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Urbanization in the Developing World¹

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING to undermine religious fanaticism and intolerance in the increasingly urban modern world? In a talk a couple of years ago, I held up Paris as an example of how to rapidly grow a large urban area, noting that it provides the sorts of facilities—opportunities for economic advancement, education, and civic entertainment—which seem work best in undermining religious fanaticism. But I added the following comment: “Unfortunately, this is not (yet) the situation in some of the Algerian arrondissements, the very parts of Paris which are most in need of further integration into modern urban life.”² Here I want to argue for the importance of something that did not even make my earlier list of things we should be doing to turn rapidly growing mega-cities into civilized places: etiquette.

Schopenhauer uses an apt image to frame his discussion of minor social mores: the sort of thing Hobbes had earlier called “small morals.” Here is Schopenhauer’s image:

¹ A version of this paper was presented to the Canadian Society for the Study of Practical Ethics Annual Congress, at York University, Toronto, on 29 May 2006, under the title, “The Mega-City in the Developing World.” I am grateful to Chris MacDonald for first inspiring me to think about this matter, to Robert Martin for his many helpful suggestions and encouragement, and to Thea E. Smith who provided me with the appropriate circumstances in which to think about these matters.

² Sheldon Wein, “Ethics and Global Urbanization,” a talk given to the Canadian Society for the Study of Practical Ethics, Sunday, 30 May 2004. For an insightful (and hilarious) look into how contemporary society undermines religious dogmatism, see David Lodge’s *How Far Can You Go?* (London: Penguin Books, 1981). Whatever one thinks of the changes in French labour law recently made to alleviate this problem (by giving those in the troubled arrondissements greater economic opportunity), it is particularly sad to see the poverty of alternative ideas by those opposed to opening the French labour market.

One cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together quite closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent themselves from being frozen. But they soon felt the effect of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another. Thus the need for society which springs from the emptiness and monotony of men's lives, drives them together; but their many unpleasant and repulsive qualities and insufferable drawbacks once more drive them apart. The mean distance which they finally discover, and which enables them to endure being together, is politeness and good manners.³

Throughout our history humans have always sought society with other humans.⁴ Whether this springs from the essential “emptiness and monotony” of our lives or from some other cause will not concern me here. What I wish to argue is that we need to think hard about how we can minimize the effects of our “many unpleasant and indeed repulsive qualities and insufferable drawbacks.” This is not something we have done well or frequently. When it comes to organizing social interaction, the greatest minds have usually devoted their attention to two deeply connected matters: economics and morals. This was quite appropriate, for we needed knowledge of the former to learn how to enable us to have the means to survive and live well and knowledge of the latter enabled us to protect lives that are worth living. And any even marginally well educated person can name several great economists (and in doing so will inevitably name several important moral philosophers).⁵ But too little attention has been paid to politeness and good manners. (Just try to name some great—well, we don't even have a name for them—some great etiquette-ists, philosophers of manners, or experts in “small morals.” Whatever you want to call them, it will be a short list.) This, I will argue, is a matter that needs correction, and urgently so.⁶

The mores—and here I use the term broadly to include morals, religions, superstitions, traditions, rules of etiquette, and patterns of be-

³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume II, §396, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 651–52.

⁴ Stories of humans who avoid social interaction with other humans—be these stories fiction or not—always have them involved in social interaction with some other group, such as wolves or great apes.

⁵ It is no coincidence that—until recently, at least—all our great economists have also been moral philosophers and our greatest moralists have all made contributions to economics.

⁶ The experts we do have in this field have concentrated on questions of how new members of the middle or upper classes should behave towards each other. To my knowledge, the writings of Emily Post and Miss Manners contain no advice on how peasants should behave when they move to the city.

lief—which arise and survive when people live together in small groups cause much greater problems when taken to larger social groups. The intolerance so typical of the village—the homophobia, the oppression of women and the violence against them, the exclusion of people with divergent religious views, the worship of tradition, the *insert here your favourite human failing*—cause much more serious difficulties and dangers when people with such views come together to live in mega-cities. Perhaps economic growth—occurring most frequently, surely, and dramatically in urban settings—also brings moral progress as thinkers from Adam Smith through Karl Marx to Benjamin Friedman have claimed.⁷ But it is clear that moral backwardness is much more of a problem in the mega-city than it is in the village. Even if the harm caused by village mores is per capita as great in the village as it is in the city, the city gives us a place to do something about it that the village does not. Overcoming the moral failings of villages seems an intractable problem for our species.⁸ Overcoming the moral failings of urbanites may not be.⁹

I take it that the rules enabling successful human interaction vary with the circumstances. On this much, everyone who thinks clearly on these matters agrees. (Everyone thinks that the surface rules which allow for successful human interaction can, and should, vary depending on the situations in which humans find themselves. The debate between relativists and non-relativists is over whether the deeper principles justifying the surface rules—if there are any such deeper principles—also vary or whether there is a single principle or complex set of them which generates and justifies different surface rules in different circumstances. For obvious reasons I will

⁷ Famously, Marx writes of the “idiocy of rural life” in the *Communist Manifesto*. But Marx may have meant only to refer to the “isolation” faced by those living outside cities. For an interesting discussion of this, see Hal Draper’s definitive, though little known work, *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto* (Berkeley: Center for Socialist History, 1998). Draper claims that Marx’s use of the German term *idiotismus* still retained the original Greek meaning from the term *idiotes*: a private person, withdrawn from communal concerns, apolitical in the original sense of isolation from the community. He argues that this was likely Marx’s intention in the *Manifesto*, given both the context and the fact that he had just been working on Greek philosophy and was in the habit of reading Aeschylus in the original. I thank Robert Martin for bringing this to my attention.

⁸ Of course, there are many highly moral people living in villages and rural areas. There are many villages that are, morally speaking, quite attractive. But no one has yet found a way to make most villages free from the scourges of homophobia, xenophobia, and oppression of women and to enable them to become places that foster free thought, tolerance, and innovation.

⁹ I say *may* not be, since it is obviously too early for any of us to make more than educated guesses about this. It may be that no matter what we do—what mores we adopt as a group—humans simply cannot sustain themselves and are simply destined for extinction.

simply avoid this issue for purposes of this paper. Nothing I say hangs on how deep the relativism of social rules goes.¹⁰) Of course, to say that the social rules that best allow humans to interact well ought to vary with the circumstances is not to say that some rules are not going to be appropriate in virtually all the circumstances in which humans are likely to find themselves.¹¹ My focus here is on those rules that appropriately change with time and place.

The circumstances of humans have been changing rapidly, and with these changes we have had to alter the social rules that enable us to interact tolerably well. I will first discuss the nature of the changes in our circumstances and then will concentrate on just one aspect of those changes—urbanization in less developed countries and the issue of whether and to what extent this requires changes in social rules. We must remember that the fact that a set of social rules works well in promoting human survival in one set of circumstances is at best little reason to think that that same set will work in other circumstances.¹²



A bit of history. For most of the past four thousand years, humans have devoted themselves to living rather short lives, spending a great deal of time engaged in miserable activities, and spending a good deal of their very limited non-miserable time making others miserable. We have been spending most of our time killing members of other species in order that we might survive, and fending off other species (especially tiny ones), and what free time we had was devoted to killing other members of our species, an activity which all the evidence suggests is, at least some of the time in some apparently quite widely various sets of circumstances, something humans find quite an attractive thing to do.

¹⁰ With the demise of deconstructionism and the plunge in popularity of postmodernism we can again recognize relativism of this sort without abandoning rigour and clear thinking.

¹¹ The classic discussion of this matter is Section 2, Chapter 9 of H.L.H. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

¹² Of course, existing social rules are salient, and so even when everyone knows that circumstances have changed radically, they may remain as the sub-optimal but stable equilibrium for the group. Furthermore, there is no social arrangement that can save all of us. "It's a dim fate, to be the sort of person who can't earn a living, or resist another drink, or remember today what he resolved to do yesterday. No amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town" (Ian McEwan, *Saturday* [Toronto: Random House, 2005] 272).

Now, folklore has it that the invention of the wheel was the great discovery that moved humans along the road to technological progress. I don't wish to go round in circles on this matter, but it seems to me obvious that, while quite important, another discovery/invention rolls all over the wheel when it comes to big deals in human history. I refer, of course, to beer.

People regularly misunderstand the role that beer plays in the life of humans. I suspect this has to do with a too-narrow focus on its present roles: getting people to watch TV sports by entertaining them during the less exciting parts of such games through the association of beer with attractive young people living enviable lives; bringing genuine pleasure in itself or as an aid to conversation and conviviality among members of our species; and ruining what otherwise appear to be lives that could be very good ones. But, without denying the importance of these consequences of beer, they are tiny compared to its main role in human progress.

The discovery of beer served to enable humans to urbanize. It provided nutrition—calories, protein, vitamins—encouraging the move from hunting/gathering to settled agriculture.¹³ But more important, perhaps, was its sanitary function. What happens to humans when they live close together in large numbers without beer is that they kill each other. They do this not by intentional means but by *intestinal* ones. It turns out that our intestines host other living things which, when not in our intestines, can and will kill others (and indeed oneself). Except in exceptional circumstances,¹⁴ if you put a bunch of humans together in close proximity, the critters in their intestines get into the water supply in sufficient concentration to kill the humans in vast numbers. And having vast numbers of dead humans around will promptly kill most of those who remain. So, urbanization seems to be impossible for humans. But beer solves this problem: the water used in making beer is boiled, killing the bugs which would otherwise kill us.¹⁵ And perhaps the low alcohol level in primitive beer acted as a further sterilizer. I think that the reason that urbanization is so important is that it allows for specialization—division of labour—and that in turn makes humans

¹³ See Tom Standage, *A History of the World in Six Glasses* (New York: Walker & Company, 2005) 21; see also, *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine: Food and Nutrition in History and Anthropology*, ed. Stuart Fleming, Patrick McGovern, and Solomon Katz (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ The exceptional circumstances involve having good sanitation available to keep human waste out of the drinking water supply. This may have occurred in some high-altitude, dry locations in the Americas.

¹⁵ Standage, *A History of the World in Six Glasses* 21–22.

so much more productive than they otherwise could be. But even if you prefer some other account—say that cities allow for cultures to develop, for information to be exchanged, for superstitions to develop into religions (which are needed for the coordination of the behaviour of large numbers of people), or for people to overcome tribalism and adopt new mores—it is obvious that urbanization did occur: humans today live predominately and increasingly in large urban centers.



It is only quite recently that the problem of how to incorporate vast numbers of new arrivals into the city has arisen, it is the result of the recent development of significantly large pockets of wealth, and the impossibility of isolating them physically from the surrounding poverty. Four centuries ago, almost everyone was badly off. But fairly recently, for the first time in the history of our species, a significant proportion of us became well off. The issue of exactly *when* this happened and, especially, *why* it happened is a matter that is hotly contested.¹⁶ This change, starting in Europe, and spreading to all inhabited continents, was accompanied by some huge and unprecedented developments. Jeffery Sachs writes:

The past two centuries, since around 1800, constitute a unique era in economic history, a period the great economic historian Simon Kuznets famously termed the period of modern economic growth. Before then, indeed for thousands of years, there had been virtually no sustained economic growth in the world, and only gradual increases in human population. The world population has risen gradually from around 230 million people at the start of the first millennium in AD 1, to perhaps 270 million people by AD 1000, and 900 million by AD 1800. Real living standards were even slower to change. According to Madison, there was no discernible rise in living standards on a global scale during the first millennium, and perhaps a 50 percent increase in the capital income in the eight-hundred-year period from AD 1000 to AD 1800.

¹⁶ The data suggest that this first started to show up (in any significant way) no more than three centuries ago and almost certainly within in the last two. It is much more difficult to say what the causes were. My list of probable candidates includes the abandonment of a world view which held that knowledge was something to be preserved rather than sought, the spread of the scientific method, the move to more open societies, the creation of predictable legal arrangements (that encourage individual initiative, inventiveness, and saving), the growth of trade and increase in literacy, the invention/discovery of the calculus, and from certain geographic considerations. Others, including Marx, rank various technological advances as more significant. But even if we were able to identify the causes, there is (in some cases) difficulty in determining when those causes actually occurred or started to have an effect. On this see William Bernstein's *The Birth of Plenty: How the Prosperity of the Modern World Was Created* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

In the period of modern economic growth, however, both population and per capita income came unstuck, soaring at rates never before seen or even imagined [T]he global population rose more than sixfold in just two centuries, reaching an astounding 6.1 billion people at the start of the third millennium, with plenty of momentum for rapid population growth still ahead. The world's average per capita income rose even faster ... increasing by around nine times between 1820 and 2000. In today's rich countries, the economic growth was even more astounding. The US per capita income increased almost twenty-five-fold during this period, and Western Europe's increased fifteen-fold. Total worldwide food production more than kept up with the booming world population (though large numbers of chronically hungry people remain today). Vastly improved farm yields were achieved on the basis of technological advances. If we combine the increases in world population and world output per person, we find that the total economic activity in the world (the gross world product or GWP) rose an astounding forty-nine times during the past 180 years.

The gulf between today's rich and poor countries is therefore a new phenomenon, a yawning gap that opened during the period of modern economic growth. As of 1820, the biggest gap between the rich and poor—specifically, between the world's leading economy of the day, the United Kingdom, and the world's poorest region, Africa—was a ratio of four to one in per capita income (even after adjusting for differences in purchasing power). By 1998, the gap between the richest economy, the United States, and the poorest region, Africa, had widened to twenty to one. Since all parts of the world had a roughly comparable starting point in 1820 (all very poor by current standards), today's vast inequalities reflect the fact that some parts of the world achieved modern economic growth while others did not.¹⁷

With these developments came major changes in mores, most dramatically in cities. Of course, all of us think that some of the mores adopted by millions, indeed billions, of people living today in cities belong in the distant past (if they belong anywhere in real time). But whatever we think of such mores, they are relatively new ones. Ken Binmore reminds us that “Anthropologists tell us that food is gathered and distributed in pure hunter-gatherer societies largely according to the Marxian principle that each contributes according to his ability, and benefits according to his need.”¹⁸ One still can find very isolated villages with those mores or, much more easily, find villages with mores from several centuries ago. But one cannot find a single mega-city where this is so. There is no mega-city where people are very much like what they were even three centuries ago.



In the developed world we have and have devoted huge resources to
the task of integrating newcomers into our rapidly growing first-world cit-

¹⁷ Sachs, Jeffrey *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005) 27–29.

¹⁸ Ken Binmore, *Natural Justice* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2005) 80.

ies. Many feel—and I am among them—that we do not devote sufficient resources to this task. Nonetheless, the amount of resources used in this way is, in historical terms, enormous. Many who emigrate to the first world’s mega-cities feel isolated and uncared for by the general populace and by government, but no unbiased observer can deny that much more is done to better their lot than was for those who arrived in earlier eras. By contrast, the mega-cities outside the first world, lacking the huge resources of first-world cities, can do much less for their newcomers.

But there are important differences between new arrivals in first-world and developing-country mega-cities, and these differences partially compensate for the resource gap. In the first world, a big proportion of new arrivals to mega-cities are immigrants, many of whom do not speak the dominant language of their new city and are unfamiliar with its cultural and political traditions. In the developing world, most of the new arrivals (and in practical terms, all the new arrivals who might need assistance) are likely to be from within the country in which the city is located. Hence, they usually know the language and the culture quite well, for it is *their* language and culture. In addition, those new arrivals to mega-cities outside the developed world who happen to be from *outside* the country are almost always more wealthy than the citizens of the city they have adopted. So, while they may require assistance in adjusting linguistically and culturally, they do not require public funding for such help.

I am not claiming, however, that things are always easier in developing-world mega-cities. First, I do not wish to minimize the significant differences among newcomers to such places. It may well be that the differences between those who move to Buenos Aires from Jujuy, Corrientes, and Patagonia pale beside the differences among those who go to London. But those who arrive in Mumbai from rural India have huge religious, cultural, and linguistic differences. In large developing nations (such as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and Russia), the differences between the newcomers to the mega-city may be quite enormous, and it glosses over things to say that because they came from the same country they likely the same language and culture. Even in smaller nations with mega-cities (consider Lagos or Tehran), the linguistic, cultural, and tribal differences among new arrivals from rural areas are apt to be quite large. Furthermore, in some mega-cities in the developing world (Cairo comes to mind), a large percentage of newcomers are from other nations.¹⁹ So it is

¹⁹ While I was writing this paper in Buenos Aires, five Bolivian workers died in a sweatshop fire there. Subsequently, there was a protest march by many thousands of (mostly illegal) Bolivian sweatshop workers. (Official estimates were that there had been only a few hundred protesters.) But the fact remains that the vast majority of new arrivals in the mega-cities of

not always true that there is less diversity among new arrivals to the mega-cities of the developing world than there is among the new arrivals to the mega-cities located within developed countries; and even in developing-world mega-cities, where newcomers are relatively less foreign, there are nevertheless real and significant problems. After all, the new arrivals in Lagos may well already hate the other new arrivals there, while London's new arrivals from Nigeria have yet to learn to hate the new Pakistani arrivals that live in the next block. Furthermore, it should be noted that foreign arrivals to mega-cities in the developed world are usually urbanites themselves, whereas arrivals to mega-cities in the developing world are much more likely to be from rural areas and have little or no experience living with people they do not know quite well. So the problems of the mega-cities in the developing world may be just as huge as those faced by mega-cities in the developed world.



Newcomers to first world cities expect to have to adapt. Of course, many of them want to retain parts of their culture, their religious beliefs, their ways of life, and their moral views. But they also expect to have to make some adjustments to the new world to which they have moved. Newcomers to developing-world cities often lack such expectations, or have them to a much lesser degree. Of course, there are some who think that the process of immigration selects individuals who are more readily able to adapt. Those people who know they can't adapt or who are unwilling to make the enormous effort required are less likely to be immigrants. So when two people leave their developing-nation villages and one goes to the first world and the other goes to the big metropolis in her own country, it is the former person who is (it is sometimes held) the more adaptable of the two. But if this difference exists, it may not make a big difference. It may be that mega-cities in the developed world have many new highly adaptable citizens who need to do lots of adapting, and mega-cities in the developing world may have many new residents who, while they have less adapting to do, are not as ready, willing, and able to do that adapting.

There are other aspects to consider. Miami and Sydney compete with Rio and Buenos Aires as places for the wealthy first-worlders to retire. The fact that Miami's population growth is much more diverse than Rio's is a big plus for much-more-expensive Miami. And the fact that developed

the developing world are from within the country in which the city is located. Indeed, there are no small country mega-cities.

societies are both safer and have a more egalitarian distribution of wealth generally makes them more attractive in this regard. Of course, there are exceptions—Buenos Aires is safer than Miami—but, in general, the wealthier the society, the safer and the more egalitarian it is. (Think about how safe one is in Sydney, or even Miami, compared with Rio or Moscow.)

Differences in immigration patterns have huge consequences for businesses. If I want to open a low-skills, not-very-highly-capitalized business, I am much better off in Mumbai than I am in London. But if I operate a business in Los Angeles and need someone to deal with a business in Shanghai, I am much better off, in terms of hiring someone with the appropriate cultural and linguistic skills, than I would be if I operated a business in Shanghai and needed to hire someone to help interact with a business in Los Angeles. Of course, otherwise, my labour costs are much higher in Los Angeles than in Shanghai. But for international transactions, the reverse is true: While Paris, New York, London, and Berlin compete with each other for high-priced talent most of it is drawn from their competitors, but when Mumbai, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Shanghai compete for high-priced talent, they compete with each other for people from developed countries.²⁰ Moreover, these developing-world mega-cities compete not just with each other but for individuals drawn from developed nations, who can easily get work in the mega-cities of the developed world. Of workers in the top two deciles, wherever they are working, proportionally many more are from developed nations than from developing ones. Indeed, one way to measure how developed a nation has become is to see from where it draws its most highly paid workers.²¹



Benjamin Friedman, paraphrasing Edward Banfield, notes:

Some minimum degree of trust between individuals who are not related by blood or marriage is an essential underpinning to many everyday arrangements—political, commercial, social—in which people must act on the assumption that

²⁰ Presumably, over time, the comparative advantage on both sides will shrink. That is to say, the less-skilled labour-cost gap will close and there will be less of a gap in the cost of bilingual culturally sophisticated labour in the two cities. Indeed, if either the critics or the defenders of globalization are correct, one thing we can count on is that the planet will become more homogeneous in that respect at least.

²¹ On measuring how developed as society is, see Sheldon Wein “Measuring Progress in International Development,” a talk presented in the University College of Cape Breton Distinguished Visiting Speaker’s Series and available from the author.

others with reciprocate. This trust becomes especially important during economic development and modernization, when large numbers of people physically move away from the family—and clan-oriented social networks that often underpin traditional societies.... Economic growth also helps this process by fostering the kind of interpersonal trust that is a prerequisite for any democracy, either new or old.²²

The evidence for this claim is quite clear. And the standard image of the country bumpkin is that of someone who is too trusting—the sucker that the city slicker can easily take advantage of. This image is false, but even if it were true, the inevitable result of such characteristics would be the lack of trust that all studies show rural folks have.²³ This inability to trust others unknown to one needs to be overcome, especially when one moves to the city. Getting new urbanites to trust their new neighbours, to adopt less fanatical religious views, to be less xenophobic, less sexist, and less violent, to become more open to education and to be more liberal, generous, and tolerant is a great challenge. Furthermore, in those cases where peasants lack the capacity to abandon and replace their illiberal views, we need to get them to hide those views. The evidence on how we are doing at this task is, to say the least, mixed.

A lot of thinking has been devoted to what causes people to change from peasants to urbanites (not in the physical but the attitudinal sense). We now are fairly sure that economic conditions—particularly how the economy is organized, and what its rate of growth is—are a huge factor, and that constrained religions, levels of education, and female participation are also important. Very little thinking has been done about what manners and customs we should seek to cultivate in people to get them (and us) through the difficult time while people are throwing off rural mores and adopting urban ones.

Adam Smith wrote:

In every civilized society, in every society where the distinction of ranks has once been completely established, there have been always two different schemes or systems of morality current at the same time; of which the one may be called the strict or austere; the other the liberal, or, if you will, the loose system. The former is generally admired and revered by the common people: the latter is commonly more esteemed and adopted by what are called people of fashion. The degree of disapprobation with which we ought to mark the vices of levity, the vices which are apt to arise from great prosperity, and from the excess of

²² Benjamin M. Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) 307.

²³ It may be that the con artists in the city get to the rural folk before the sociologists do and that this explains the scholarly data.

gaiety and good humour, seems to constitute the principal distinction between these two opposite schemes or systems. In the liberal or loose system, luxury, wanton and even disorderly mirth, the pursuit of pleasure to some degree of intemperance, the breach of chastity, at least in one of the two sexes, &c. provided they are not accompanied with gross indecency, and do not lead to falsehood or injustice, are generally treated with a good deal of indulgence, and are easily either excused or pardoned altogether. In the austere system, on the contrary, those excesses are regarded with the utmost abhorrence and detestation. The vices of levity are always ruinous to the common people, and a single week's thoughtlessness and dissipation is often sufficient to undo a poor workman for ever, and to drive him through despair upon committing the most enormous crimes. The wiser and better sort of the common people, therefore, have always the utmost abhorrence and detestation of such excesses, which their experience tells them are so immediately fatal to people of their condition. The disorder and extravagance of several years, on the contrary, will not always ruin a man of fashion, and people of that rank are very apt to consider the power of indulging in some degree of excess as one of the advantages of their fortune, and the liberty of doing so without censure or reproach, as one of the privileges which belong to their station. In people of their own station, therefore, they regard such excesses with but a small degree of disapprobation, and censure them either very slightly or not at all.²⁴

Smith goes on to note: "Almost all religious sects have begun among the common people, from who they have generally drawn their earliest, as well as their most numerous proselytes. The austere system of morality has, accordingly, been adopted by those sects almost constantly." He further observes that many of them "have even endeavoured to gain credit by refining upon this austere system, and by carrying it to some degree of folly and extravagance."

Smith then observes that people of the higher class ("A man of rank and fortune [who] is by his station the distinguished member of a great society, who attend to every part of his conduct, and who thereby oblige him to attend to every part of it himself") have to be more careful about obeying the looser rules than do men of lower classes (advice we all wish Bill Clinton had been a bit more careful to heed). For present purposes, however, it is Smith's further observations that are most important. He goes on to observe that, in cities, religious sects take over the role of the village in keeping an eye on and punishing those members of the working classes who could so easily deviate. This is a good thing, but, unfortunately, "The morals of those little sects, indeed, have frequently been rather disagreeably rigorous and unsocial." The adverse effects of religion on civil society was a concern of Smith's throughout his life. In his earlier *The Theory of*

²⁴ This and the following quotes from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* are from Book V, Chapter I, Paragraphs 199–201.

Moral Sentiments (which Smith always thought was his most important work), he says “False notions of religion are almost the only causes which can occasion any very gross perversion of our natural sentiments.”²⁵ And, of course, Smith thought that our natural sentiments were the foundation for our moral views and the sole motive for our acting out of moral duty. Perversion of these sentiments is a real danger for society.

So the question for Smith is something like this. We need some way to control and coordinate the behaviour of the newly urbanized poor to conform to a rather austere morality until such time as their economic circumstances improve to the point where a looser, less austere, more permissive morality is appropriate. Religion might seem like the appropriate device for bolstering morality here. But the only religions that take up this task are unacceptably fanatical and are liable to harm civilization more than they protect the newly urbanized peasants. To deal with this problem, the problem of how to undermine the forces of religious fundamentalism, Smith suggests using the power of the state.

Smith argued that public funding for the fine arts and various festivals was important in undermining the deleterious effects of religious fanatics and keeping them from poisoning the minds of new urbanites with an overly rigorous morality. He also thought that successful urbanites had a duty to reflect on the manners and customs appropriate to adopt towards impoverished new arrivals and to seek to get them to adopt. Unfortunately, despite the fame of his discussion of the fact that in order to go out in public in some societies a linen shirt is a necessity while in others it is not, his advice that we all need to think carefully about the appropriate social mores to adopt in novel circumstances has largely been ignored. We do not know what “small morals” to teach to the new urban poor or to adopt towards them. We need to think carefully about this.



Lest anyone think that “small morals” are small matters, let me remind them of the large role they play in the behaviour of individuals in highly developed, largely urbanized societies.²⁶ For example, in the United States of America and in Canada people have very strong views about the morality of abortion. These views are roughly the same in both countries. That is to say,

²⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Part III, Chapter 6, Paragraph 12.

²⁶ I reject the views of the filmmaker Michael Moore on this subject. He sometimes seems to hold that they are *all* that matter—a view that makes his behaviour difficult to comprehend!

roughly the same percentage of each of the two populations thinks that it is always wrong, that it is usually wrong, that it is sometimes wrong, and so forth. Roughly the same percentage of the populations thinks that a woman has a (moral) right to choose whether to have an abortion (or ought to have the legal right to do that), and roughly the same percentage thinks the right ought to be constrained in roughly the same circumstances, and so forth. In other words, the moral views—the big morals—of the two countries are virtually identical on this contentious issue. (Canadians have slightly more liberal views on the matter, but this is only to the extent that Canada is a somewhat more urbanized, and hence less religious, society. If you look only at the rural data or the urban data you cannot tell which country you are looking at.)

But in the United States of America, people regularly take violent means to settle their differences on this matter. Canadians rarely do so. (I should note here that the same is the case about homosexuality, interracial marriage, and almost everything else that might drive people to kill each other for impersonal non-economic reasons.²⁷) Why is this?

The best explanation I know of is that, in Canada, it is impolite to get worked up about such matters, whereas etiquette is not so strict in the United States. So manners matter, and not just in the sense we were all taught by our parents but in terms of how well a society is able to function.

Note here that my argument does not depend on the view that Canadian manners are superior to American ones. Perhaps people who think that something is murder ought to stand up and do something about murder. Perhaps having a people be socialized so that they allow what they perceive to be murder to take place because to do something about it would be impolite, is to have a people overly vulnerable to being corroborators in vast and hideous crimes.²⁸ Suppose this is so. (Say that if you give children American manners they speak up when told to work at a concentration camp, but the Canadian only thinks about objecting and decides not to because, well, it isn't polite to raise such matters.) My point is that our collective rules of etiquette make a difference, sometimes a huge difference. It is something that we need to think about, argue about, study, and work on. And we need to do this promptly. Finally, you may be wondering what small morals I think citizens of megacities in the developing world should adopt towards the anosognosiac newcomers who are arriving and what social graces they should seek to inculcate

²⁷ Ronald Inglehart, Miguel Basanez, and Neil Nevitte, *Convergencia en Norte-america: Comercio, Politica y Cultura* (Mexico City, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1994).

²⁸ Politeness is not the only causal factor here, but, on the hypothesis being considered, it is the one that tips the balance.

in those newcomers.²⁹ Unhappily, my (alas, widely shared) ignorance keeps me from being able to answer this.

²⁹ My own view is that we need to encourage newcomers who move to the city from the countryside to adopt whatever mores will enhance their inclination to rely on and support the rule of law, especially where this conflicts with tradition and peer pressure, will move them to value education for their children, and will allow them to become less illiberal. But I have no competence to offer advice on either what social mores might best do this or how they should be developed.

