salaries, he realizes he faces a known counter-response. He cannot continue without dismissing the "allegation" that "salaries and other emoluments... would render the parish schoolmaster independent of labour, and consequently idle" (1802, p. 21). By way of comparison, Smith writes, "Their subsistence, so far as it arises from their salaries, is evidently derived from a fund altogether independent of their success and reputation" (V.i.f.5). Smith may be the source of the "allegation" that Christison has in mind. Or he may not. But both Christison's and Anderson's points are meaningful, for they both appear in the politics of the parish system, and yet Smith is not cited by them as being a proponent of it. Instead his

language against endowments becomes the defining discourse *against* it. Also, we see how the discussion of endowments matches his own, and that the subject of endowments – which is treated as *curiosum* today – was of highest importance at the time for all levels of schooling. When reading his section of endowments, therefore, it would be anachronistic to compartmentalize it to the subject of universities. Endowments were a hot topic across all educational spheres and continued to be so for another century.

While these examples are speculative, Smith's association with endowments becomes more obvious in time. The 1843 Edinburgh edition of WN summarizes Smith's views on education in the introduction. The anonymous editor writes, "He proves, that, in conformity to that desire to better our condition, by which all men are directed, and upon which the author has founded his whole doctrine, the teacher, whose wages are a fixed salary, will have no other end than to spare himself every trouble, and dedicate as little attention as possible to his pupils" (1843, Introduction p. xxx). He concludes that Smith "confirms his theoretical opinions by incontestable examples" (p. xxx). Such is how Smith's views on education are summarized: endowments are representative of the whole of his doctrine and are opposed to intervention.

With Chalmers it becomes clear that Smith is becoming strongly associated not just with the criticism of endowments, but also with the politics of non-intervention in education. Chalmers was a seminal Scottish figure influential in the movement to expand the state role in education. In the centennial celebration of his arrival as a minister in Glasgow, he was hailed as "one of the greatest of our race" and compared to John Knox (Brown 1990, p. 61).

In 1815 he took over a parish in the congested west end of Glasgow where urban density had challenged literacy rates. The experience changes his views of charity and government. In a prior 1814 sermon, he praises the charity system for providing education for those in the “intermediate spaces” of society. His goal is merely to “scatter a few more stationary schools in these intermediate spaces” (1830, 335). He wishes only to inspire the public to more generously support the charitable societies. In 1819, however, in his publication *Considerations of the System of Parochial Schools in Scotland*, Chalmers finds fault in charity and he is inspired by a state alternative. Now the state has a certain advantage. It could provide sharper inspection. It could provide “a marked and separate edifice, standing visibly, out to the eye of the people, with its familiar and oft repeated destination” (1819, p. 11). The parish school as a physical manifestation and an administrative power, therefore, could become an important galvanizing force. It could overlay and give form to the natural parish community more precisely, rather than merely function within it. State involvement served the objective better than charity for forming a community as a single family where the parish school would educate people of all ranks together. The community would become more than it could otherwise: “The example spreads from house to house, till it embrace the whole of the assigned community” (1819, p. 11).

His proposal for how to fund additional schools is a mixed solution which would retain a partial fee system, but which would be subsidized. And in this case, the schools would be subsidized specifically by government. His proposal resembles that which

scholars believe Smith recommended. It naturally should be asked, then, how Chalmers viewed his plans relative to Smith. Chalmers provides his view.

Although Chalmers' plan resembles that which is commonly ascribed to Smith today, Chalmers does not see precedence and authority in Smith's example. He sees a political adversary. What resonates from Smith's article for Chalmers is his resistance to endowments. The specific purpose of his lengthy *On The Uses and Abuses of Literary and Ecclesiastical Establishments (1827)* is to argue for endowments specifically against Smith's views of them. "Scholarship will best thrive, when placed in the circumstances in which it is now found that merchandise best thrives...Dr. Smith was the first to proclaim these principles – and not without effect, we apprehend, on the legislature both in this and other countries" (p. x). He derides Smith for having benefitted from endowments as a professor, and yet being critical of them. He continues, "The object of this work, is to estimate the soundness of this economic principle as applied to education" (p. xiii).

Chalmers frames the debate as one between government provision and private provision. Charity gets almost no attention in this work. Therefore, with charity schooling absent from this framework, Smith's indictment of endowments is hard to see as anything other than an advocacy of the free market. By Chalmers' account, Turgot and Smith stood for the political economics of the day that favored the free market. The current state of affairs in education is blamed on "the ascendancy of his errors" (p. xii). Chalmers believes Smith's view on endowments in education were "an unlucky generalization" of his principles (p. 20). Education is, quite simply, not like other goods for Chalmers.

J.S. Mill follows a similar path as Chalmers. His rebuttal to Turgot and Smith is that there is no inherent flaw in endowments. He begins with Turgot. Turgot and all the philosophers of the time erred by overgeneralizing from an historically temporary event. What they observed was a moment when “established institutions were in the very last stage of decay and decrepitude” (1859, p. 25). The philosophers also observed the effects of the Catholic church being corrupt in its predictable way (p. 26). And they observed the effects of a system of law which regulated endowments too severely (p. 27).

Mill finds that endowments can work. The quality of the institution depends on the people who operate endowments. Smith had sought institutions that might be as reliable for quality, regardless of the variable character the people in the model. But Mill put his faith in improving the moral character of those involved and in institutional restructuring of the endowments. Mill writes:

A doctrine is indeed abroad, and has been sanctioned by many high authorities, among others by Adam Smith, that endowed establishments, for education or other public purposes, are a mere premium on idleness and inefficiency.

Undoubtedly they are so, when it is nobody’s business to see that the receivers of the endowments do their duty...Let us see whether, where the endowments proceed from the governments themselves, and where the governments do not as here, leave it optional whether that which is promised and paid for shall or shall not be done, it be not found that...the education given is the best which an age or a country can supply. (1859, p. 29-30)

Mill characterized Smith as fully opposed to endowments. However, Mill offers a particularly important insight about endowments that may be closer to Smith's than he realizes. His views can explain why Smith still may still entertain government endowments in his conclusion of the chapter. Mill points out that endowments may have been historically bad, but endowments run by government and in the present state of things might nonetheless operate well. The inclusion of government in Smith's equipoise can be understood by the same logic that, in the social sciences, the past cannot fully predict the future. Making an adjustment such as putting government in control of the endowed school is a change we cannot dismiss in advance.

But such possibilities of Smith's text are lost in the 19th century politics, just as charity is lost today. In Mill's time, the politics and the social issues had changed, the framework for understanding education had changed, and the framework for reading Smith had changed. Smith's nuanced and equivocal views were treated as a starkly opposed to government provision. His views of endowments became his defining message. Mill and Chalmers could see him (or found it expedient to represent him) only as opposed to government. And later Robert Lowe would continue to cast him as opposed to government intervention in education. Such was the ultimate legacy until the 20th century. Lowe writes that where a respected public school can be found it is such not because of endowments but *in spite of* their endowments. Instead, these rare finds are due to the "free action of the much-despised commercial principle" (1868, p. 6). He cites Smith as the "highest authority" of endowments (p. 7). And Lowe warns his fellow legislators who were seeking endowments, "It is not such a light thing to override without

attempting to refute the opinion of Adam Smith on any economic subject, nor the cogent and vigorous arguments by which that opinion is supported” (1868, p. 4). All the way until the nationalization of education, Smith’s article stood for many as the emblem of a free-market theorist, whose authority had to be refuted before government could intervene. Historian Gabriel Compayré writes in 1886, still within this framework, that Smith felt “education should be abandoned to the private market” (p. 510).

Throughout 19th century discourse we see that the issue of endowments was of far greater importance than it is generally acknowledged in Smithian scholarship. The intellectuals and reformers of the 18th and 19th century engaged in significant scrutiny of endowments, which was necessary to try to, first, set charity on an effectual path, and then government. Rosenberg writes that scholars have treated the subject as *curiosum* as it pertains to Smith. Smith’s audience, arguably more sensitive to the importance of the topic of endowments for their time, were inclined to attend to Smith’s portrayal and to react strongly to its rigorous condemnation. At the same time, in the more polemical politics of the 19th century, they may have erred in the opposite direction as scholars do today. Whereas today scholars see a condemnation that poses little problems for recommending government for the poor, 19th century readers saw a condemnation that allowed for no solution other than the free market. In both cases, Smith’s finer treatment of the systematic variability and the unpredictable variability of agents, is lost – as is the greater range of options that might avoid corruption.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the tendency among scholars has been to construct an interpretation that makes sense of the *appearance* (at least to today's reader) that Smith advocated government. Such excellent scholars have managed to find what it is in his corpus that can substantiate a concession to government specific to the market of education. Thus Weinstein (2013) concludes in his exceptionally detailed work that Smith felt "schooling was *too important* for the poor and for society as a whole to be left solely to the market" (emphasis added) (p. 202). And educational historians Lawson and Silver (1973) have concluded that education "was too important to be left to philanthropy" (p. 235).

I concur that a plausible case can be made that Smith found the education of the poor to be important. But I do not know where it becomes "too important" that society cannot allow natural systems, the growth of benefaction, the creativity of zealous moral leaders, and the element of time to resolve. Scholars have not provided me with a line in the sand separating "important" from "too important," and I would be skeptical if they did. I am inclined to reverse the logic, after viewing the history. I see a state of education in Smith's time where one ought to perhaps be more inclined to say that charity was "too capable and convenient" to allow government to meddle with it. Samuel Parr, as we saw, certainly made such a statement.

Many scholars have looked to Smith's jurisprudence, his views on distributive justice, his concept of police, his ethics, his views of wonder and imagination, and his

appreciation of great texts in order to make sense of his government advocacy for education. I have looked to history to make sense of the rest of the article, the parts that don't vaguely summon government, and thus which might explain why he *vaguely* summons government. I have brought forward many points that have not been given much attention in the Smithian scholarship, and I have tried to substantiate them in a way that is novel even among those who have made similar points. I have shown that there is much to the article that is inconvenient for making the interpretation that Smith advocated for government provision. Smith may have found an educated lower class to be desirable and important, but he does not take a strong position of government advocacy.

First, the article appears to have a unity of purpose that strongly condemns blind faith in the endowments which governments would rely on. The article is much more critical than is commonly recognized. The article includes broad statements about endowments as a universal mechanism for corruption and as occurring across a broad array of school forms to various degrees. The article also includes a rejection of Montesquieu, who was the primary example of statist thinking in Britain. The article offers protreptic lessons to try to prevent more statist sentiments from emerging from bad interpretations of the empirics. It employs biting examples of irony for those most enthusiastic about endowments. And it measures damages done by endowments along several measures, each more worrisome than the next: school quality, curriculum usefulness, the productiveness of the rising generation, and intergeneration social cohesion. In short, endowments have contributed to ruin in Britain.

Second, the article contains positive views of private and charity schools, which – in his final words on the topic – he identifies as deserving some favor in our contemplation of the subject. Smith, himself, appears to extricate himself from the expectation of determining best policy. He indicates some equivocation, with some inclination that private schools and charity schools might more reliably or predictably accomplish the stated ends of education. His inclination for the free market perhaps requires no further explanation. His inclination for charity schools can only be understood through the implicit knowledge of the time, which held charity schools as having unique qualities that endowments did not. Charity schools had a stronger management, a clearer sense of purpose, and a body of judicious donors scrutinizing performance in the manner that customers would in the free market. His equivocation, on the other hand, can be understood by his very astute recognition that the causal mechanism of salaries and privileges was variable across the many forms of schools, and not a perfect predictor of performance. As such, a mixed-form of funding that included both endowments and fees might avoid much of the corruption, and enough of it, to achieve its ends. An endowed school with particularly virtuous staff might also avoid the worst of corruption. The science is important, and yet imperfect. It must figure into political discourse but not predetermine it.

Smith's article is neither a condemnation of government nor a dismissal of the free market. Such a binary framework appears at odds with it. It appears to be an exploration of the causal variable that ought to figure into political discourse and policy formation. It is an exploration that includes forms that are not as obviously familiar to us

today: charity and partial subsidization of elementary schools. As such, when he directs the government to attend to education, he may be asking government to attend to it through the science he elucidates, and, therein, to first try to nurture the market and the charity system as much as possible, and only thereafter to consider partial (and perhaps very prudent) subsidization.

I have pointed to many ways that government could have helped private individuals to find solutions for the poor. And I have pointed out the linguistic oddities that permit us to read the article as an encouragement of an indirect role for government in lieu of a direct provision. That the phrase “the publick can facilitate” ought to be read as the “government should build” requires linguistic inferences which may not be warranted when charity was the obvious model to remedy the problem of the poor. In the end, I suggest that today’s debate between public and private education is not one that can be used as a template to understand Smith’s article. Smith appears to have been entertaining a much wider swath of solutions and roles for government, and to have been doing so in uncertain times, in an age before the modern world converged onto the model of fully subsidized and controlled national education for all – an extreme government model, which regardless of how one assesses his nuance, appears to find no encouragement in his article.

CONCLUSION

It is generally argued that Smith was a decided advocate of government provision of education for the poor.⁵² It is often further argued that the provision would be a significant financial commitment. Muller (1993) writes, “Smith presents a list of expensive recommendations” (p. 148). Himmelfarb (1983) claims, “He now advanced a scheme requiring a greater measure of government involvement than anything that had ever existed before” (p. 59). Kennedy (2005) calls Smith’s proposal a “substantial intervention by the state in the economic model of his narrative of perfect liberty” (p. 226). And Rothschild and Sen (2006) describe his proposal as “an extensive system of education” (p. 321). Many also tend to see his proposal as tending toward universal access.⁵³

In short, according to such interpretations, Smith has proposed something approximating today’s modern system of education of industrialized countries. Historians, thus, rather confidently begin their narratives of the history of education in Britain with the mention of Smith (e.g., Sturt 1967, p. 4; Musgrave 1968, p. 8; Cubberly 1898, p. 621). And they suggest an uninterrupted history of thought between Smith, and future representative of the modern era of educational thought. Musgrave (1968) links

⁵² See Table 1 in Appendix.

⁵³ Rothschild (1998, p. 211), Ross (1984, p. 183), Muller (1993, p. 151), Freeman (1969, p. 183) and (Pack 1991, p. 143).

Smith and Jeremy Bentham (p. 8). Ellwood Cubberly (1920) links Smith and Malthus and Thomas Paine and “the young and powerful champions of the idea of popular education” of the 19th century. (p. 621-622). Donald Winch (1996), writing of Malthus claims, “For reasons that were identical to those given by Smith, education of the populace at large at public expense became a major public responsibility” (p. 269). Smith has a place in the historical development of the national education system. But is his place correctly characterized?

A much smaller set of scholars have shown reservation about this common interpretation (e.g., West, 1994; Mueller, 2015; Friedman, 1997). They have suggested that Smith expresses reservation, and a lack of commitment. They suggest some conflict between what might be just and what might be prudent. In this dissertation, I have sought to explore if there is historical and textual reason to think that the appearance of advocacy in key points in the article could be understood in any other light.

My primary method of analysis in this dissertation has been to elucidate the nature of the discourse of education at the time that Smith wrote. Key to this history are the sentiments and frameworks of “age of benevolence,” the philosophical suspicion of expanded literacy, and the politics of endowments. My secondary method has been to reassess Smith’s text in light of the historical discourses. I have provided extensive examples of the discourses so that the reader may judge for themselves how Smith’s article compares, to find faults in my interpretations where they may lie, and to pursue related lines of inquiry. I find that much of what is treated as ambiguous, awkward, and

digressive in Smith's article is much more intelligible within historic context, and offers us an alternative interpretation of Smith's purpose.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I substantiated how little discussion there was prior to Smith regarding government provision of education. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that philosophers and intellectuals before Smith had put their efforts into the improvement of education for the upper ranks, and into the reformation of the university system. As for the poor, the philosophers and intellectuals repeated common reservations that the poor lacked the ability to learn or to be moral, that they faced limiting environmental conditions precluding them from greater education, and that their widespread education might destabilize the social and economic order. Therefore, Smith was facing a hostile environment where education for the lower ranks was not seen as a public good, but as a "public bad." Government provision was not an issue given much contemplation as that philosophers had not moved beyond what might be called the prerequisite question of desirability.

Those who did find education desirable were the clergy and the religious-minded social reformers who saw education as a form of social control that might improve the moral state of society, reduce crime, diminish the burden of the Poor Laws, and save souls. There was a fault line between such philanthropists and the dissenting philosophers. The philanthropists pursued expanding access while the philosophers remained content with reforming education for the upper ranks and with determining a philosophy of education that might apply to those ranks.

And yet, when we study the behavior of philanthropists, we see that their attention to the issue does not amount to an appeal to government for help. Not at all. They appear fully embedded in a culture of charity, showing that Smith would have faced a problem from this audience too. Philanthropists had at their disposal the traditional tools of charity schools, the ready forums for appealing to benefaction, and a narrative regarding the religious duties of the people of rank. They continued to work through such means to expand educational access. And they did so with great zeal and alacrity. Despite the repeated emphasis in Smithian interpretations that Scotland's status quo was government provision, the actual historical reality is one where the governmental "parish system" was one marked heavily by long-running charitable sentiments, and where additional independent charity schools played a significant role for the lower ranks. Charity might rightly be called the *de facto* status quo for how to provide education for the poor. This claim of mine, and given credence also by other historians, find additional support by the fact that even radical social reformers (identified in Chapter 2) would continue to imagine reform within the paradigm of charity, instead of imagining it within the paradigm of government.

Such a history is not discussed in Smithian scholarship (West being an exception), but it has become widely recognized by historians of education. This history prompts the question as to why Smith would not pursue an expansion of the charity system, and why he would feel compelled to turn to government when those most engaged in the provision for the poor saw no need to do so. This history ought to cause us to be skeptical of the common interpretation, and to ask what Smith's purpose might plausibly be if he does

not make a strong case that would address the resistance at the time, and if he does not specifically discount the successes or means of charity.

In Chapter 2, I challenge my interpretation that Smith would have been radical and unwarranted to recommend government provision in his time. I look for the strands of statist discourse that might have appeared from amongst a wide variety of social reformers, radicals and utopian thinker. I find some evidence of statist ideas in regards to education, but they are few, and they are received with hostility, debunked by liberal thinking, or they are ignored and lost as brief interludes in obscure texts. The sources I find provide further evidence that Smith would have been radical to recommend government provision, and perhaps implausibly so.

The clearest example of a recommendation for government provision comes from Montesquieu and in the British reinterpretation of his principles by John Brown. However, I show that Joseph Priestley and others has demonstrated the weakness of Brown's proposal, and that their voices appear to have represented the sentiments of the time. Later commentators would continue to refer to Priestley as having set the tone against statism in the second half of the century. Again, these historical realities, which are neither acknowledged in Smithian scholarship nor widely discussed in the history of British education, would force us to characterize Smith as radical relative to his times – and more radical than even the most radical social reformers of his time. It prompts the question why Smith would recommend government provision without acknowledging and refuting the worries expressed by Priestley. These were worries that Smith himself would inarguably have been able to identify with and that Samuel Godwin, David

Williams, and others would later identify with. It also prompts the question of why Smith does not signal any merit of the principles of Montesquieu and Brown – merit that statisticians would almost universally mention in their proposals in the coming decades. If Smith has advocated for government, he did so contrary to the negative responses toward his few salient predecessors, and he did so without salvaging their argument against the salient criticism they had endured and which defined the politics of the day.

In addition to John Brown, I find that the works of radical democratic-republicans Thomas Spence and James Burgh also entertained government provision. However, after a wide search, they are the lone examples. Moreover, these two do so only in their fictional utopias, and they do so only fleetingly and vaguely, and with little to no evidence in the remainder of their works that would show that they held specific interest in providing education for the poor. My search for historical precedent of government provision magnifies rather than qualifies how novel it would be if Smith genuinely had argued for government provision.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I choose to reread the article with the skepticism that I feel that the history permits me to have. I ask what Smith might have meant to do if not make a case for government provision of the poor. I have concluded that there are many passages and aspects of the article that have been given short-shrift in the secondary literature. Much has been written off as ambiguous, peculiar, digressive, and of insufficient importance to derail the *apparent* proposal for government provision. But these passages are much more intelligible when we place ourselves in 18th century discourse. And they provide a basis for an alternative interpretation that although Smith

was very much in support of the poor having access to education, he was equivocal about the source of funding, and possibly even disinclined to concede provision to government.

One of the important aspects of identifying the history of thought on education before Smith is that it brings attention to the fact that Smith does, in fact, signal his awareness of the lone significant thread of statist sentiments before him. Namely, he mentions Montesquieu's views. However, in contradiction to what one would expect from somebody advocating for government, Smith strongly rejects Montesquieu and makes him into an example of how a bad interpretation of empirics leads to bad policy prescriptions.

The history of thought on education also points out that we might benefit from treating the question of the desirability of an educated lower class as separate from the question of the source of funding. Those discussing education at the time were under no illusion that support for the first question triggered support for the second. Instead, a zeal for the first was accompanied by a prudence for the second. Smith, I suggest, is no different. The passion with which Smith writes regarding the problems of the poor is undeniable: "The torpor of the mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment" (V.i.f.50). Many have identified the rigor and passion in which he makes his case about the desirability of an educated lower class. But, the coolness of his agenda and the vagueness of it must also be admitted. Smith writes, "For a very small expense the publick can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon the whole body of the people the necessity of acquiring the most essential part of education"

(V.i.f.54). Despite his rigorous portrayal of the problem of moral degradation, his discussion of possible tools to address the problem lacks prescription and the sense of a determinate policy. They appear, in their coolness, to belong to a different discourse, one separate from and unbiased from the heat regarding the desirability of the education for the poor.

The key policy passages raise more questions than they answer. It is not clear whether he had identified three actions to be employed in unison, or three possible actions that will applied with discretion as conditions required (West, online, p. 9; Rothschild 1998, p. 210). It is not clear if he really intends to cede these policy tools to the agent of government. Problematic for thinking so, is that he does not appear to adjudicate between the options of parish and charity schools in his proposal. And when scrutinizing the text and its cool equipoise surrounding the two options of parish and charity schools, one begins to see that the common interpretation takes considerable leeway with its inferences. It is inferred that “the publick” means “government,” “can” means “should,” and “facilitate” means “tax and build.” But taken literally, there is hardly a prescribed government model in paragraphs 54-57. The public might turn toward legislation, or it might turn to other options, which we now know would include charity. As Cropsey (2001) states, “Smith can say no more than ‘it would require the most serious attention of government’” (p. 106). Given the discourse of the time, we should not be shocked that he could be interested in popular education, but reserved about government provision of it.

Another important aspect of understanding the history of educational discourse is that it renders apparent that the public-private debate of today's age is one that is anachronistic to Smith's time. It is a framework that is likely to mislead us. In resisting it, one can more readily note that Smith is analyzing the entire range of educational forms in his article. He focuses his efforts on elucidating the causal and variable impact of endowments and privileges across this entire range of schools. Endowments were a very salient political issue in his time. And Smith offers an empiricism that can explain the observed varieties of quality and usefulness among schools at the time. It would be a false construal to suggest that the article serves some debate of the merits of government versus private schools. Instead, it serves a needed science for the time, and produces uncertain but likely predictions for how a given school might perform.

His final words on the matter, in the conclusion of the chapter, shows no such advocacy as claimed in the common interpretation. It is a great inconvenience for the common interpretation, and one that makes more sense when we understand that charity was a viable option at the time. In this final paragraph he sets all his options in an equipoise. He does not prescribe a solution, nor suggest there is no fixed one. If Smith offers any inclination as to how we should contemplate this open-ended discussion, this final passage suggests that charity and the private market might have greater propriety as an alternative and might offer some "some advantage." This passage has been rarely cited, as West laments. Once one contemplates it, and tries to make sense of his hedging as meaningful instead of awkward, it is hard to submit to the statist interpretation. Smith has remained quite prudent on the issue of provision, and although he can theoretically

imagine government provision being “without injustice” he – or the impartial spectator – would favor charity and the private market. I believe that Smith, like others in his time, separated the issues of the desirability of educating the poor from the question of the means of provision. Today, his passion for the first issue is conflated with his coolness toward the second.

This final assessment of the situation shows that Smith produced a science with some uncertainty. Smith must hedge his views and preferences, extricate himself from the role of a prescriptions, and direct his readers to consider the fine details and conditions of any given situation. It is fair to conclude, that Smith likely wants something more to happen on behalf of the poor, and for government to be involved in some capacity to make it happen. But it would be highly speculative to think that he wants government to take over what charity and private markets had thus far accomplished. And it would be inaccurate to say he urged or pleaded for government to do so. Other, less direct roles for aiding charity and private schools were being discussed at the time, and these roles can make sense of his vague call for government to pay attention to the issue.

Finally, a review of the history of educational discourses brings to light his subtle but important appreciation of charity. Smith signals that the charity school system, though having access to money similar to endowments, might be viewed as operating under the influence of a different institution, a system of judicious donations or “voluntary contributions” that disciplines the schools in a manner similar to the manner in which consumers discipline private schools. In making this distinction, he is

reaffirming a common opinion of the time that the charity schools represented a different spirit that held promise that endowed schools did not.

Still, Smith's article is subtle. Or rather, it might be said that the article assumes implicitly a certain familiarity with an historical discourse. After the French Revolution much of this subtlety is lost as the discourse began to take on a public versus private character. Moreover, the conflation between the topics of desirability and the means of provision happened early. Dugald Stewart in the first decade of the 19th century, believed that Smith was approving of government provision. Stewart cites Smith's passage that "education requires the attention of the public" and also the final paragraph of Smith's article that addresses public utility most clearly. His reading comports with the common one today. But his other sources of authority for the approval of government provision reveal the flawed pattern of his analysis (1855, Vol VIII, p. 50-52). Stewart also cites Bishop Bielby Porteus and Bishop Joseph Butler as similarly espousing government intervention. I have already cited Porteus and demonstrated his support for education through charity. Butler's discussion of education occurs in a *Charge deliver'd to the Clergy* (1751). Here Butler tells the clergy that their role is to "press strongly upon [their congregation] what is their Duty in this Respect, and admonish them of it often if they are negligent" (1751, p. 17). Therefore, in these other examples, we see that Stewart broadly mistook statements of desirability of education as statements of approving legislation. An inverse mistake is then, perhaps, made by J.S. Mill and Thomas Chalmers. They over-identify Smith's criticism of endowments as precluding the possibility of any government involvement in education. In both cases, the subtlety of Smith's emergent science is lost.

I suggest that the article ought to be understood relative to the context and preconceptions of his immediate audience. And we should consider as important that fact that his article is lacking the kinds of arguments one should expect he would have to make given his audience. One should expect an argument that government is superior to charity. One should expect that he would try to disassociate a project of government provision from the much maligned poor rates. And one should expect that he might address Priestley and the other various salient concerns that had left philosophers on the sidelines throughout the whole century. That Smith does not argue for the government in a way that his time would have required, and which other authors after him would recognize a statist proposal would required, suggests to me that the textual coolness he displays toward government is a fair indication of his views.

I have pointed out that his text is open-ended and contingent, disinclined toward government and inclined toward charity and the free market. Smith is writing in the same spirit that philanthropists did in his time, and – in an era that had no blueprints for how government might improve access to education and in an era that had little inclination to expand the direct role for government. There may be three “Smiths” at work in the article. I propose that Smith, the philanthropist, is foremost advocating that people take education for the poor as a serious concern for society. Smith, the empiricist, is providing us material by which to contemplate the options that could expand access to education. And Smith, the philosopher of jurisprudence, reminds us that although there is room to speak of justice, we must keep the science in mind – as the impartial spectator would –

and thus consider that the pursuance of government provision may not lead to the results one desires in terms of justice and/or usefulness.

APPENDIX I

Commentator	Year	Scale of	Smith's Purpose	Posture
Mackay	1898	Detail	favours the free market	--
Viner	1927	Detail	industry/ citizens/ "happier and healthier men in mind and body" / "inequality in the distribution of wealth"	+
Fay	1930	Detail	democratic / compensation	+
Rosenberg	1960	Detail	preoccupied with conditions for market mechanism /devasting remarks of state of ed	--
West	1964	Detail	remedy "apathy and listlessness" / instill Wonder / Scientific exploration and invention	--
West	1964	Detail	(no discussion)	--
Robbins	1965	Detail	just quotes 50 as reasoning	+
West	1965	Detail	wonder and imagination/ to share "his own ardour for philosophical, scientific, and cultural pursuits"	
Miller	1966	Detail	assess the needs of society / return to level of forefathers	--
West	1969	Detail	"self-estrangement" (in detail)	
Freeman	1969	Detail	"to judge their own and society's interests for effectively" / "improve civil government" / increase productivity	+
Heilbroner	1973	Detail	to salvage his economic system from inevitable moral decay -- failed effort	+
Lamb	1973	Detail	against all forms of alienation	
Lawson & Silver	1973	Passing	too important for charity	+
West	1975	Detail	"self-estrangement" (in detail)	+
Blaug	1975	Detail		--
Peacock	1975	Detail		
Rimlinger	1976	Detail		+
Lynn	1976	Detail		--
Speigel	1976	Passing	undo harm /alienation	+
West	1977	Detail	(no discussion)	--
Samuels	1977	Passing		--
D Winch	1978	Detail		+
Himmelfarb	1983	Detail	"to be free and full participant in society"	+

Commentator	Year	Scale of Comm	Smith's Purpose	Posture
Robertson	1983	Detail	"liberating the moral potential" / "play a part in public life" / "universal participation"	+
Harpham	1984	Detail	reinforce psychological bonds to tie society together / reinforce traditional authority	--
Ross	1984	Detail	social stability; also martial spirit	+
Ralphael	1985	Detail	Remedy of Div Labor	+
Wallech	1986	Detail		--
Haakonssen	1989	Detail	"politid insight" / avoid delusion / "enable them to see connections" / social and political stability	+
Werhane	1991			
Baum	1992	Detail	"Maintain rank, peace, self-respect, capacity for judgment / "to control anti-social tendencies"	+
Muller	1993	Detail	Antidote to Div Labor / Private / Against faction and superstition / Deference of Superiors	+
D Friedman	1993	Detail		--
Ando	1993		improve "social interest and moral sensibility" / overcome "inequality and monopoly of state by few"	+
Minowtiz	1994	Passing		+
Skinner	1995	Detail	martial spirit / mutilation / isolation	+
Anderson	1995	Detail	"more moral and orderly" / "rational assent instead of personal respectability / regard for lawful superiors / knowledge of public affairs / how interests connected	+
D Winch	1996	Detail		+
Skinner	1996	Detail		
Fitzgibbons	1997	Detail	Correct Div Labor/ Avoid disaster / Virtue and "cultural reorientation" / "noble dignity"	+
Fitzgibbons	1997	Detail	prevent a "moral leopracy" / "socol cohesion" / "cultural integrity" / expand "intellectual horizons" / "civic spirit"	+
Young	1997	Detail	"level of morality and virtue" / "understanding policy" / "character formation"	--
Berry	1997	Detail	private life / self-command / avoid enthusiasm and supersitition / no Marxian alienation	+
D Friedman	1997	Passing		--
Rothschild	1998	Detail	Reduce inequal moral opportunity / enlightened self-interest / wonder / public safety	+
C Winch	1998	Detail	"Examine critically self-interested bodies"	--
Alvey	1998	Detail	market failure for science / "moderation as a type of public good" / "to make citizens prudent" -- "spectatorship"	+

Commentator	Year	Scale of Comme Smith's Purpose	Posture	
Reisman	1998	Detail	"not to overcome over-concentration" / "to raise productivity" / obedience and stability	+
Griswold	1999	Detail	"social cohesion" / "humanity" / "moral citizenry" (civic	+
Leathers/Raines	1999	Detail	"the social benefits clearly outweighed the costs"	+
Fleischacker	2004	Detail	"restoring liberty" / "to foster freedom"	+
Fleischacker	2004	Detail	"to foster freedom"	+
Kennedy	2005	Detail	Disease control of Div Labor/ General Public Benefit/	+
West (on line)	2005	Detail	"adverse moral trend" / "propereity, prudence, and benevolence"	
Buchan	2006	Detail	"Less open to political contagion"/ Against faction and philosophy / to meet "epistemic demans of measuring propriety"	+
Schliesser	2006	Passing	/ "proper functioning of morality" / public order	+
Craig Smith	2006	Detail	"preventing...disputes / socializing / providing degree of understanding /increasing cumative sum of knowledge	+
Hyard	2007	Detail	Private utility / obedience to gov / private admiraton	--
Weinstein	2007	Detail	Remedy of Div Labor/ Market Failure / Cultivating moral judgment and sympathy / Ease class tensions	+
Hill	2007	Detail	social order not alienation / "to inculcate patterns of civility"	+
Rasmussen	2008	Detail	Team fanaticism / respect law / see through faction /more informed citizens	+
Bygrave	2010	Detail	vocational	--
Quinn	2013	Detail	"to shape the character" toward self-command and autonomy	+
Weinstein	2013	Detail	"to cultivate rational thinking" / "equity" "happines and fairness"	+
Aspromourgos	2013	Passing	/ "economic advancement" / "governance of differences"	+
Pack	2013	Detail	"acquisiton of labour skills"	+
Paganelli	2013	Passing	"better citizens" /	
Sen	2013	Passing		+
Labio	2013	Passing	"moral and expedient grounds"	+
ver Ecke	2013	Detail	combats stuptidity / enhances intellect	+
Craig Smith	2014	Detail	utility as determined by society and the stateman	--
Hall	2014	Detail	"to think rationally" / to be fit "to rule themsleve politically or guide their own lives" / "expanded self-interest"	+

APPENDIX II

Smith is using a very broad and encompassing term of “public schools” in paragraph 17 that is different than today’s usage. In general, it is a term designated to distinguish preexisting schools with a physical structure and a set curriculum. It is not a term used to designate the source of funding. It stands in opposition to “private schools” but the connotation of private schools is what is different here. They are in opposition based on manner of instruction, size, and student body instead more than manner of funding.

Private schools are one of two sorts at the time. For the poor, private schools were often called “adventure schools” (Anderson 1969, p. 106-111). Adventure schools – a derogatory name to suggest the wild and speculative ambitions of their owners – were small, low capital and inexpensive schools, usually conducted out of a teacher’s home. The term private school then refers to fee-based schools that serve the lowest ranks and are very dubious undertakings without a public presence.

For the upper classes, the private school is be equated with “domestic schooling” in the debates at the time between Locke’s views and others’. This latter type commonly occurs in the home of the student (though not always), commonly serving a *small* group of students of similar rank and peerage, and led by a personally selected tutor, delivering

a curriculum specific to the students' and the parents' wishes. Therefore, they too serve a specific subgroup in society and they too lack a public presence.

Public schools, inversely, are pre-established schools with a physical structure, a set curriculum, a funding stream that may or may not rely on endowments, and are open to the public at large. In much of the discourse of the time, "public education" would rely on both endowments and fees – and doing so did not make them private-ish. They were still "public" – a term meant to distinguish them from endeavors outside the traditional public sphere.

A number of sources can substantiate these definitions. For David Williams, the public school is a large pre-existing school as opposed to a small one led by a tutor. He writes, that private schools are "for private persons, who are to pass their lives without enterprise" (1779, p. 204). He continues, "Private institutions have been formed, where youth have been taught sciences, and taught morals with great tenderness and care. These are supported by unquestionable abilities in many of their tutors; and they have the approbation and sanction of the first philosophers of the age" (1779, p. 204). Private schools are a form of domestic education for Williams. Their fault lies in the fact that parents "may more easily extend their influence over small than over great [i.e., large] institutions" (p. 204). Thus, by inference, public schools are large ones open to the public as a whole, and able to maintain a set curriculum. Williams is venturing into the public domestic debate. Public schools stand opposite private as understood to be domestic schools.

Reverend Richard Shepherd writes in 1782 about how preferences in this debate depends upon the characterization one chooses to imagine when considering public and private:

It has been a point of controversy much agitated, whether a public or a private education be preferable...If by private education be meant an education at the mother's apron string, or in the father's stable; where, by sycophantry of servants and dependents every passion is indulged...; and by a public education be understood an education in some seminary from home; no one can hesitate to prefer the latter. (1782, p. 1)

But then he continues with a different characterization:

If by a public education be designed an education at some great school, consisting perhaps of one, two, or three hundred boys where one general and uniform mode of education must prevail; those boys partly boarders, and partly oppidans, some consequently of the lowest classes, vagrants in the streets, importing low and vicious habits from the canaille of the people; and by a private education if we to suppose an education where twenty boys, of equal rank and conditions, are placed under the care of a judicious person; who has it in his power to vary his instruction according to the genius of his pupils...some will incline with Milton and a Locke to give the preference to a private education. (1782, p.2).

The importance of elaborating on this definition is to eliminate some confusion, and show that the muted praise he has for public schools in paragraph 17 is not to affirm that government schooling is a flawless mechanism. He particularly mentions in the

paragraph that the public schools achieve whatever success they achieve is due to the fee system that they extensively rely on.

A number of scholars have compartmentalized Smith's criticism to universities, in doing so they seem to have treated paragraph 17 as an important structural point absolving government elementary schools from the criticism that proceeds it. Reisman (1998) writes: "In respect of Oxford, Smith was a libertarian...In respect of secondary education for the lower classes, he was visibly more interventionist" (p. 376). Rothschild treats universities and elementary schools for the poor as separate issues. "Smith is bitterly critical of established institutions for the education of young men...but he is strongly in favour, by contrast, of public support for the education of the 'common people'" (p. 210). Similar treatment are given by Morrow (1927, p. 326), Himmelfarb (1983, p. 58), Robbin (1965, p. 90). In general, there is truth to Rosenberg's (1960) accusation that Smith's views on endowments have been seen as "mere curiosum" (p. 568).

The most extreme example of such a practice of compartmentalization can be seen in an abridged version of WN that appeared in France in 1790. The abridged version in *Bibliothèque de l'homme public* (Vol 1, part 3) does not do the article on education much justice. Daniel Diatkine (2013) reviews the abridged version and finds that it explains how "very strangely misunderstood" WN is among the French. Diatkine does not address the topic of education, but regarding other topics, he concludes that the abridgment WN removes "theoretical difficulties" for a French audience, and as a whole

forces Smith's work to be more systemically in accordance with the physiocrats' views (p. 218; 220).

As for the article on education, the abridged version provides most of the first 17 paragraphs of the article – the paragraphs which address the problems of the endowments most clearly. However, it ends at paragraph 17, which provides a mildly positive note about English elementary and grammar schools being “much less corrupted than the universities.” From this paragraph (to be discussed in more detail below), the redacted version jumps directly to the final paragraph of the article, which asserts there are (thusly) public benefits to educating the poor in elementary schools. The effect of such an abridgement is to relegate criticism before paragraph 17 to an analysis specific to universities, and to posture his muted praise for elementary schools as if it were the *premise*, or turning point in his thinking, for pursuing governmental provision. What has been deleted is everything else that occupied my attention in Chapter 3.

APPENDIX III

October 9 1696: Act for settling of schools

Our sovereign lord, considering how prejudiciall the want of schools in many places have been, and how beneficiall the establishing and setleing therof in every paroch will be to this church and kingdom, therfor, his majestie, with the advice and consent of the estates of parliament, statutes and ordains that there be a school settled and established, and a schoolmaster appointed, in every paroch not already provided, by advice of the heritors and minister of the paroch. And for that effect, that the heritors in every paroch meet and provide a commodious house for a school, and settle and modifie a sallary to a schoolmaster, which shall not be under one hundred merks nor above two hundred merks, to be payed yearly at two terms Whitsunday and Martinmass by equall portions, and that they stent and lay on the said sallary conform to every heritors valued rent with in the paroch, allowing each heritor relieff from his tennents of the half of his proportion for settling and maintaining of a school and payment of the schoolmaster's sallary, which sallary is declared to be by and attour the casualities which formerly belonged to the readers and clerks of the kirk session. And if the heritors, or major part of them, shall not convene or, being convened, shall not agree among themselves, then and in that case the presbitrie shall apply to the commissioners of the supply of the shire, who, or any five of them, shall have power to establish a school and settle and modifie a

sallary for a schoolmaster, not being under one hundred merks nor above two hundred merks yearly, as said is, and to rent and lay on the samen upon the heritors, conform to their valued rent, which shall be also valid and effectuell as if it had been done by the heritors themselves. And because the proportion imposed upon every heritor will be but small therfor, for the better and more ready payment therof, it is statute and ordained that, if two terms proportions run in the third unpayed, then these that so fail in payment shall be lyable in the double of their proportions then resting, and in the double of every terms proportion that shall be resting thereafter, ay and while the schoolmaster be compleatly payed, and that without any defalcation, and that letters of horning and all other executorialls necessar be directed at the instance of the schoolmaster for payment of the said stipend and double of the proportions in manner forsaid; and discharges all suspensions to pass against schoolmasters of the sallaries, except upon consignation or a valid discharge. And if any suspension be past, that the lords discuss the samen summarly without abideing the course of the roll. And it is hereby declared that liferenters, dureing their lifetime, shall be lyable in payment of the proportions imposed on the lands liferented and execution, in manner forsaid, shall pass against them for that effect, and the heritors shall be alwayes free of the same dureing the liferenter's lifetime, and if any person find themselves wronged by the inequality of the proportions imposed, it shall be lawfull for them to seek redress therof befor the commissioners of supply, sheriff of the shyre, or other judge competent, within the space of year and day after the imposing of the stent, and no otherways. As also, it is declared that the provideing of the said schools and schoolmasters is a pious use within the paroch, to which it shall be lawfull and

leisum to patrons to imploy the vacant stipends as they shall see cause, excepting from this act the bounds of the synod of Argyle, in respect that by a former act of parliament in the year one thousand, six hundred and ninety, the vacant stipends within the said bounds are destined for the setting up and maintaining of schools in manner therein mentioned. And the said vacant stipends are hereby expressly appointed to be thereto applied at the sight of the sheriff of the bounds forsaid. And lastly, his majestie, with advice and consent forsaid, ratifies and approves all former lawes, customs and constitutions made for establishing and maintaining of schools within the kingdom in so far as the same are not altered nore innovat by this present act.

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