

# Adam Smith on the cyclicity of the rise and fall of civilization

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## ABSTRACT

As a historical framework, Adam Smith used the four-stages theory of social development, which was included in a broader one, namely, the history of civilization. First, in narrating history, Smith criticized the perspective of the historical cycle of the rise and fall of civilization adopted by Machiavelli and other writers. On that occasion, he inquired into the unique mechanism and development of the modern European civilization through comparing it with the ancient classical civilization and the uncivilized feudal past. Furthermore, Smith attributed the unique mechanism of the modern civilization to some important aspects of it: the invention of fire-arms (the military revolution), the production system based on the division of labor without slavery, and the establishment of absolute power. For Smith, the system of natural liberty suited modern civilization in which many governments were not republican. However, he regarded republican self-government as indicating the progress of society. In the long run, Smith recognized the contradictions and ambivalence in the modern civilization.

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## 1 Introduction

In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* in the 1762–1763 session (*LJ(A)*), Adam Smith argued, “Opulence and Freedom, the two greatest blessings men can possess.”<sup>1</sup> As human beings aimed at opulence and freedom, their history could be depicted as the pursuit of opulence and freedom. In fact, Smith proposed the view of the history of opulence, or his four-stages theory, which was based on four modes of subsistence; that is, hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial societies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, A. (1982) *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein, Liberty Fund, iii. 111. (*LJ(A)*).

<sup>2</sup>See for example, Smith, A. (1981) *An Inquiry into the nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations* (*WN*), ed. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd, Liberty Fund, Book V, and *LJ(A)*, i. 26ff.

The four-stages theory was included in another distinction of society between rude (barbarous) and civilized societies—a broader view of society containing economic structure, governmental systems, and manners. Certainly, commercial society had the same economic structure with civilized society. For, in considering the division of labor, Smith used the term of commercial society interchangeably with that of civilized society, as he regarded both societies as based on the division of labor.<sup>3</sup> However, the four-stages theory, or the economic distinction, did not cover all the causes of civilization. Specifically, the modes of government were among the most important factors in societal change.

Although Smith did not define the concept of civilization explicitly, Smith used that concept in various writings to grasp the essential mechanisms of the modern European civilization. In doing so, Smith adopted an historical perspective; specifically, he compared the modern civilization with both the ancient classical one and the uncivilized past society.

In examining history, Smith's problem is whether or not opulence is compatible with liberty. In his writings, liberty has at least three meanings in relation to governmental systems: first, ancient democratic liberty, realized by the ancient classical civilization; second, republican liberty based on self-government, effectuated by the modern Britain, Holland, Italy, North America, etc.; third, liberty compatible with modern monarchies, or the system of natural liberty. These three different types of liberty are fit for different social situations, and so constitute the core factors of the historical change of civilization.

As Turgot and Mirabeau put it, it is a contemporary awareness of the issues whether the modern civilization would repeat the cyclical history of the Greco-Roman rise and fall. This essay will discuss how Smith grappled with the problem of the cyclicity of civilization, and how he built his own historical framework of social change. With this intent, the essay focuses both on the impacts of the different types of liberty on society, and on the relationship between liberty and opulence in history. The following parts examine Smith's historical criticism of the cyclicity of civilization, the historical development and unique mechanism of the modern civilization, and its prospects.

## 2 Criticizing the cyclicity of civilization

Smith responded to the problem of whether the modern civilization would repeat the cyclical history of the rise and fall of civilization.

In his *Wealth of Nations*, although Egypt, India, and China were also considered as opulent, Smith focused primarily on Europe, including Italy, Holland, Spain, France, and Britain (including the British North American colonies).<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> *WN*, I. i–iv.

<sup>4</sup> *WN*, III. i. 7.

a sense, the *Wealth of Nations* was an analysis of the contemporary prosperous civilized society, the recognition of which was based on Smith's perspective of the historical change of society. This point was expounded on at length in a note on the *Lectures of Jurisprudence* (especially *LJ(A)*). In this note, he explained the developing and declining processes of civilization in the ancient Greek and Rome, and the course of the formation of the modern civilization after the fall of the ancient Roman Empire.

Like Athens,<sup>5</sup> the ancient Roman society was also considered civilized. In the section on freedom of divorce, Smith pointed out that there were prosperous societies in contemporary Europe as well as in Athens and Rome. During the first period of society, the Roman people were poor, and the Roman women maintained their chastity. However, during the last period of the Roman republics, women's morals were corrupted due to their depravity, which continued throughout the imperial period of Rome.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Smith regarded both the last period of the Roman republics and the entire period of the Roman empire as those of a civilized, but depraved society.

Hence, the questions arise as to whether the ancient Rome's experience of progress and decline would be repeated, and whether the contemporary European civilized society would decline in the same manner as the ancient Rome. Concerning these questions, Smith was probably conscious of the republican theory of the cyclical view of history, which had been revived by Machiavelli and accepted by the early modern British writers.

There has been considerable debate over the definition and characteristics of early modern republicanism, on which this essay shall comment briefly. Both John Pocock and Quentin Skinner, although at conflict over the definition of republicanism, agreed with the opinion that the early modern British republicanism had kept its train of thought through Machiavelli (Skinner avoided the term "republicanism" because it included the theory of mixed constitution; he created the term "neo-Roman theory of liberty," which virtually denoted republican theory). They also agreed that republican language had been used to criticize the Walpolean oligarchy of the eighteenth century. Pocock emphasized that republicans saw the history of society as that of civic virtue followed by its corruption, and that British republicans in the eighteenth century had considered the corrupting of contemporary civilized society as the repetition of that of the ancient Roman empire. This corrupting process could be caused by the loss of civic virtue. Thus, they criticized the contemporary symptoms of the loss of virtue and the resulting corruption.<sup>7</sup> In contrast with Pocock, Skinner emphasized his version of the republican view of liberty, which was

<sup>5</sup> *LJ(A)*, iv. 62–74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 7–12.

<sup>7</sup> Pocock, J. (2003) *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine Political Thought and Atlantic Republic Tradition*, Princeton University Press.

the liberty meant both self-government based on the will of all members of a community, and opposition to the servile political state in which the will of a certain member of a community decided the fate of all the community members.<sup>8</sup>

Insofar as Smith's writings are concerned, liberty means both self-government and opposition to slavery as suggested by Skinner, as well as a denial of the previous cyclical theory of history emphasized by Pocock. All of these factors constituted the core of Smith's historical narrative.

Smith was conscious of the problem of the cyclicity of the rise and fall of civilization, and criticized the cyclical theory on the basis of two factors in which the ancient and modern civilization differed substantially; military affairs and slavery.

About the former, Smith said, "The first duty of the sovereign, therefore, that of defending the society from the violence and injustice of other independent societies, grows gradually more and more expensive, as the society advances in civilization".<sup>9</sup> In addition to the introduction of the standing army, "The great change introduced into the art of war by the invention of fire-arms, has enhanced still further both the expense of exercising and disciplining any particular number of soldiers in time of peace, and that of employing them in time of war."<sup>10</sup> Thus, because of the so-called military revolution,<sup>11</sup> military costs became more expensive, so the difference between the ancient and modern civilization arose:

In modern war the great expense of fire-arms gives an evident advantage to the nation which can best afford that expense; and consequently, to an opulent and civilized, over a poor and barbarous nation. ... In modern times the poor and barbarous find it difficult to defend themselves against the opulent and civilized.<sup>12</sup>

In the early modern period, it was well known that the ancient Roman civilization had been destroyed by the Northern Barbarians due to the loss of military virtue of the Roman people. Whether or not this declining historical process would be repeated in the contemporary Europe was a hot issue; for instance, there was the standing army controversy at the end of the seventeenth century. Smith argued that the destruction of civilization by the barbarians could not be repeated because of the military revolution. On this point, he said

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<sup>8</sup> Skinner, Q. (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> *WN*, V. i. a. 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, V. i. a. 43.

<sup>11</sup> About the military revolution, see Parker, G. (1988) *The Military Revolution: Military innovation and the rise of the West, 1500–1800*, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> *WN*., V. i. a. 44.

as follows:

The invention of fire-arms, an invention which at first sight appears to be so pernicious, is certainly favourable both to the permanency and to the extension of civilization.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, he apparently recognized and criticized the cyclical view of the history of civilization.

Smith added, “Though empires, like all the other works of men, have all hitherto proved mortal, yet every empire aims at immortality.”<sup>14</sup> Smith knew the historical viewpoint which postulated that the Roman civilization had been ruined by the Northern barbarians because the Romans had lost their courage because of the propagation of luxury. In addition, he did not deny the possibility of the decline of the modern civilized society. Through his recognition of the military revolution, he theoretically denied the cyclicity of the rise and decline of civilization. What his theory of history implied was the unique process of the modern civilization.

In addition to the above-mentioned military affairs, Smith observed that whereas the ancient civilization was based on slavery, the modern civilization was based on free labor. In the modern Europe, even poor people without movables and immovables could work and earn money, but, in the ancient society, poor people could not because most work was done by slaves.<sup>15</sup> Slavery was one of the core factors behind the decline of the ancient civilization; first, due to slavery, poor citizens could not get jobs, the loss of property meant the loss of work and means of subsistence; second, having fallen into this state, the poor were easily bribed by the nobles, so the very system of the Roman constitution was turned into a mere shell; third, poor citizens without jobs and property frequently rioted, so that there was the constant threat of anarchy.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the modern Europe was unique in abolishing slavery.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the ancient and modern civilization, although both depending on the division of labor, had structurally different social mechanisms, namely, the division of labor with or without slavery. Accordingly, the process of decline could theoretically be different. In addition, that dependency caused the decline of the free citizens was similar to the view of liberty suggested by Skinner. For Smith, ancient slavery was one of the main reasons why the prosperous Roman civilization was ruined and the process of corruption began.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, V. ii. c. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *LJ(A)*, iii. 142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 139–144.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 101.

Thus, since the ancient and modern civilization had different social mechanisms, the cyclical repetition of the decline of the ancient civilization could theoretically be avoided. Because of the military revolution, the modern civilization could not fall prey to destruction by barbarians. In the modern civilized society, based on the division of labor without slavery, even poor people could become economically independent, thus securing their independence and freedom of the individual.

### 3 The historical development and unique mechanism of the modern civilization

In grasping the mechanism of the modern civilization, Smith referred not only to the experience of the ancient classical civilization but also to that of the uncivilized feudal society in Europe, and the subsequent advancement to the modern civilization.

Besides the above-mentioned independence and freedom of the individual, the modern civilization without slavery was also related to a certain form of government. Generally speaking, Smith classified the forms of government into two types, namely, monarchical and republican. The latter was subdivided into two types of government: aristocratic and democratic.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, in modern civilized countries, he thought, there was no democratic republic, as had existed in the ancient civilization. The modern small republics in Holland and Italy were regarded not as democratic but as aristocratic.<sup>19</sup> Smith made the following observation:

The institution of slavery seems to have been the cause of this difference. In the modern republics every person is free, and the poorer sort are all employed in some necessary occupation. They would therefore find it a very great inconvenience to be obliged to assemble together and debate concerning publick affairs or tryalls of causes. ... But in the ancient states the mechanick arts were exercised only by the slaves. The freemen were mostly rich, or if they were not rich they were at least idle-men, as they could have no business to apply themselves to. They therefore would find no inconvenience in being called to the publick affairs.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, the citizens in the modern republic entrusted the magistracy to some assembly composed of a small number of people.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the modern

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 68.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 69.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 70.

division of labor was intimately related to the centrally governed states of the modern Europe.

This centralization of the modern government had its origin in the past feudal form of government while also being comparable with the government of the ancient civilization. Before the propagation of luxury, the mode of government in Western Europe was the feudal government, in which the nobility exercised considerable influence, in spite of the general historical tendency for kings to consolidate their hold on power. Nevertheless, as the nobles became addicted to luxury, they dissipated their fortunes on luxurious goods. Concomitantly, the emancipation of the serfs gradually weakened the political power of the nobles. As a result, “the fall of the nobles, having left no rival to the kings power, established an absolute government.”<sup>22</sup> This historical change happened in “France, Spain, Portugal, and in England after the fall of the great nobility.”<sup>23</sup>

However, unlike the other Western countries, England established its “system of liberty” where the parliament had the actual political power after the introduction of an absolute government.<sup>24</sup> Whereas other Western countries had developed full standing armies for the support of their absolute government, England did not establish one, and so was not prevented from establishing its free constitution. English liberty was also secured by the independence of the judiciary and the frequency of elections.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the English free constitution was exceptional among the modern civilized countries. In addition, because the same economic mode involving commercial society resulted in different constitutional structures, it could be said that Smith’s theory of social development was not one-sided economic determinism.

About the centralized state, or the monopoly of power by the central government, Smith took an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, under the feudal system, because oppressive nobles lived in close proximity with the common people, the latter could not stabilize their property. However, he said as follows:

In an absolute government, as that of the Tudors, the greatest part of the nation, who were in the remote parts of the kingdom, had nothing to fear, nor were in any great danger of being appressed [oppressed] by the sovereign, who was terrible to those only who were near at hand to the seat of his court.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, in the absolute government, people could make sure of their stability of property and enjoy personal security. On the other hand, the modern

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 160–161.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 166.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 178.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 5–8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 165–166.

governmental system exercised a monopoly of power which made it difficult for people to resist an unjust and oppressive monarch.

On that occasion, the three main branches of the sovereign power—executive, legislative, and judicial<sup>27</sup>—originated. The structure of the state was introduced in the pastoral age because people came to possess property like domestic animals.<sup>28</sup> The oldest of the three branches, namely, the executive power, was first established in the pastoral period, but was precarious. In the civilized age, when the executive became absolute, people would be severely punished if they engaged in violent conflict in peace time. The judiciary was also precarious, and was established later than the executive. At first, judges were nothing but arbitrators, and had no power to enforce their decisions. In the civilized period, their authority was fully established. In the same way, the legislative was gradually established. Accordingly, all the three powers became thoroughly established in the civilized state. “There is now no power of resistance, whether the sentence of the judge appear to the person to be just or not; and in the same manner there is no remedy against a law which appears to be unjust unless it be repealed.”<sup>29</sup>

In England, the actual sovereign power was not in the king, but “the sovereign power is lodged in the king and Parliament together.”<sup>30</sup> However, the English free constitution was exceptional. The general constitutional form of the modern civilized countries resulted in the following:

There is no doubt then but the power of the king may be resisted; but the question is, when is it lawfull or allowable to resist the power of the king and Parliament. They would never have any thoughts of making any laws which should tell us that, when they were beyond such and such limits, the people were not bound to obey them but might resist. ... In whatever place there is a sovereign, from the very nature of things the power must be absolute.<sup>31</sup>

In consequence, for Smith, the modern civilization was expressed in absolute government in which the centralized power was fully established, and in which no other figure than the sovereign could retain political power. Smith saw this absoluteness of power as ambivalent; on the one hand, it ensured political and social stability, and people could enjoy security; on the other hand, it made it difficult for citizens to resist an oppressive sovereign.

About resistance, “all disputes of this sort have been decided by force and violence.”<sup>32</sup> This was the moment where Smith found no general rule of historical

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 7–9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 112.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 103.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 113–114.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 103.



development because of the difficulty and unpredictability of resistance, or the fluctuations of government. Paradoxically, it could be argued that insofar as the theoretical potentiality of Smith's theory was concerned, this unpredictability of history could be the sole remedy against the general tendency toward absolute government.

## 4 The prospects of the modern civilization

### Civilization as the society of humanity

For Smith, because the monopoly of power, the stability of order, and the security of property and person were fully secured in the civilized society, the types of communication and passions were thus transformed.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith depicted civilization as a society not of self-denial but of humanity. Smith stated as follows:

Among civilized nations, the virtues which are founded upon humanity, are more cultivated than those which are founded upon self-denial and the command of the passions. Among rude and barbarous nations, it is quite otherwise, the virtues of self-denial are more cultivated than those of humanity. ... A polished people being accustomed to give way, in some measure, to the movements of nature, become frank, open, and sincere. Barbarians, on the contrary, being obliged to smother and conceal the appearance of every passion, necessarily acquire the habits of falsehood and dissimulation.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, for Smith, in the civilized society, people respect each other politely, and enjoyed friendly association and communication.

Nevertheless, this virtue had some limit, namely, its full enjoyment needed a certain degree of wealth. Then, what was the state of poor people in civilized society? Smith referred to the harmful effects of the division of labor. By the division of labor,

the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour. ... comes to be confined to a few very simple operations; frequently to one or two. ... The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of

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<sup>33</sup>Smith, A. (1982) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ed. D.D. Raphael, A.L. Macfie, Liberty Fund, V. 2. 8, 11.

such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, as the division of labor resulted in the narrowing of the laborers' mind and viewpoint, the laborers could be excluded from enjoying such flow-ers of civilization as communicating and enjoying association with each other. This negative effect was more noticeable in the modern civilization than in the ancient one. For, whereas the ancient civilization was based on the division of labor by slaves, the modern civilization, based on free labor, extended its division of labor to almost all citizens. The latter, unlike those in the ancient civilization, could be more directly inflicted with the above-mentioned negative effect of the division of labor. On this point, Smith denied the cyclic process of the rise and fall of civilization, and tried to grasp the unique mechanism of the modern civilization.

Thus, it could be interpreted that Smith made a distinction between the positive and negative effects of civilization, the latter of which could be considered as an obstruction to the further progress of civilization. It could be speculated that this progress could be achieved by a certain factor like education.

### **Toward the further progress of the modern civilization**

Although the above-mentioned aspect of civilization as a society based on humanity was enabled by the establishment of centralized government and the stability it created, this did not mean the complete inevitability and affirmation of the absolute power in the modern civilization. Smith admired another mode of government, which did exist in the contemporary modern civilization.

This point was conspicuously illustrated in Smith's treatment of the North American colonies. When, in the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith analyzed the prosperity of the North American colonies, he pointed out, as its causes, not only the vastness of North America, but also its liberty. Civilized British people went to colonize North America with agricultural and other skills, and with "the habit of subordination, some notion of the regular government which takes place in their own country, of the system of laws which support it, and of a regular administration of justice; and they naturally establish something of the same kind in the new settlement."<sup>35</sup> Smith said as follows:

But there are no colonies of which the progress has been more rapid than that of the English in North America.

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<sup>34</sup> *WN*, V. i. f. 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. vii. b. 2.

Plenty of good land, and liberty to manage their own affairs their own way, seem to be the two great causes of the prosperity of all new colonies.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Smith argued that because the establishment of law and government could enable people to enjoy security in respect to their property, and protect them from being invaded and plundered by enemies, people then could advance in industry, arts, and sciences, and promote the division of labor.<sup>37</sup> However, the absolute government of the civilized European society was not the ultimate form. Self-government was the more preferable mode of government for the promotion of prosperity than the European absolute government.

Concerning this self-government, despite the fact that the development of the North American colonies was retarded to some degree by the policy of their home country, Smith argued as follows:

In every thing, except their foreign trade, the liberty of the English colonists to manage their own affairs their own way is complete. It is in every respect equal to that of their fellow-citizens at home, and is secured in the same manner, by an assembly of the representatives of the people, who claim the sole right of imposing taxes for the support of the colony government. ... The councils, which, in the colony legislatures, correspond to the House of Lords in Great Britain, are not composed of an hereditary nobility. ... In none of the English colonists is there any hereditary nobility. ... There is more equality, therefore, among the English colonists than among the inhabitants of the mother country. Their manners are more republican, and their government, those of three of the provinces of New England in particular, have hitherto been more republican too.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, Smith considered the republican self-government as preferable for the promotion of prosperity, improvement of people's behavior and passions, and further progress of the mode of law and government as compared to the contemporary European, or even the English form of government. For Smith, self-government without the hereditary nobility was more favorable than the English government with the nobility. In the same way, a society composed of citizens deemed to be equal was preferable.

The modern absolute government where there was no governmental oppression could introduce a system of natural liberty, in which "every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. vii. b. 15–16.

<sup>37</sup> *LJ(A)*, vi. 19.

<sup>38</sup> *WN*, IV. vii. b. 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. ix. 51.

However, the system of natural liberty was not thoroughly identical with the above-mentioned republican self-government. If the system of natural liberty required a republican self-government, the formation of the modern European civilization, in which many countries were not republican, could not be explained. In reality, Smith included not only England but also France and other monarchies as the subjects of his investigation into the modern civilization. Furthermore, if Smith had regarded the republican government as an inevitable aspect of civilization, the political regime of contemporary Europe would have needed a radical and complete regime change. He considered both the positive and negative aspects of the existing civilized countries. The system of natural liberty could be introduced in the modern civilized countries, whether the form of government be monarchical or republican. While the system of natural liberty was similar to negative liberty, republican self-government, which required that citizens participate in public affairs, was an expression of positive liberty, and could do more to enhance the independence and equality of people than could negative liberty. This was vindicated by the progress of the North American colonies.

As a result, Smith was in sympathy with republican self-government, which was exceptional in contemporary Europe, but which offered the opportunity to construct a more equal society without the hereditary nobility, and to promote the further progress of civilization.

## 5 Conclusion

For Smith, commercial society was not the full expression of civilization. The modern civilized society was one where the safety of property and person was fully assured on the basis of political stability. As a result of this safety, society could develop the division of labor, and so promote the prosperity of society. In addition, civilization was related not only to political and economic factors, but also to the types of behavior and passions. For civilization meant a society in which people could cultivate their manners and passions, respect each other humanely, and enjoy the free exchange of their feelings and opinions. Also, because of its prosperity, people could pursue their intellectual curiosity and pleasures, thus promoting the arts and sciences. In this manner, the civilized society comprised not only self-interested individuals but also diverse people pursuing their intellectual interests. However, such civilization had its limitations. Certainly, the rich could enjoy free and cheerful association and communication, but poor workers became ignorant and narrow-minded. Both the positive and negative aspects were caused by the division of labor.

Hence, Smith's view of civilization was characterized by ambivalence with respect to both the positive and negative influences of such a society. Certainly, at first sight, Smith's ambivalent attitude toward civilization could appear to be contradictory. A civilized society in which people could enjoy their association

and communication appeared to contradict one in which the division of labor caused the alienation of workers. In addition, the civilization of the system of natural liberty would appear to contradict a society based on republican self-government.

Nevertheless, these seeming contradictions could explain Smith's dynamic view of society; namely, he saw contemporary civilized society not as perfect, but as a society in which both positive and negative aspects existed, and in which its further progress was possible, although its decline was also possible. For Smith, the republican self-government, which was a society composed of equal citizens without an hereditary nobility, meant the further progress of society.

In spite of that, he argued, "It is now more than two hundred years since the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, a period as long as the course of human prosperity usually endures."<sup>40</sup> As a result, it could be argued that, fundamentally, Smith feared the repetition of the rise and fall of civilization. Certainly, Smith's history of civilization could not be regarded as the complete affirmation of the endless progress of civilization, nor could it deny the possibility of the decline of civilization. Unlike Machiavelli and other republican thinkers, what Smith denied was the repetition of the same process of the rise and fall of civilization. Through the comparison of the ancient with the modern, Smith discovered the unique mechanism of social change in modern civilization. In addition, he also denied the predictability of civilization, since the theory of the cyclicity of the rise and fall of civilization would make it possible to predict the future course of society. Accordingly, while discovering the unique structure of the modern civilization, Smith's theory of civilization could no longer answer questions as to whether the modern civilization would prevail or be ruined in the future or whether the modern civilized monarchies would be transformed into another constitution such as the republican self-government. At the ultimate limit of the historical analysis, the problem of *Fortuna*, an unpredictable historical force, did not end with Smith.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, III. iv. 20.