

## BETWEEN COMMERCE AND EMPIRE: DAVID HUME, COLONIAL SLAVERY AND COMMERCIAL INCIVILITY

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**Abstract:** Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought has recently been reclaimed as a robust, albeit short-lived, cosmopolitan critique of European imperialism. This essay complicates this interpretation through a study of David Hume's reflections on commerce, empire and slavery. I argue that while Hume condemned the colonial system of monopoly, war and conquest, his strictures against empire did not extend to colonial slavery in the Atlantic. This was because colonial slavery represented a manifestly *uncivil* institution when judged by enlightened metropolitan sensibilities, yet also a decisively *commercial* institution pivotal to the eighteenth-century global economy. Confronted by the paradoxical 'commercial incivility' of modern slavery, Hume opted for disavowing the link between slavery and commerce, and confined his criticism of slavery to its ancient, feudal and Asiatic incarnations. I contend that Hume's disavowal of the commercial barbarism of the Atlantic economy is part of a broader ideological effort to separate the idea of commerce from its imperial origins and posit it as the liberal antithesis of empire. The implications of analysis, I conclude, go beyond the eighteenth-century debates over commerce and empire, and more generally pertain to the contradictory entwinement of liberalism and capitalism.

**Keywords:** liberalism, empire, capitalism, colonialism, slavery, commerce, Enlightenment, David Hume, Adam Smith

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### Introduction

One of the more remarkable recent reorientations in the field of political theory has been the 'imperial turn'.<sup>3</sup> Especially amongst the scholars of intellectual history, the entanglement of modern Western political thought with the history of European colonialism is now a half-truism,<sup>4</sup> although disagreement abounds over the extent, significance and contemporary implications of such entangle-

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Jennifer Pitts and three anonymous reviewers from *History of Political Thought* for their helpful comments on the earlier drafts of this essay.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see J. Pitts, 'Theories of Empire and Imperialism', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13 (2010), pp. 211–35.

<sup>4</sup> See especially the essays recently collected in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. S. Muthu (Cambridge, 2012). For the intersection of imperial history and theories of international relations, see D. Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013).

ments.<sup>5</sup> The debate has been particularly vivid when the political ideas or thinkers under study are associated with 'liberalism' or the 'Enlightenment', as these intellectual traditions are ostensibly incompatible with relations of domination and subjugation inherent in modern empires.<sup>6</sup> A major touchstone for testing these traditions' intermixture with imperial agendas has been to interrogate the arguments of (proto)liberal European thinkers regarding the legal and cultural status of non-Europeans, as well as their judgments on Europeans' treatment of non-Europeans in the context of imperial expansion. Theories of universalism and relativism, pluralism and provincialism, and cosmopolitanism and exceptionalism furnish these investigations with their principal objects of inquiry in charting out the courses of collusion and collision between modern European political thought and colonialism.

This article pursues a promising yet relatively under-served line of inquiry into this field, one that adopts as its central optic the political economy of empire. Parting with the dominant preoccupation with European representations of the non-Europeans, it aims to bring into focus European thinkers' perceptions of their fellow Europeans as agents of distinctly *modern and commercially driven acts of conquest, plunder and enslavement*. At the centre of my analysis is the status of coercive economic enterprises at imperial frontiers as a theoretical problem to be negotiated and judged by metropolitan standards of liberalism, civility and enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> While a comprehensive triangulation of this problem exceeds the space of this article, I suggest that a productive starting point is offered by the works of David Hume, the Scottish Enlightenment luminary, champion of modern commercial civility, and forerunner of classical political economy. Hume's writings on commerce and empire provide us with a window onto the challenges posed to metropolitan conceptions of commercial civility by imperial instantiations of commercial incivility in the eighteenth century. I contend that colonial plantation slavery in particular confronted Hume with a thorny conundrum, as it constituted at

<sup>5</sup> For a useful recent appraisal, see 'The Dream Machine: On Liberalism and Empire', in D. Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016), pp. 19–48.

<sup>6</sup> For starkly contrasting positions on liberalism's relationship to empire, see U. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999); and J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> My interpretation is therefore concerned less with what Europeans thought of *who the colonized were* than with their views on *what the colonizers did*, though this is not to overlook that answers given to these questions historically mediated one another. An exemplary and rather controversial case is Edmund Burke's differential treatment of Indians, Africans and Native Americans. See Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, ch. 5; Pitts, *Turn to Empire*, ch. 3; M. Kohn and D. O'Neill, 'A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America', *Political Theory*, 34 (2006), pp. 192–228.

once a powerful engine of global commerce *and* an uncivil institution that contravened the conventions of modern European civility that global commerce had made possible. I trace this conundrum through a series of elisions that traverse Hume's writings on slavery, liberty and despotism. I maintain that Hume treated slavery principally as a moral and political problem, disavowing its economic centrality to the modern world of global commerce. This took the form of diverting attention from the modern, commercial incarnation of slavery (the colonial-capitalist plantation), and confining the discussion of this practice almost exclusively to its ancient, feudal or Asiatic variants. The implications of this analysis, I argue, more broadly concern the separation of the idea of global commerce from the imperial institutional framework within which it came into existence, and its idealization as the very foundation of a liberal critique of empire.

The article proceeds in four sections. I begin by framing the problem of commercial incivility as a problem of the illiberal origins of global commerce, expressed in the relationship between the 'gentlemanly capitalists' and the 'imperial frontiersmen' of the British Empire. The second section reconstructs Hume's celebratory account of the constitutive link between commerce and civility that set modern Europeans apart both from ancient Europeans and contemporary non-Europeans. The third section turns to Hume's criticism of the 'old colonial system' of mercantilist regulations and trade monopolies, and delineates the difficulties involved in disentangling the idea of commerce as a civilizing force from the objectionable imperial economic relations in and through which it historically came into existence. As a condensation point of this conundrum, the final section concentrates on Hume's writings on slavery and places them in conversation with Adam Smith's arguments on the same subject in order to tease out Hume's rhetorical moves that deflect attention from the disturbing 'commercial incivility' of the modern plantation economy. The conclusion extends the analysis in two directions. First, I propose that the figure of the imperial frontiersman complicates the civic humanist account of the origins of liberalism as a political language, as espoused by J.G.A. Pocock. Second, I conjecture that the fraught entwinement of commerce and empire in the early modern period can offer insights into the contradictory entwinement of liberalism and capitalism more generally.

## I

### Imperial Frontiersmen, Gentlemanly Capitalists

A prominent interpretive strand in the literature on liberalism and empire has stressed the 'deep ambivalence' harboured by eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers on the question of global commerce. For instance, Sankar Muthu has argued that the enthusiasm about the cosmopolitan potential of global commerce for peace, prosperity and civilization was marred by scepticism towards the imperial processes of 'violence, exploitation, slavery, conquest,

and occupation' by which such global connections were forged.<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, Jennifer Pitts has claimed that Hume's generation was 'the first to try to come to grips with the idea that Europe did not give birth to itself; that modern Europe was constituted by its global connections'; however,

Enlightenment historians were struck by the irony that this cosmopolitan existence had been brought about through conquests they could only consider barbaric in their violence . . . there was not global history to be written before 1492, and afterward, the only global history to be written had to take account of the brutality, chaos, and expropriation characteristic of European empires.<sup>9</sup>

These interpretations have served to complicate the totalizing postcolonial critique of Enlightenment thought as an unequivocal and uniform ideology of imperial rule. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment in particular has been shown to be capable of a robust moral critique of imperial violence and injustice while at the same time embracing the cosmopolitan promise of the new commercial order.

At first glance, the problem of 'commercial incivility' would appear to be a species of the aforementioned 'ambivalence' or 'irony' of global commerce. I suggest, however, that a more fruitful way of approaching this problem is to cast it in terms of the illiberal imperial origins of capitalism and its liberal metropolitan conceptions. There exists a long-standing and freshly revitalized strand of scholarship that centres on the formative role of European imperial violence in the historical creation of global capitalist structures.<sup>10</sup> The displacement of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, the slave trade and plantations in the Atlantic, armed 'company capitalism' in South and Southeast Asia, and various forms of resource extraction and 'export-led exploitation' have been examined as chief moments in the history of global capital.<sup>11</sup> Writing in this vein, Sven Beckert has recently concluded, 'not

<sup>8</sup> S. Muthu, 'Conquest, Commerce, and Cosmopolitanism in Enlightenment Political Thought', in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Muthu, p. 205. For a similar interpretation, see '“Savage Impulse—Civilized Calculation”: Conquest, Commerce, and the Enlightenment Critique of Empire', in A. Pagden, *The Burdens of Empire: 1539 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 224–42.

<sup>9</sup> J. Pitts, 'The Global in Enlightenment Historical Thought', in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. P. Duara, V. Murthy and A. Sartori (Chichester, 2014), pp. 185, 189.

<sup>10</sup> For a theoretical treatment of the 'colonial empire' as the politico-legal framework of the historical emergence of capitalism, see O. Ince, 'Primitive Accumulation, New Enclosures, and Global Land Grabs: A Theoretical Intervention', *Rural Sociology*, 79 (2014), pp. 104–31.

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, R. Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London, 1997); Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden, 2010); A. Bagchi, *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital* (Lanham, 2005); A. Bagchi,

secure private property rights but a wave of expropriation of labour and land characterized this moment, testifying to capitalism's illiberal origins'.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, these coercive processes of social transformation gave birth to the institutional background conditions of capitalism, such as private property in productive assets, global commodity chains, markets in subsistence goods, and mobile wage labour, around which arose a liberal understanding of capitalism as a market system based on contractual relations and the investment of capital. Classical political economy, from Hume onwards, designated these juridico-economic forms as the defining features of the new commercial-capitalist order and strove to distinguish this order from the imperial-mercantilist structures with which it came entwined in practice.

An illuminating instance of this fraught entanglement of commerce and empire in the eighteenth century was the uneasy symbiosis between what Anthony Hopkins and Peter Cain have labelled the 'gentlemanly capitalists' of the British metropole and what I call the 'imperial frontiersmen' of Britain's transoceanic economy.<sup>13</sup> The term 'frontiersman' is only partly metaphorical. Britain's imperial economy historically rose on the endeavours of colonial economic entrepreneurs such as settlers, planters and joint-stock trading company agents. As H.V. Bowen notes, the gentlemanly capitalists of the Cain-Hopkins thesis who were committed to overseas expansion themselves never left Britain; 'the real drivers were those operating at or beyond different frontiers'.<sup>14</sup> These 'real drivers' were the ones who got their hands dirty, so to speak, in the making of global commerce: on the Western frontier, building plantations with Native American land and African slave labour in the Caribbean and Virginia; on the Eastern frontier, reorienting by means of arms and fraud the economy of the Indian Ocean to the European and Atlantic markets.<sup>15</sup>

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'Nineteenth Century Imperialism and Structural Transformation in Colonized Countries', in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question*, ed. H. Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay (London, 2009); M. Kale, *The Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration to the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 1998); Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London, 2015), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850', *The Economic History Review*, 39 (1986), pp. 501–25; A. Porter, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and Empire: The British Experience Since 1750?', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18 (1990), pp. 265–95.

<sup>14</sup> H.V. Bowen, 'British Conceptions of Global Empire, 1756–83', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 26 (1998), pp. 1–27, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> D. Washbrook, 'South Asia, the World System, and World Capitalism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49 (1990), pp. 479–508; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe*:

Imperial frontiers comprised a 'great testing-ground for the operation of commerce' outside the restrictive institutions, customs, and norms regnant in Britain, wherein economic entrepreneurs found unprecedented freedom in devising novel and violent forms of exploitation and extraction.<sup>16</sup> As a result, however,

The East and West Indies were both uncivil societies. One of the revelations of the postwar world of the 1760s and 1770s was indeed the discovery, with the East India Company Scandals, that the British Empire was a ferment of cruelty and barbarism in the commercial 'East', as well as the slave-owning and slave-trading 'West'.<sup>17</sup>

In planters, colonial merchants and company agents at the far-flung provinces of the British Empire, we can see the internal tensions of global commerce magnified. On the one hand, these agents were indispensable for breaking new ground for capital investment *via* settler colonies and plantations, and for establishing maritime trade networks through which the metropolitan capital circulated and expanded. British commerce flourished and the British economy diversified thanks to overseas expansion, a point that Hume and Smith, along with many of their enlightened contemporaries, openly conceded.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, imperial frontiersmen were found to be too cruel in their business methods and crude in their social manners to be readily admitted to the circle of Britain's commercial civility. Although the British public and political opinion was not monolithic, it harboured a strain, particularly pronounced amongst the men of letters, that deemed colonial entrepreneurs to be despotic, rapacious and barbarous when judged by the metropolitan standards of civilization, refinement and manners. Imperial frontiersmen thereby occupied in the British imagination the peculiar position of the uncivil members of a civil society, consigned to the cultural margins of a commercial order that they helped bring about.

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*Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> A.B. Leonard and D. Pretel, 'Experiments in Modernity: The Making of the Atlantic World Economy', in *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money, and Knowledge*, ed. A.B. Leonard and D. Pretel (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> E. Rothschild, 'The Atlantic Worlds of David Hume', in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830*, ed. B. Bailyn and P.L. Denault (Cambridge, 2009), p. 442.

<sup>18</sup> A. Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vol. II of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (Indianapolis, 1981), Vol. I, p. 65. The positive dynamic between colonial expansion and settlement on the one hand, and enhanced economic performance in the metropole on the other, has been traced at least back to the second half of the seventeenth century. See S. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009); N. Zahedieh, *Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660–1700* (Cambridge, 2010).

David Hume's political essays comprise a propitious entry point for unraveling the tensions outlined above. Hume's intellectual career coincided with the turbulent decades of imperial expansion, crisis and reform in the second half of the century, encompassing the Seven Years' War, the American crisis, and the militarized incursion of the East India Company in India. These developments effected a shift in the British comprehension of 'empire' from a mere collection of disconnected possessions to an economic totality of interdependent peripheries that ought to be deliberately integrated and governed by policy.<sup>19</sup> Hume held profound misgivings about the way the British Empire was governed in his day, above all about the dangers posed by imperial expansion for Britain's economic well being and political institutions.<sup>20</sup> As a principal interlocutor in the commercial reappraisal of statecraft and empire, he relied heavily on the lexicon of political economy and the popular essay form to address his disquisitions about imperial misconduct to a metropolitan audience.<sup>21</sup> As I elaborate below, Hume's disquisitions evinced a notable tension between his approval of the extension of global commerce and its contribution to prosperity, sociability and civility, and his suspicion of the colonial actors, institutions and dispositions that practically effectuated commercial expansion.<sup>22</sup> These tensions came to a head around the issue of Atlantic slavery, and Hume, unlike Adam Smith who

<sup>19</sup> Bowen, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', p. 26. See, more broadly, H.V. Bowen, 'British Conceptions of Global Empire, 1756–83', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 26 (1998), pp. 1–27.

<sup>20</sup> This pattern of imperial critique, common to many of Hume's enlightened contemporaries, has a longer genealogy, extending back to the seventeenth-century neo-republican critiques of imperial expansion and forward to twentieth-century anxieties over the boomerang effect of empire-building. See D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000); A. Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property, and Empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> According to Istvan Hont, Hume developed one of the earliest attempts to define the advent of modern politics by the political attention devoted to commerce. I. Hont, 'An Introduction', in *The Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 9, 121–3. For a fascinating study of the diffusion of political economy as the *lingua franca* of statecraft in early-modern Europe, see S. Reinert, 'The Empire of Emulation: A Quantitative Analysis of Economic Translations in the European World, 1500–1849', in *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World*, ed. S. Reinert and P. Røge (Basingstoke, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> There exists disagreement over the target of Hume's scepticism. Pocock holds that for Hume finance and public debt were at once the inevitable corollaries of commercial society and the proximate causes of its self-destruction. Hont disagrees, relocating the source of Hume's dismay from public debt itself to empire-driven wars that inflated it to unsustainable levels. 'Hume and the American Revolution: The Dying Thoughts of the North Briton', in J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), Part II, pp. 125–42; I. Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy', in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (Cambridge, 1993).



openly confronted the issue, opted for disavowing the connection between colonial slavery and global commerce.

Before we proceed to an examination of Hume's writings, I should clarify that the point of my argument is not to charge Hume with duplicity in obscuring the slavery-commerce nexus, but to interpret his disavowal as an index to a more general ideological tension between capitalism's illiberal moorings in the world of colonial empires and its essentially liberal-commercial conceptions in British metropolitan political economy. This was arguably a common theoretical problem that faced any eighteenth-century thinker who gave serious reflection to the history and workings of the new commercial order. Needless to say, the historical instances of this problem varied across specific controversies over territorial conquest, settler colonialism, slavery, armed trading and merchant sovereignty, each of which elicited an array of positions ranging from frank admission to uneasy disavowal to uncompromising criticism. For instance, Edmund Burke could couple his fierce attack on the governance of the India trade with a triumphalist embrace of settler colonies in North America, while Adam Smith's principled critique of colonial slavery would fade into disavowal on the issue of Native American displacement.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, whether one cut a liberal role for the British Empire as the global engine of private property, free trade and free labour, or turned these liberal principles into the very basis of denouncing imperial practice, the tension at the heart of global commerce persisted as a central issue animating the polyvalent discourse of political economy. Hume's disavowal of colonial slavery belongs to this broader story of navigating between commerce and empire, to the genealogy of the liberal imagination of capitalism in the face of its illiberal history.

## II

### Cosmopolitan Economy and Commercial Civility

As has been noted by a number of scholars, Hume was one of the first eighteenth-century thinkers to make the cornerstone of his reflections the premise that the formation of global networks of commerce had forever changed the parameters of politics in Europe.<sup>24</sup> In 'Of Civil Liberty', he remarked

<sup>23</sup> On Edmund Burke, see O. Ince, 'Not A Partnership in Pepper, Coffee, Calico or Tobacco: Edmund Burke and the Vicissitudes of Colonial Capitalism', *Polity*, 44 (2012), pp. 340–72; D. Bell, 'The Dream Machine: On Liberalism and Empire', in *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016); D. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Berkeley, 2016). On Adam Smith, see David Williams, 'Adam Smith and Colonialism', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 10 (2014), pp. 283–301; O. Ince, 'Adam Smith, Settler Colonialism, and Cosmopolitan Overstretch', paper presented at the 2016 Annual Conference of the Association for Political Theory.

<sup>24</sup> Hont, 'An Introduction'; C. Wennerlind, 'David Hume's Political Philosophy: A Theory of Commercial Modernization', *Hume Studies*, 28 (2002), pp. 247–70;



trade was never esteemed an affair of state till the last century; and there is scarcely any ancient writer of politics, who has made mention of it . . . The great opulence, grandeur, and military achievements of the two maritime powers [the United Dutch Provinces and Great Britain] seem first to have instructed mankind in the importance of an extensive commerce.<sup>25</sup>

‘European history had become the history of commerce’,<sup>26</sup> and Hume’s speculations on the principles of government ‘were to a substantial extent the principles of government of economic connections . . . of the new circumstances of global commerce’.<sup>27</sup> The cluster of political, legal, ethical and economic themes that coalesced into the language of political economy were reflected in what Emma Rothschild has labelled Hume’s commercial ‘idyll’. In Hume’s essays ‘Of Commerce’ and ‘Of Refinement in the Arts’, commerce consistently occupied the centre of a semantic constellation comprising prosperity, peace, sociability, learning, arts and sciences. As Richard Boyd puts it concisely, Hume belonged to the eighteenth-century intellectual coterie who conceived ‘“civil society” as the moral antonym of “barbarism”; “civilization” as the broader description of Enlightenment; commerce as the most likely engine of this transformation; and “civility” as the distinctive virtue associated with the social conditions of an extended economic order’.<sup>28</sup> While Hume neither elaborated on the specific causal mechanisms by which commerce brought about these advances of civilization, nor seemed to propose commercial society as a universal terminus of social development to which all societies were inevitably drawn,<sup>29</sup> he left little doubt that he thought commerce and civility to be closely tethered. Commerce, by introducing human beings to different commodities, especially of the refined and luxurious kind, incited in them new desires, rousing them from indolence into industry,

C. Cheney, ‘Constitution and Economy in David Hume’s Enlightenment’, *David Hume’s Political Economy*, ed. M. Schabas and C. Wennerlind (New York, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> D. Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Cheney, ‘Constitution and Economy’, p. 223

<sup>27</sup> Rothschild, ‘Atlantic Worlds’, p. 413.

<sup>28</sup> R. Boyd, ‘Manners and Morals: David Hume on Civility, Commerce, and the Social Construction of Difference’, in *David Hume’s Political Economy*, ed. Schabas and Wennerlind, p. 65. For an excellent treatment of the Scottish Enlightenment interpretation of ‘commercial society’, see C. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1997), especially pp. 120–55.

<sup>29</sup> See Wennerlind, ‘David Hume’s Political Philosophy’. In ‘Of Money’ and ‘Of the Balance of Trade’, Hume asserts that industry and prosperity are a function of the ‘manners and customs of the people’, noting that monetary and trade policy can promote economic performance only indirectly effecting these social dispositions. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 175, 193. Similarly, he contrasts the customs and institutions of republics with those of monarchies and concludes the former to be more favourable to commerce. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 85–6. For a discussion of Hume’s thoughts on the connection between regime type and commercial dynamism, see Cheney, ‘Constitution and Economy’.

giving new vigour to their mental faculties, and promoting liberal as well as mechanical arts, linking ‘*industry, knowledge, and humanity*’ together in an ‘indissoluble chain’.<sup>30</sup>

The element of ‘humanity’ followed from the refinement of human reason by its application to the ‘vulgar arts’ of ‘commerce and industry’ and the concomitant stabilization of passions by their exteriorization.<sup>31</sup> The process of ‘refinement’ in turn carried two key social and political corollaries. The first was the gradual softening of tempers and broadening of sensibilities entailed (and necessitated) by increasingly complex relations of economic interdependence mediated by market transactions. This new model of social cohesion, of ‘unsocial sociability’,<sup>32</sup> made it possible to relate to strangers in a peaceful and even enjoyable manner. In a commercial society, people ‘flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge’ in direct contrast to the distance, isolation and mutual suspicion that typified relations between ‘ignorant and barbarous nations’<sup>33</sup> — in one word, social interaction became more *civil*. The second corollary is political. Sociability and refined manners of a civil society also engendered ‘mildness and moderation’ in government by ‘instructing men in the advantages of humane maxims above rigour and severity’ and habituating them into submission to ‘laws, order, police, discipline’.<sup>34</sup> An unintended consequence of commerce was to render individuals more *governable* through consensual, pacific means, making possible civil government in which people remained free even as they voluntarily submitted to public authority.

Importantly, the conditions of commercial civility were not an immediate function of political constitutions. Breaking with the long-standing dichotomy between republics and monarchies, Hume envisioned the possibility of commercial society under both forms of government. Notwithstanding certain critical differences between the two constitutions (detailed below), the ‘civilized monarchies’ of Europe were for Hume ‘*government of Laws, not of Men*’ and thereby quite capable of securing property, encouraging industry and promoting manufactures and commerce.<sup>35</sup> Instead, the contrasting cases by which Hume cast commercial civility in relief were, on the one hand,

<sup>30</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 164.

<sup>31</sup> See ‘The Mobility of Property and the Emergence of Eighteenth Century Sociology’, in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, Part II, pp. 103–24.

<sup>32</sup> For a meticulous reconstruction of the idea of unsocial sociability in the early-modern period, see I. Hont, ‘The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the “Four-Stages Theory”’, in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. A. Pagden (Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 70. Also see Cheney, ‘Constitution and Economy’. The shift in the discussion of liberty away from republican forms and checks and balances towards the security of person and property was more broadly part and parcel of eighteenth-century

ancient Greek and Roman republics that combined a disorderly and warlike spirit of liberty with the most cruel form of slavery, and on the other, Asiatic despotisms of Turkey and India in which political order was maintained through arbitrary power over servile masses.<sup>36</sup> While Hume's enlightened contemporaries diverged on the existence, extent or exceptionalism of 'despotism' in Asia, their agreement over the fundamental differences between the ancient and the modern Europeans was more complete.<sup>37</sup> Eighteenth-century language of commercial civility often compared ancient republics to modern-day barbarians, like Central Asian pastoralists or Native American hunter and gatherers, yet this 'reevaluation of the ancient city-state tradition from a modernist point of view' represented 'a downgrading of the ancients rather than an upgrading of the primitives'.<sup>38</sup> For instance, Hume spoke of the Romans as the 'only *uncivilized* people that ever possessed military discipline',<sup>39</sup> and he demonstrated their profound unsociability by noting, 'in the old Latin, the term *hostis* expressed both a stranger and an enemy'.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, he aligned himself with the broader proclivity to cast the ancient Europeans and contemporary non-Europeans as 'barbarous' in their social manners and modes of government precisely because they occupied a 'pre-commercial' station in the stadial history of human development. In these societies, Pocock writes, 'the exchange of goods and services is so underdeveloped that the normal human relationship is between master and

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political economy. Other luminaries of this nascent field, like James Steuart and Adam Smith, echoed Hume's distinction. See for instance, R. Travers, 'British India as a Problem of Political Economy: Comparing James Steuart and Adam Smith', in *Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought*, ed. D. Kelly (Oxford, 2009); D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> For Hume's criticisms of the irregular government of the ancients, see principally 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', in Hume, *Essays*, especially pp. 231–4. For similar reflections on Oriental despotism, see 'Of Taxes', in Hume, *Essays*, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> Eighteenth-century European literati harboured quite a number of 'Orientalists' like John Wilson, Anquetil-Duperron and even Warren Hastings, as well as venerated of the ancient Indian constitution like William Robertson and Edmund Burke. For an exemplary study, see F. Whelan, 'Oriental Despotism: Anquetil-Duperron's Response to Montesquieu', *History of Political Thought*, 22 (2001), pp. 619–47; F. Whelan, 'Scottish Theorists, French Jesuits, and the "Rude Nations" of North America', *Enlightenment Thought and Non-Western Societies: Sultans and Savages* (New York, 2009); R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> F. Whelan, 'Hume and the Non-Western World', in *Enlightenment Thought*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 376 n.8. Hume maintained a similar approach to ancient Greek politics, which he deemed to be 'violent, and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things'. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

slave, lord and serf. Only as commerce develops do social relations become capable of generating civil authority'.<sup>41</sup>

It is thereby unsurprising that Hume was also one of the first defenders of global free trade, although his own term, 'open communication' better captures the multifaceted nature of commerce beyond the mere exchange of commodities.<sup>42</sup> The cosmopolitan bent of Hume's thought at times bordered on the teleological, as when he wrote in 'Of the Jealousy of Trade', '[n]ature, by giving a diversity of geniuses, climates, and soils, to different nations, has secured their mutual intercourse and commerce, as long as they all remain industrious and civilized'.<sup>43</sup> Pursued as principle and policy, free trade would set in motion a mutually reinforcing relationship between domestic economic growth and foreign commerce through competitive 'emulation' or 'imitation of foreigners' in their superior 'art, industry, and invention'.<sup>44</sup> Nor were the rewards to global commerce to be engrossed by a minority. 'There seems to be a happy concurrence of causes in human affairs', Hume wrote in 'Of Money', 'which checks the growth of trade and riches, and hinders them from being confined entirely to one people'.<sup>45</sup> Hume developed a theory of limited economic convergence based on relative labour costs and capital mobility, in which the discrepancy in wage levels (themselves a function of differential prosperity) would prompt capital and industry to migrate from rich countries to poor ones and contribute to their prosperity.<sup>46</sup> For Hume, 'the argument

<sup>41</sup> Pocock, 'Mobility of Property', p. 121. Hume's germinal contribution to this modern sensibility made him, in Richard Boyd's words, one of the 'standard-bearers of *doux commerce* and Enlightenment'. Boyd, 'Manners and Morals', p. 237.

<sup>42</sup> On the positive polysemy of the eighteenth-century notion of commerce, see A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven, 1995), ch. 5; Pagden, 'Savage Impulse'; S. Muthu, 'Conquest, Commerce, and Cosmopolitanism in Enlightenment Political Thought', in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Muthu.

<sup>43</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 195. For a similar remark, see 'Of the Balance of Trade' where 'the Author of the world' replaces 'nature' as the architect of commercial theodicy. Hume, *Essays*, p. 192. On theodicean undercurrents of Hume and Smith's political economy, see Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics* (Chicago, 2006), chs. 1, 4 and 5.

<sup>44</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 194. Increased division of labour, economic diversification and rise of productivity (which has later been labelled 'dynamic gains from trade') constituted for Hume the 'chief advantage which arises from a commerce with strangers'. Hume, *Essays*, p. 160.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* For an in-depth treatment of this political economic argument as well as its historical roots in the uneven political relationship between England and Ireland, see I. Hont, 'The "Rich Country–Poor Country Debate" in Scottish Classical Political Economy', in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (Cambridge, 1983); I. Hont, 'The "Rich Country–Poor

became the cornerstone of a cosmopolitan theory of commercial globalization', a prefiguration of the 'competitive advantage' as a mechanism that could 'spread economic development from the center to the peripheries'.<sup>47</sup> If 'open communication' was allowed to run its natural course, the dynamics of trade, money, factor mobility and division of labour would conspire in favour of commerce and civility, peace and prosperity, industry and happiness.

The 'if' in the last sentence, however, is a momentous one. Global commerce in the second half of the eighteenth century was anything but idyllic, and Hume knew it. As William Robertson and Adam Smith would after him, he welcomed 'the discovery of new worlds, by which commerce has been so much enlarged'.<sup>48</sup> Yet as he was well aware, the institutional framework within which webs of commerce emerged and bound Europe to the East and West Indies was one of colonial empires. This was a world of mercantilist monopolies, privileges and protectionism, of slave trade and plantations, and of inter-imperial rivalry that frequently erupted into drawn-out wars.

Despite this imperial salience, however, Hume's reflections on empire remained intermittent and elliptical. For instance, Frederick Whelan notes the palpable inattention in these reflections to the 'Indian, and the larger South Asian scene', while Glen Doris highlights Hume's notable silence on the question of colonial slavery.<sup>49</sup> As I discuss in the next section, Hume's reticence on modern slavery stands out even more starkly when juxtaposed to his verbose and unfavourable treatment of the ancient institution of slavery. These omissions are all the more striking because, as diligently detailed by Rothschild and Ian Simpson Ross, Hume's biography is a story thick with imperial connections. Hume himself had a brief mercantile career in 1734 as a clerk in the house of a Bristol merchant at a time when Bristol was at the height of its grandeur as a commercial hub in the colonial trade of slaves, sugar and tobacco.<sup>50</sup> More broadly, Hume's native Scotland sent out a significant contingent of entrepreneurs both to the West and the East Indies, including

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Country" Debate Revisited: The Irish Origins and French Reception of the Hume Paradox', in *David Hume's Political Economy*, ed. Schabas and Wennerlind.

<sup>47</sup> Hont, 'Introduction', pp. 66–8, 84.

<sup>48</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 236.

<sup>49</sup> F. Whelan, 'Scottish Theorists, French Jesuits, and the "Rude Nations" of North America', in *Enlightenment Political Thought*, p. 44; G. Doris, 'Making Excuses for Hume: Slavery, Racism and a Reassessment of David Hume's Thoughts on Personal Liberty', unpublished manuscript, available at: <https://aberdeen.academia.edu/GlenDoris>. Retrieved 28 July 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Rothschild, 'Atlantic Worlds', pp. 427–8; I.S. Ross, 'The Emergence of David Hume as a Political Economist: A Biographical Sketch', in *David Hume's Political Economy*, ed. Schabas and Wennerlind, pp. 34–5.

a number of Hume's friends and acquaintances who were 'connected, directly or indirectly, to the Atlantic slave economy'.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, Hume was steeped in a world of transoceanic commerce that was bookended by, on the one hand, wealth in 'plantations and slaves and mills and boiling houses' to the West, and on the other, fortunes made in 'jewels or bonds or "paper"' to the East.<sup>52</sup> Yet, we do not find in Hume's political essays a systematic treatment of empire that reflects the density of imperial economic relations that stamped his social and personal milieu. Reconstructing such an account requires extrapolating from Hume's scattered remarks on commerce, slavery, despotism and liberty, themes that he articulated through comparisons between the ancients and the moderns, and between the Europeans and the non-Europeans. I maintain that even when Hume seemed to confine his discussion of commerce and civility to examples outside modern Europe, it is possible to discern in these discussions the imprint of imperial economies that shaped his context. The next two sections trace this imprint around the questions of trade monopoly and slavery.

### III

#### Imperial Worlds of Global Commerce

It can be argued that Hume's neglect of militarized trading operations in India was due to the fact that the 'scandal of empire'<sup>53</sup> in the East had not yet been exposed when he published his essays in *Political Discourses* in 1752 — though the question remains why he did not produce a tract on the subject when the delinquency of the East India Company in Bengal attracted public attention in the 1760s and 1770s and drew Edmund Burke into one of the most dramatic castigations of imperial abuse. Nonetheless, Hume's general position on the imperial system of trade was unequivocal. Prefiguring classical political economy's catholic criticism of the 'old colonial system',<sup>54</sup> he decried the 'monopolies of our East India companies obstructing communication', opposed the duties levied on foreign imports designed to 'encourage home manufactures' or 'support our southern colonies', and ridiculed the folly of imperial wars driven by the 'jealousy of trade' by comparing them to

<sup>51</sup> Rothschild, 'Atlantic Worlds', p. 428. For a more detailed account of the imperial networks in which Hume and other literati were embedded, see E. Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Rothschild, 'Atlantic Worlds', p. 442.

<sup>53</sup> N. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> See D. Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (Cambridge, 1965); B. Semmel, *Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1970); B. Semmel, *Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore, 1993).

'a match of cudgel-playing fought in a *China* shop'.<sup>55</sup> His essay 'Of Money', where he elaborated his famous 'specie-flow mechanism', principally aimed at demonstrating the futility of mercantilist policies of balance of trade in a world of global economic connections, and eventually inspired Adam Smith's sweeping critique of the 'mercantile system'.<sup>56</sup>

In *The History of England*, Hume extended the economic argument into the political and equated the Elizabethan policy of trade monopolies with the despotic Turkish system of taxation. He concluded that 'had [Elizabeth] gone on, during a track of years, at her own rate, England, the seat of riches, and arts, and commerce, would have contained at present as little industry as Morocco, or the coast of Barbary'.<sup>57</sup> Of particular concern to Hume was the expansion of British public credit to unprecedented levels in order to support imperial wars. In 'Of Public Credit', Hume inventively imbued the eighteenth-century civic humanist critique of imperial over-extension with a political economic content, alerting his readers to the corrosive effects of public debt on domestic institutions and customs that could end in nothing short of the destruction of liberty and the establishment of the basest form of despotism.<sup>58</sup> Generalizing from the fall of the Roman empire, which he attributed not to 'luxury' but to 'an ill-modeled government, and the unlimited extent of conquests', he concluded 'extensive conquests, when pursued, must be the ruin of every free government'.<sup>59</sup> The policy of channelling the wealth of the nation, through taxation, monopoly or public debt, into pursuing imperial bellicosity was, as the analogy with the Turks and the Romans suggest, a most *unenlightened and barbarous* policy. These arguments lend credence to Whelan's conclusion, 'Hume's endorsement of free international trade seems not to have

<sup>55</sup> Hume, *Essays*, pp. 186, 192, 200, 211.

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Viner has popularized the term 'specie-flow mechanism' into a staple of modern economic debate. See J. Viner, *Studies in the Theory of International Trade* (New York, 1937). For recent appraisals of Hume's theory of money, see C. Wennerlind, 'An Artificial Virtue and the Oil of Commerce: A Synthetic View of Hume's Theory of Money', and M. Schabas, 'Temporal Dimensions in Hume's Monetary Theory', both in *David Hume's Political Economy*, ed. Schabas and Wennerlind.

<sup>57</sup> D. Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Vol. 4 (Indianapolis, 1983), p. 233.

<sup>58</sup> 'It must, indeed, be one of these two events: either the nation must destroy public credit, or public credit will destroy the nation.' Hume, *Essays*, p. 211. For a discussion of the political aspects of Hume's criticisms of public credit and his advocacy of a Europe-wide, orchestrated state bankruptcy, see Hont, 'Rhapsody of Public Debt'.

<sup>59</sup> Hume, *Essays*, pp. 167, 288. The nexus between empire, war and public debt underpinned what Pocock calls Hume's 'Tory' or 'conservative' assault on empire as a 'radical burden on the structure of British Politics'. Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution', p. 138.



embraced the kind of intrusive and aggressive policies . . . that sometimes amounted to what can be termed commercial imperialism'.<sup>60</sup>

Beyond this, however, Hume had little to say about alternative institutional arrangements for enabling trans-oceanic commerce that could replace the extant mercantilist policies. The known, *actual* history of global commerce that separated the moderns from the ancients had been inaugurated by European overseas expansion, replete with territorial conquest, Native American and African enslavement, and resource extraction. Once in place, these political and economic arrangements had been institutionalized in the form of colonial charters, monopolies and slave codes. In the words of Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, 'coercion and military violence went hand in hand with trading enterprises', which 'played key roles in creating global marketplace linkages rather than thwarting connections'.<sup>61</sup> This point was not lost on eighteenth-century defenders of the British East India Company, like Julius Mickle who derided Smith's vision of free trade with the East Indies as little more than a speculative chimera.<sup>62</sup> As to what would succeed this coercive system as the institutional mainstay of global commerce, Hume had no clear answer. In justice to Hume, he was not alone in stopping short of proposing an alternative to the mercantilist structures. As Patrick O'Brien reminds us,

very few critics of mercantilism and imperialism writing between 1688 and 1815 developed an alternative blueprint for national development . . . Nearly everyone at the time perceived that economic progress, national security, and the integration of the kingdom might well come from sustained levels of investment in global commerce, naval power, and, when-ever necessary, the acquisition of bases and territories overseas.<sup>63</sup>

The most intuitive solution to the economically liberal mind would be to abolish imperial institutions and let trans-oceanic commerce chart its spontaneous

<sup>60</sup> Whelan, 'Scottish Theorists', p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> D.O. Flynn and A. Giráldez, 'Born Again: Globalization's Sixteenth-Century Origins (Asian/Global vs. European Dynamics)', *Pacific Economic Review*, 13 (2008), pp. 359–87, p. 363.

<sup>62</sup> W. Mickle, *A Candid Examination of the Reasons for Depriving the East India Company of its Charter* (London, 1779); E. Rothschild, 'Adam Smith in the British Empire', in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Muthu. For a similar observation on eighteenth-century critical writings on the amalgamation of monopoly capital and the imperial state, see S. Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Stanford, 2012).

<sup>63</sup> P.K. O'Brien, 'Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire, 1688–1815', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. P.J. Marshall, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1998), p. 76. For recent appraisals of mercantilism see K. Morgan, 'Mercantilism and the British Empire, 1688–1815', in *The Political Economy of the British Historical Experience 1688–1914*, ed. D. Winch and P.K. O'Brien (Oxford, 2002); and *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early-Modern Britain and Its Empire*, ed. P. Stern and C. Wennerlind (Oxford, 2013).

course. Yet, as Istvan Hont correctly observes, neither Hume nor Smith after him ‘cared to speculate about a pure realm of trade that operated in peace and harmony’.<sup>64</sup> One explanation for this is the fact that international free trade would be unviable by the terms of Hume’s own theory of commerce. Hume posited a set of enabling conditions that had to be in place for commercial relations to take root that were yet markedly absent at the international level. As Carl Wennerlind argues, Hume conceived of commercial society as a contingent social formation dependent on ‘certain conventions’, internalized as ‘artificial virtues’, that would direct the passions and self-love of individuals towards virtuous ends.<sup>65</sup> Wennerlind identifies ‘property’, ‘markets’ and ‘money’ as the ‘constitutive institutions of a modern commercial society’ in Hume’s account. These institutions historically emerged through an evolutionary process in which the ‘middling sorts’ (social classes positioned between great landlords and labouring masses) played a decisive role, and in which compliance from the dissenters to the new social order was secured through a coercive system of laws.<sup>66</sup>

This interpretation of commercial society as contingent on the happy confluence of several historical factors that solidified into a structure of custom and law finds support in Hume’s assessment of the relative capacities of republics and monarchies in generating commercial civility. In ‘Of the Rise and Progress of Arts and Sciences’, Hume ascribed this auto-generative capacity exclusively to ‘free governments’, which inevitably tended towards a system of laws and security that made the pursuit of arts, sciences and learning both a feasible and an honourable activity. By contrast, monarchies, insofar as they rested on the untrammelled prerogative of the sovereign and his petty tyrants, ranked utterly incapable of autonomous development of commercial civility.<sup>67</sup> It was a contradiction to expect, Hume wrote, ‘that a pure despotism established among a barbarous people, can ever, by its native force and energy, refine and polish itself. It must borrow its laws, methods, and institutions, and consequently its stability and order, from free governments. These advantages are the sole growth of republics.’<sup>68</sup> At best, monarchies could emulate the achievements of free governments and thereby evolve into Hume’s ‘civilized monarchies’, as in Bourbon France. Even then, the stagnation of the Asiatic despotisms indicated that such emulation was by no means a foregone conclusion.

<sup>64</sup> Hont, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Wennerlind, ‘David Hume’s Political Philosophy’, p. 250.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254. For an excellent treatment of the status of ‘middle classes’ as an agent of civilization in eighteenth-century European political economic thought, see E. Adamovksy, ‘Before Development Economics: Western Political Economy, the “Russian Case”, and the First Perceptions of Economic Backwardness’, *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 32 (2010), pp. 349–76.

<sup>67</sup> Hume, *Essays*, pp. 81–5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Crucially, when it came to *global* commerce, Hume offered no corresponding account of conventions, customs and system of laws that could render social intercourse polite and mutually beneficial and restrict rivalry to peaceful emulation. In the absence of such institutional conditions, there was no reason to expect that abandoning the old colonial system, even if it were at all possible, would clear the way for a pacific order of international trade. A comparison with Adam Smith might be illustrative here. The conundrum that confronted Hume also, and perhaps more starkly, vexed Adam Smith, who amplified and systematized Hume's anti-imperial free trade argument. Smith excoriated joint-stock trading companies and the allied faction of metropolitan merchants, criticized chattel slavery, and prescribed either decolonization or imperial federation as the only possible remedies to the injuries of empire.<sup>69</sup> Yet, for all his intellectual investment and acumen, Smith's analysis also stopped short of designating a cosmopolitan alternative to Britain's imperial system. Smith and Hume can be said to have come up against the same problem of what Rothschild calls the 'political conditions for the flourishing of free trade'. '[L]ong-distance commerce', Rothschild remarks, 'required at least one of three sorts of "order" if it was to be tolerably secure'.<sup>70</sup> These were, first, entrusting the protection and enforcement of economic transactions to local authorities in distant lands; second, relying on the existing methods of military and political instruments of empire; and, third, a trans-oceanic institutional framework that would straddle the political borders of the states engaged in commerce. The difficulty of Smith's system (and one can plausibly add Hume here) was that he '[did] not choose any of these three possible orders'.<sup>71</sup> In the absence of such a viable alternative, for Hume or Smith to expect that global commerce could somehow shed the cocoon of empire in which it imperceptibly incubated, and then replicate at the global level the commercial civility that obtained within Britain, was a tremendous leap of faith, one that would be paralleled only by Karl Marx's derivation of universal human emancipation from the exploitation and iniquities of capitalism a century later.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps more significant than the question of political conditions of international trade was the move to disentangle the very notion of 'commerce' from the thick of the history of colonial dispossession and bondage, and to posit empire as a *threat* to, rather than the *enabling underside* of, global

<sup>69</sup> S. Muthu, 'Adam Smith's Critique of International Trading Companies: Theorizing Globalization in the Age of Enlightenment', *Political Theory*, 36 (2008), pp. 185–212; Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*.

<sup>70</sup> Rothschild, 'Adam Smith', p. 194.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>72</sup> One should add that while Hume was silent on the prospects of anti-imperial commerce, Smith himself nurtured the hope that global commerce would one day help to establish a global balance of wealth and power and thereby put an end to the oppression and injustice of empires. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 65–6; Muthu, 'Conquest', p. 214.

commerce. I suggest that the feat of distilling a pacific and civilizing essence of commerce from the sordid reality of imperial economies of slavery and extraction required underplaying, eliding or, to use Jeanne Morefield's felicitous term, 'deflecting' attention away from the most egregious aspects of early-modern global commodity chains.<sup>73</sup> Such deflection need not serve imperial justification, and Hume can hardly be credited as a defender of empire. Yet, regardless of its animating motives, pitting the promise of cosmopolitan commerce against the violence of empire involved a conceptual purification that expunged the imperial baggage of global commerce, such that it could stand as the *antithesis* of empire.<sup>74</sup> I contend that Hume's writings on slavery constitute the primary site of such deflection wherein he drew attention to the barbarism and incivility of slavery only to instantly turn attention away from its colonial form by confining his study of this institution to the ancient Greek and Roman cases. Even if we were to admit Hume's writings on Ancient slavery as a veiled criticism of modern slavery, this remained a distinctly moral and political criticism that revolved around despotism and the corruption of character, and avoided the socioeconomic register of commerce, capital and public economy. Consequently, the profound incivility that pervaded the central node of Atlantic commerce, that is, the slave societies of the British West Indian frontier, was kept at arm's length from the gentlemanly capitalism and commercial civility of the metropole.

#### IV

#### Colonial Slavery and Commercial Incivility

In 1713, Daniel Defoe had unceremoniously expressed the critical importance of the slave trade to Britain's Atlantic commerce: 'No African Trade, no Negroes, no Negroes, no Sugar; no Sugar no Islands, no Islands no Continent,

<sup>73</sup> In her study of Anglo-American liberal imperialism, Jeanne Morefield defines 'deflection' as a discursive strategy in which the oblique gesture at empire's illiberal deeds is urgently followed by asserting the incidental nature of such deeds in the face of empire's essentially liberal character. J. Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> While the scope of this article does not allow a detailed discussion, I should note that such purification is particularly dangerous when combined with the twin claims that the history of commerce and its associated values are historically of European provenance and that global market capitalism (modern day moniker of global commerce), notwithstanding imperial blemishes on its record, is essentially a force of good. This ideological compound, to be sure, has been enlisted for a criticizing imperialism, as attested by not only Hume and Smith but also Joseph Schumpeter. Yet it has also formed the kernel of a virulent and popular type of imperial apologetics, most notably popularized by Niall Ferguson, that render Anglo-American imperialism as the harbinger of a global liberal order. J.A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York, 1951); N. Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and the Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2003).

no Continent no Trade; that is to say farewell your American Trade, your West Indian Trade.'<sup>75</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, this economic argument sedimented into a sort of truism, as reflected, for instance, in Edmund and William Burke's *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757) where the authors wrote '[n]othing could excuse slave trade at all, but the necessity we are under of peopling our colonies, and the consideration that the slaves but were in the same condition in Africa'.<sup>76</sup> The moral unease in the Burkes' passage, however, signals a shift in attitudes around this time, namely, the emergence in the British Isles of a 'secular critique' of West Indian slavery articulated in the language of 'civility and barbarism, virtue and savagery'.<sup>77</sup> Given Hume's germinal contribution to the secular language of civility, it is striking to find that he had little to say about the slave trade and plantation system in the British colonies. This paucity of overt reference to modern slavery has led one commentator to conclude, 'Hume delicately avoids declaring that modern slavery is as morally debasing to the British society as he believes it was to the inhabitants of the classical world'.<sup>78</sup> I contend, however, that if we read Hume's treatment of ancient slavery like a palimpsest and place it in conversation with Smith's remarks on colonial slavery, we can detect the contours of Hume's Atlantic context and catch a glimpse of the modern conundrum of 'commercial incivility'.

Hume's most extensive reflections on the subject of slavery are to be found in his essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations'. In that tract, Hume started from the postulate that, 'there is no universal difference discernible in the human species', and attributed variation in social manners to conventions, institutions and historical circumstance.<sup>79</sup> He substantiated this postulate through a comparison of the ancients and the moderns on their domestic and political institutions in which slavery occupied the central place. 'The chief difference between the domestic oeconomy of the ancients and that of the moderns', Hume wrote, 'consists in the practice of slavery which prevailed among the former, and which has been abolished for some centuries throughout the greater part of Europe.'<sup>80</sup> Following the influence of institutions on manners, Hume conjectured that the 'severe, I might say, barbarous manners of ancient times' was due to 'the practice of domestic slavery; by which every man of rank was rendered a petty tyrant, and educated amidst the flattery,

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in A. Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest from Greece to the Present* (New York, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>76</sup> E. Burke and W. Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, (London, 1757), pp. 128–9.

<sup>77</sup> C. Brown, 'The Politics of Slavery', in *British Atlantic World: 1500–1800*, ed. D. Armitage and M. Braddick (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 227.

<sup>78</sup> Doris, 'Making Excuses', p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 219.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

submission, and low debasement of his slaves'.<sup>81</sup> Absence of slavery in modern Europe, by contrast, rendered even the 'most arbitrary government' preferable to 'the most flourishing period of ancient times'.<sup>82</sup> When Hume, as a 'polite man of commercial and cultivated society', looked back to antiquity, what he saw was 'not a world of virtuous citizens but one of barbarism'.<sup>83</sup>

Punctuating this otherwise predictably adverse assessment of ancient slavery were two instances where colonial slavery made an oblique appearance in the essay. The first of these was Hume's acknowledgment of the 'domestic slavery, in the American colonies', which, however, he quickly followed with the assurance that its limited scope 'would never surely create the desire of rendering it more universal'.<sup>84</sup> The second, even more oblique, reference to modern slavery was in a footnote on the demographic decline of slave populations due to ill-treatment, on which Hume wrote, '[i]t is computed in the West Indies, that a stock of slaves grow [sic.] worse five *per cent.* every year, unless new slaves be bought to recruit them'.<sup>85</sup> In the same footnote, he also proposed what would become the staple liberal economic argument against slavery, namely, the economic inefficiency of slave labour due to the high costs of maintaining slaves and the low productivity of their labour. Hume reiterated this point more catholically by pronouncing, 'slavery is in general disadvantageous both to the happiness and populousness of mankind, and that its place is much better supplied by the practice of hired servants'.<sup>86</sup>

While these arguments lend support to the conclusion that 'Hume was apparently sincerely distressed by the institution of slavery', his remarkable evasion of the issue of colonial slavery leaves open the question of whether he wanted to see the practice abolished. One way to explain this differential treatment of ancient and modern slavery is to consider the fundamentally different social purposes they served. Ancient slavery, as Hume underscored, belonged to the domestic sphere of the *private economy*, the realm of *oikonomia* outlined in Aristotle's *Politics*. As Pocock notes, the main function of property in slaves was to give the ancient citizen of virtue 'independence and autonomy as well as the leisure and liberty to engage in public affairs'.<sup>87</sup> Modern colonial slavery, in contrast, was rooted in the *public economy* of a decisively commercial kind. A West Indian planter was not so much the *paterfamilias* ruling over a household as a commercial entrepreneur exercising 'quasi-feudal powers' over an 'army of labor' exploited for export-oriented

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Pocock, 'Mobility of Property', p. 115.

<sup>84</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 221.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395 n.23.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>87</sup> Pocock, 'Mobility of Property', p. 109.

agriculture.<sup>88</sup> As Sidney Mintz, Robin Blackburn and Hilary Beckles, among others, have demonstrated, modern slavery, both in its black-chattel and white-indentured forms, found its propulsive power in the expanding webs of trans-oceanic trade and capital accumulation in the Atlantic. Modern plantation slavery was thereby anything but an atavistic residue of ancient or feudal forms of bondage.<sup>89</sup> It was the progeny and a vital part of global commerce that had made possible the advancement of modern European civilization beyond the barbarism of ancient Europeans and contemporary non-Europeans. What is more, a significant section of the 'middling rank of men', who now aspired to the gentlemanly ideal and whom Hume hailed as the 'best and firmest basis of public liberty', made their fortunes directly or indirectly by colonial trade in the West as well as in the East.<sup>90</sup>

These subterranean and disturbing links can offer an explanation as to why Hume trod so lightly on the question of modern slavery, and ensconced his moral and political critique of it in the safety of ancient history. For while colonial slavery was distinctly modern in its historical origins and socioeconomic functions, it carried the same odium of barbarism that Hume imputed to ancient slavery. As Rothschild puts it baldly, 'America was an uncivil society'.<sup>91</sup> Colonial planters strove hard to combat this opprobrium by projecting an image of gentility that came with land ownership and control of dependent labour, yet such projection was blemished by the brutality on which their wealth and status rested.<sup>92</sup> As Catherine Hall puts it, 'the wealthy planters represented forms of vulgarity, backwardness, and degeneracy that inverted the standards of English civility and culture'; the West Indies represented in the British imagination 'a kind of outpost of the metropolis, an extension or

<sup>88</sup> Brown, 'Politics of Slavery', p. 217.

<sup>89</sup> S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985); Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*; H. Beckles, 'The Concept of White Slavery in the English Caribbean During the Early Seventeenth Century', in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. J. Brewer and S. Staves (New York, 1995). Germinally examined by Eric Williams, the structural and formative link between Atlantic slavery and global capitalism has recently found renewed interest amongst social and economic historians and produced some excellent works. E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944); E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, 2014); S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 167. Bowen contends that during the eighteenth century the link between gentleman status and landed wealth had loosened to admit professionals, financiers and merchants on the basis of manners, consumerism and civility. Bowen, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', pp. 32–3.

<sup>91</sup> Rothschild, 'Atlantic Worlds', p. 442.

<sup>92</sup> M. Braddick, 'Civility and Authority', in *British Atlantic World*, ed. Armitage and Braddick. For a contrasting view that emphasizes the formation of a British 'transoceanic imperial elite' united by metropolitan patterns of civility, manners and learning, see Bowen, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', pp. 30–1.



perhaps an excrescence of the British self rather than a place entirely separate'.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Michael Craton encapsulates the ideological tensions of the West Indian plantocracy when he notes that while the 'contradictions between landowning and commerce' were becoming more reconcilable in the first half of the eighteenth century,

few were able to bridge the gap between the conditions of English rural life and the crude realities of slave plantation production. Conversely, few persons with the kind of background or temperament that made it possible to exploit Negroes as chattel laborers in the cause of profit, could effectively make the transition to English country gentleman.<sup>94</sup>

Much controversy has been fanned by Hume's racist statement in 'Of National Characters' that he suspected 'negroes to be naturally inferior to whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion'.<sup>95</sup> What Hall and Craton suggest, however, is that the colonial masters of negroe slaves also fell short of fulfilling the conditionalities of civility, locked in as they were in a *barbarizing yet essentially commercial institution* that corrupted them into petty tyrants.

While Hume reserved the barbarism of slavery for the ancient citizens, Asiatic despots and feudal lords,<sup>96</sup> there is one striking statement in his essay 'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science' that can be interpreted to hint at the barbarous proclivities of colonial slavery. In that essay, Hume wrote: 'it may be easily observed, that, though free governments have been commonly the most happy for those who partake of their freedom; yet are they the most ruinous and oppressive to their provinces'.<sup>97</sup> Arguing that republics are more vicious than monarchies towards alien peoples they have subjugated, Hume clinched his case with a reference to the cruel tyranny of the Roman Empire

<sup>93</sup> C. Hall, 'What did a British World Mean to the British?', in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. P. Buckner and R.D. Francis (Calgary, 2005), pp. 26, 28.

<sup>94</sup> M. Craton, 'Property and Propriety: Land Tenure and Slave Property in the Creation of a British West Indian Plantocracy, 1612–1740', in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. Brewer and Staves, p. 519.

<sup>95</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 372 n.10. For the controversy, see J. Immerwahr, 'Hume's Revised Racism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1992), pp. 481–6.

<sup>96</sup> The association of slavery and tyrannical manners was not restricted to the ancients. In 'Of Polygamy and Divorces', Hume blamed the deficiencies of 'Asiatic manners' on the 'bad education of children, especially children of condition [superior rank] . . . Those who pass the early part of life among slaves, are only qualified to be, themselves, slaves and tyrants', Hume, *Essays*, p. 120. Similarly, societies stuck in a pre-commercial, feudal stage were organized into 'two classes, proprietors of land, and their vassals and tenants. The latter are necessarily dependent, and fitted for slavery and subjection; especially where they possess no riches, and are not valued for their knowledge in agriculture; as must always be the case where the arts are neglected. The former naturally erect themselves into petty tyrants.' Hume, *Essays*, p. 167.

<sup>97</sup> Hume, *Essays*, p. 33.

'over the world during the time of their commonwealth', which 'became easier upon the provinces' after the collapse of the republic.<sup>98</sup> 'If we pass from ancient to modern times', he continued, 'we shall still find the observation to hold. The provinces of absolute monarchies are always better treated than of the free states.'<sup>99</sup> This time, the examples he adduced to the argument were the conquered territories of Britain and France. Given that he composed this essay during the War of Austrian Succession, a major imperial war that was fought as much in North American and Indian theatres as in Europe, one could plausibly expect Hume to compare British and French settler colonies and trading posts. Instead of America and India, however, one finds Ireland and Corsica.<sup>100</sup>

Hume's omission of overseas colonies from his examination of provincial tyranny is cast into sharper relief if one turns to Smith's discussion of the same theme. In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith made almost exactly the same argument about free government and provincial oppression, but he did so by comparing the condition of slaves owned by the British and the French planters in the West Indies. '[I]n the good management of their slaves', Smith observed, 'the French planters . . . are superior to the English'.<sup>101</sup> The reason behind this counter-intuitive conclusion was that property rights in slaves were protected more stringently under a free government (as in English colonies) in which 'the master is perhaps either a member of the colony assembly, or an elector of such a member', whereas under arbitrary government (as in French colonies), 'it is much easier for [the magistrate] to give some protection to the slave; and common humanity disposes him to do so'.<sup>102</sup> While a discussion of Smith's position of slavery exceeds the scope of this article, it is worth noting that he openly asserted a correlation between economic commercialization and social refinement on the one hand, and the consolidation and increased brutality of slavery on the other. His *Lectures on Jurisprudence* are littered with the 'cruel paradox' that 'the more wealth, opulence and refinement in a society, the more the misery and unhappiness of the slaves'.<sup>103</sup> There, Smith variously stated, 'in a despotic government, slaves may be treated better than in a free government'; 'slavery is more tolerable in

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. II, p. 38.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>103</sup> S.J. Pack, 'Slavery, Adam Smith's Economic Vision and the Invisible Hand', *History of Economic Ideas*, 4 (1996), pp. 253–69, p. 257. Also see J. Salter, 'Adam Smith on Slavery', *ibid.*, pp. 225–51.

a barbarous than in a civilized society'; 'slavery is more severe in proportion to the culture of society'.<sup>104</sup> The final verdict is:

Opulence and freedom, the two greatest blessings men can possess, tend greatly to the misery of this body of men, which in most countries where slavery is allowed makes by far the greatest part. A humane man would wish therefore if slavery has to be generally established that these greatest blessings, being incompatible with the happiness of the greatest part of mankind, were never to take place.<sup>105</sup>

Although slavery ultimately issued from men's inherent 'love of domination and tyrannizing' what made this expensive and inefficient form of labour economically feasible in Smith's day was the artificially high profits that colonial planters reaped thanks to Britain's mercantile regulations and trade monopolies.<sup>106</sup> Smith's association of commerce, opulence, civilization and culture with more appalling forms of bondage clearly suggests that the commercial incivility of the plantation system was far from opaque, let alone invisible, to the liberal observer.

The purpose of contrasting Hume and Smith on the question of slavery is neither to idolize Smith, nor to impute Hume any intention of wilfully obfuscating the link between global commerce and chattel slavery. Rather, given their kindred sensibilities and conceptual frameworks on commerce and civilization,<sup>107</sup> reading Smith's remarks on slavery alongside those of Hume's can help detect the evasions where one would expect to find explanations, or in Peter Gordon's words, conjecture about 'not just *what* the author said but what she *might have said* if pressed to consider a further implication or even a contradiction of her claims'.<sup>108</sup>

I have sought to answer this question by situating Hume's writings in the broader ideological tension between, on the one hand, conceptions of civility

<sup>104</sup> A. Smith, *Lectures On Jurisprudence*, ed. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael and P.G. Stein, Vol. V of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis, 1982), pp. 387–8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. I, p. 315; Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, p. 179. On Smith's pessimistic views of the love of domination and slavery, see D. Luban, 'Adam Smith on Vanity, Domination, and History', *Modern Intellectual History*, 9 (2012), pp. 275–302.

<sup>107</sup> For instance, in the *Wealth of Nations* Smith accredited Hume with discovering the historical-evolutionary link between the flourishing of 'commerce and manufacture' in Europe and the entailment of 'order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbors, and of servile dependency upon their superiors', Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. I, pp. 328–9.

<sup>108</sup> P. Gordon, 'Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas', in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. S. Moyn and D. McMahon (Oxford, 2014), p. 43.

predicated on the advent of a modern order of global commerce and, on the other, economic institutions and practices that, while integral and enabling parts of global commerce, were deemed uncivil and barbarous by the moral standards employed to judge that new order. The figure of the 'imperial frontiersman' (in this case, the colonial planter) embodies this tension between commerce and empire and offers a productive perspective on the impact of imperial economic structures in shaping metropolitan attitudes towards both. In this respect, Hume's disavowal can be understood as a genuine if troubled effort to navigate this contradiction, which arose from embracing the prosperity, manners and morals unique to commercial society while refusing to openly engage commercial society's imperial, illiberal conditions of possibility.

### Conclusion From Commerce to Capitalism

In an important essay on the historical origins of liberalism, J.G.A. Pocock challenged the then-dominant interpretation that traced liberalism to the natural jurisprudential theories of Hobbes and Locke.<sup>109</sup> Liberalism as a political language, Pocock countered, was born of the clash of civic humanism and commercial civility as two modern (that is, post-feudal) political vocabularies mobilized to comprehend and judge the historical novelty of commercial society in the eighteenth century. Those who spoke the language of civic humanism revived the classical values of citizen virtue and public spirit to criticize luxury, finance and the absorption of citizens into private economic activities entailed by the modern division of labour. Exponents of commercial civility, Hume amongst them, emphasized the refinement of manners, sociability and material comforts that accompanied increased commercial intercourse, which made the ancient citizen of virtue appeared poor, rude and warlike. The triumph of the language of civility, Pocock concludes, is where we should look for liberal origins.

I have argued that when we focus on imperial frontiersmen such as colonial planters, we find them occupying a liminal position that unsettles the binaries by which Hume and other figures of the Enlightenment differentiated modern Europeans from their barbarous predecessors as well as from their savage or despotic non-European contemporaries. The colonial planter represented a disturbing species of petty tyrant residing in imperial provinces who was at once *commercial and barbarous*, and whose barbarism bore a direct proportion to the profits to be made from the exploitation of his slaves. Colonial planters were distinctly *modern*. While partaking in the barbarism of the ancients as slave owners, they lacked the latter's civic virtue. Their property in land and slaves were productive assets, or *capital*, put to the pecuniary pursuit of supplying the Atlantic world with tobacco and sugar, rather than a

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<sup>109</sup> Pocock, 'Mobility of Property'.

means to independence, autonomy and leisure necessary to engage in public affairs. They were despotic and oppressive in their manners like the Asiatics but they were also white, English-speaking subjects of the most 'enlightened' and 'free' nation in Europe. Their barbarism could not be localized either temporally or geographically. They inhabited the frontier of commercial civility, contributing to its socioeconomic foundations, while being denied full admission in it.

Colonial planters are not the only figures that fall under the rubric of imperial frontiersman. As noted earlier, the agents of joint-stock trading companies operating in South and Southeast Asia also occupied such a liminal position. Once the commercial imperialism of the East India Company in India was laid bare by the Select Committee of the Commons in 1781, Edmund Burke (one of the members of the Select Committee) excoriated the 'barbarous policies' of the Company that opened the subcontinent to naked plunder with no regard to civilized customs and conventions, British and Indian alike. Once arrived in the Eastern provinces of the empire, Britons dropped all trappings of civility and succumbed to a speculating, commercial type of barbarism that rendered them comparable to modern-day 'Tartars', who descended on the Indian population like 'birds of passage and prey'.<sup>110</sup> Yet, Burke's proposed solution was not to pull out of the subcontinent, but to restore the Anglo-Indian trade to its 'true commercial foundation' while maintaining the British rule in India. Burke's efforts at impeaching Warren Hastings and reforming the East India Company were tokens of his faith in the possibility of an Indian empire cleansed of imperial arrogance, one that remained an empire but conducted fair and equitable trade with its conquered subjects, or, to use Morefield's apt coinage, an empire without imperialism. Burke's exoneration of 'imperial commerce' by displacing rapacity onto the 'imperious commerce' of the Company, like Hume's confinement of slavery to the ancients or the Asiatics, can be construed as an effort to shore up the ideological boundaries between commerce and empire at a time when these boundaries were increasingly perforated by the movement of planters and company men, along with their colonial wealth and incivility, back and forth between the imperial frontiers and the metropole.<sup>111</sup>

To return to the theoretical framework outlined in the first section, an important implication of the foregoing analysis is that the 'barbarism' that characterized imperial frontiersmen represented neither a temporal relapse into more primitive attitudes of cruelty nor a spatial exodus from the domain of civility that was coextensive with Western Europe. Rather than an anomaly to Western commercial civility, it constituted a dynamic internal to the historical emergence of global capitalist relations within the politico-legal

<sup>110</sup> E. Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, 1981), p. 402.

<sup>111</sup> Ince, 'Not a Partnership'.

framework of colonial empires. More specifically, these acts of ‘barbarism’ can be understood as colonial instances of what Karl Marx has labelled the ‘primitive accumulation of capital’, which denotes the use of extra-economic force, non-market coercion and naked violence for transforming or subordinating non-capitalist relations of social reproduction to capital.<sup>112</sup> While primitive accumulation was pivotal to creating the institutional background conditions of the capitalist market order, its methods, amongst which Marx includes expropriation, enslavement and plunder, appeared too ‘primitive’ and uncivilized when judged by the rarefied image of capitalism as essentially a liberal market society in which ‘life, liberty, property, and Bentham’ reigned supreme.<sup>113</sup> Expanding these insights into a framework of colonial capitalism can bring into focus the inner connections of imperial economic formations, the specific vectors of imperial violence employed to transform and reorient colonial economies, and the specific ideological problems that each of these instances created in specific periods and contexts. Viewed from this broader perspective, the eighteenth-century ambivalence about global commerce ceases to be merely a moral critique of wanton imperial violence thwarting a cosmopolitan promise, and appears as a critical and formative episode in the genealogy of the fraught entwinement of liberalism and capitalism.

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<sup>112</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1: *Critique of Political Economy* (London, 1976).

<sup>113</sup> For two recent appraisals, see N. Fraser, ‘Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode’, *New Left Review*, 86 (2014), pp. 55–72; O. Ince, ‘Bringing the Economy Back In: Hannah Arendt, Karl Marx, and the Politics of Capitalism’, *The Journal of Politics*, 78 (2016), pp. 411–26.