

SLAVERY, ADAM SMITH'S ECONOMIC VISION AND THE INVISIBLE HAND*

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With an appendix:

Adam Smith and the Late Resolution of the Quakers of Pennsylvania: A Response to a False Report

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Smith was against slavery on moral and economic grounds. The "invisible hand" in societies which allow slavery, operates in such a way that increases in the wealth of the rich, leads to increased misery for the poor free citizens as well as for the slaves themselves. It seems that the beneficial workings of the "invisible hand" are dependent upon commercial societies which are not based upon the institution of slavery.

The appendix demonstrates that Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* was responding to a false report of the supposed manumission of the slaves by the Quakers of Pennsylvania.

1. There is a deep, profound element of pessimism in Adam Smith's social and economic thought which is perhaps not suffi-

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ciently appreciated by many of Smith's readers; although some, such as Hayek (e.g. 1948) and Heilbroner (e.g. 1975), have certainly emphasized this aspect of Smith's thought. Thus, for example, it is possible to extract a relatively searing indictment of "commercial" society from Smith's writings (e.g. Pack, 1991, especially chapter 8, "Character Formation Under Capitalism: The Downside of Smith's System of Capitalism", pp. 138-165). Nonetheless, Smith ultimately came out in favor of commercial society because of commercial society's low opportunity cost: human nature was such, according to Smith, that anything other than commercial society would no doubt be worse than commercial society. Smith's pessimistic view of human nature is perhaps most evident in his position on slavery.

The most extensive record we have of Smith's views on slavery comes from his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, "Report of 1762-3" delivered on Tuesday February 15, 1763, and then the next day Wednesday, February 16, 1763; these lectures were not published until 1978. The following paper details Smith's pessimistic attitudes towards slavery. For Smith, slavery had existed since the beginnings of time and there was little likelihood of its ever being completely abolished in the future. The condition of slaves grew worse as the society became richer and more free. In slave-owning societies, the growth of the wealthy was deleterious towards the rest of the populace.

In these societies, there was no beneficial "invisible hand" which enabled the consumption of the rich to help the rest of society. This suggests that the beneficial workings of any invisible hands in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations* was socially specific to commercial societies which did not allow the institution of slavery.

2. Adam Smith was against slavery on humanitarian and ethical grounds. He lectured his students that "... we may see what a miserable life the slaves must have led; their life and their property entirely at the mercy of another, and their liberty, if they could be said to have any, at his disposal also" (1978, p. 178). "It is evident that the state of slavery must be very unhappy to the slave himself.

This I need hardly prove, though some writers have called it in question" (p. 185).

As Smith pointed out, people who call themselves Christians may still be slaveholders. "But we are not to imagine the temper of the Christian religion is necessarily contrary to slavery. The masters in our colonies are Christians, and yet slavery is allowed amongst them" (p. 191).

Of course, as is well known, Smith was also against slavery on grounds of economic efficiency. So for example, Smith claimed that "work done by slaves ... is in the end the dearest of any. A person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible". (WN, p. 387). Smith makes this same basic point in Book I (pp. 98-99 in the chapter on wages); Book III (pp. 387-388); and Book IV (both in the section "On Colonies" p. 587 and in the chapter on the Physiocrats, pp. 683-685). In writing the *Wealth of Nations* for publication (as opposed to lecturing to his students in his jurisprudence course), Viner was no doubt correct in surmising that "Smith may have thought that a more effective way of ending slavery than preaching moral principle or humility to slave-owners was to persuade them that free labor would be more profitable to them than slave labor" (1965, p. 116).

Yet, there was also a deep pessimism in Smith regarding the possibility of eradicating slavery. Slavery exists in most parts of the world: "It is indeed almost impossible that it should ever be totally or generally abolished" (1978, p. 181). There is what may be called an ontological flaw in the make up of humans: "... slavery takes place in all societies at their beginning, and proceeds from that tyrannic disposition which may almost be said to be natural to mankind" (1978, p. 452).

Smith does not foresee that slavery will ever be abolished in a "free" society. This is because of "the love of domination and authority and the pleasure men take in having every thing done by their express orders, rather than to condescend to bargain and treat with those whom they look upon as their inferiors and are inclined to use in a haughty way; this love of domination and tyrannizing, I say, will make it impossible for the slaves in a free country ever to recover their liberty" (1978, p. 186).

Slavery is also unlikely to be abolished in a monarchy since "to abolish slavery therefore would be to deprive the far greater part of the subjects, and the nobles in particular, of the chief and most valuable part of their substance. This they would never submit to, and a general insurrection would ensue" (1978, p. 187).

Hence the deep, profound pessimism in Smith regarding the possibility of slavery's eradication. "This institution therefore of slavery, which has taken place in the beginning of every society, has hardly any possibility of being abolished" (*ibid.*). Smith's "reading" of human history and human nature leads to his conclusion that "Slavery therefore has been universal in the beginnings of society, and the love of dominion and authority over others will probably make it perpetual" (*ibid.*).

Even in his own Scotland, Smith doubted that the coalminers would ever be set free. Smith argued that the mine owners would be better off setting the mineworkers free and then hiring them back for wage labor. Yet, "... this the masters of coal works will never agree to. The love of domination and authority over others, which I am afraid is natural to mankind, a certain desire of having others below one, and the pleasure it gives one to have some persons whom he can order to do his work rather than be obliged to persuade others to bargain with him, will for ever hinder this from taking place" (1978, p. 192). Political freedom or a republican form of government for nonslaves worsens the plight of the slaves. According to Smith, "whatever laws are made with regard to slaves are intended to strengthen the authority of the masters and reduce the slaves to a more absolute subjection ... The authority of the masters over the slaves is therefore unbounded in all republican governments" (1978, p. 181). In ancient Rome, "the freedom of the free was the cause of the great oppression of the slaves. No country ever gave greater freedom to the free-men than Rome" (1978, p. 182).

Slaves are treated better in a monarchical government. It is in the king's interests to help the slaves since more power to the slaves could strengthen the king's authority by weakening that of the nobles. Moreover, the king "is as it were somewhat more of an impartial judge, and by this means his compassion may move him to slacken the rigour of the authority of the masters" (1978, p.

182). According to Smith, an impartial judge would tend to be on the side of the slaves, and against that of the masters¹.

According to Smith, the state of slavery is also more tolerable in a "poor and barbarous people than in a rich and polished one" (1978, p. 182). A rich state can afford to own more slaves than a poor one. Consequently the masters in the rich state will be "in continual fear of their slaves, so they will treat them with the greatest severity and take every method to keep them under" (1978, p. 183).

On the other hand, in a poor country, the masters and slaves will be more similar in dress and general demeanor than in a rich country. In a rich country "a man of great fortune, a nobleman is much farther removed from the condition of his servant..." (1978, p. 184). Consequently, in a rich country the master will have less sympathy or empathy with the slave and "will hardly look on him as being of the same kind" (*ibid*). By Smith's theory "those persons most excite our compassion and are most apt to affect our sympathy who most resemble ourselves, and the greater the difference the less we are affected by them" (*ibid*)². Thus, according to Smith, "It is not the barbarity of the North Americans but merely their poverty which makes them thus familiar, and of consequence as I have shown, humane" (1978, p. 185) towards their slaves. Presumably, by Smith's theory, as the North Americans grew richer, they would also grow more inhumane in their treatment of their slaves³.

Thus, a cruel paradox is held by the celebrated writer of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*: the more wealth, opulence and refinement in a society, the more the misery and unhappiness of the slaves. Even worse: slaves are bet-

1. On the importance of an impartial spectator who makes judgements in Smith's moral thought see *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part III.

2. For the role of sympathy in Smith's thought, see *TMS* Part I. On terminological issues concerning the relationship between the words sympathy and empathy, see PACK (1991), p. 76 and p. 98 fn. 11.

3. For evidence that this may have indeed happened, see STAMP (1956), Chapter IV, "To Make Them Stand in Fear", Section 7, pp. 177-191, especially p. 183.

ter off under an arbitrary government than under a free one. For Smith, "The greater the freedom of the free, the more intolerable is the slavery of the slaves. 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" (1978, p. 185).

Where slavery exists, a humane man would have to be against freedom and opulence. Doubtless, Smith considered himself a humane man; doubtless he was against slavery. Smith's advocacy of freedom and growth in the wealth of nations should then be seen to be based upon certain key institutional arrangements, to wit, no slavery. Ancient Greek and Roman societies were based upon slave production. Smith's relationship to ancient Greek and Roman thought is a problematic one⁴. To the extent ancient Greek and Roman thought and society were based upon slavery (e.g. possibly in their conception of "virtue", or in their indulgent attitudes towards plunder and what may be termed the "piratical mode of production") Smith was against Greek and Roman thought and society.

In another lecture course on Jurisprudence ("Report dated 1766") Smith is recorded as expressing essentially the same position: "Slavery is more severe in proportion to the culture of society. Freedom and opulence contribute to the misery of the slaves. The perfection of freedom is their greatest bondage. And as they are the most numerous part of mankind, no *human* person will wish for liberty in a country where this institution is established" (1978, p. 453, emphasis added). The underlined word *human* appears to be a mistake; the word should probably be "humane". Clearly, for Smith, a human person could wish for liberty in a country where the institution of slavery was established; consider for example, the human Thomas Jefferson, who was to write an influential "Declaration of Independence" in 1776. Smith seems to

4. See e.g. the numerous references to Smith in LOWRY.

mean, as was recorded in the other lecture, that no *humane* person could wish for liberty in such an institutionally flawed society.

In a relatively rich society based upon slave production, a rich person will tend to be supported by his slaves upon his estate. In ancient Greece and Rome, non-agricultural products would also be produced by slave labor. Under this institutional arrangement, the rich person's consumption of these products also supported slave labor instead of free citizens. In those societies, "The rich men then set up their slaves in all the different trades they had occasion for; one was a mason, another a carpenter, ... and if it happened that a rich man had occasion for a workman in a trade which was exercised by none of his own slaves, he would rather oblige another rich man who was his friend by employing his slave than employ a poor citizen ..." (1978, p. 196). In this manner the whole produce of large estates of the rich were consumed by the master and his slaves.

In Scotland in Smith's time a poor person could get a job. This was not the case in ancient slave based societies such as Athens and Rome. In ancient Rome the poor people had no "business to which they could apply themselves with any hopes of success" (1978, p. 197). Thus, for Smith, "We may see from this that slavery amongst its inconveniences has this bad consequence, that it renders rich and wealthy men of large properties of great and real detriment, which otherwise are rather of service as they promote trade and commerce" (1978, p. 198). That is, in societies which have slavery, as slaveowners grow richer they support more slaves, not more free individuals. Consequently, in ancient times, the wisest men "looked on these wealthy men as the objects of their dread and aversion, as so many monsters who consumed what should have supported a great number of free citizens. Their fears were well grounded" (1978, p. 196). Note that for Smith there is no beneficial invisible hand operating in societies which have the institution of slavery. In slave-based societies, the growth of the wealthy hurts the poor free citizens. The deleterious consequences of the consumption of the rich may be contrasted with the growth of the wealthy in societies without slavery. Smith discusses this briefly in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1978, pp. 194-196). His more famous discussion of the consumption of the rich

and the beneficial invisible hand occurs in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*; "The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species" (1976a, pp. 184-185).

From Smith's discussion of slavery in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, it is evident that this fortuitous state of affairs, where the consumption of the rich supports the life of poor citizens, is dependent upon certain societal institutions. To wit, it is dependent upon the absence of the institution of slavery.

This supports Mark Blaug's characterization of Smith's thought: "What distinguishes Smith's 'theory of economic development' ... is a continuous harking back to the framework of social institutions that harness and channel pecuniary motives. So frequently accused of *Harmonielehre*, the vulgar doctrines of the spontaneous harmony of interests, Smith instead seems to be forever emphasizing that the powerful motive of self-interest is only enlisted in the cause of the general welfare under definite institutional arrangements" (1978, p. 63).

3. One can extract from Smith's discussion of slavery two (unresolved) contrasting aspects to slavery. On the one hand, a system based upon slavery is economically inefficient. Nonetheless, slavery has a tendency to persist in a "free" commercial society; this is because the "free" owners will not want to give up their power over the slaves. Smith ascribes this phenomenon to an ahistorical "love of domination" and describes the "history" of slavery to account for the persistence of slavery in a free society.

But, one may ask, is there not a much more complex problem related to the nature of market society? Why would slavery persist therein, and not be eradicated by the market mechanism itself due to slavery's economic inefficiency? Is there not also a new, historically specific species of "free" (self-interested) individuals who are either created or, perhaps more accurately, encouraged by commercial society, and who act to continue and expand the system of slavery?

This problem has been partly alluded to by Edmund S. Morgan in his classic study of Colonial Virginia (1975). Morgan emphasizes that the strongest proponents in the British North American colonies for free "republican" ideals were the slaveowners of Virginia. He finds a deep connection between owning slaves and demanding independence from England. Who knows more about slavery and what it is like to be under the arbitrary control of a despotic ruler than a slaveowner? Moreover, Morgan claims that "Aristocrats could more safely preach equality in a slave society than in a free one" (p. 380). "The most ardent American republicans were Virginians, and their ardor was not unrelated to their power over the men and women they held in bondage" (p. 381).

Similarly, Immanuel Wallerstein, among others, has emphasized the actual expansion of slavery and serfdom which came with the expansion of "the European world-economy" in the sixteenth century (1974). Wallerstein's position is that there tended to be created a system of slavery in the periphery of the "world capitalist system".

Forms of sharecropping and serfdom were created in the "semiperiphery" of the world economy, particularly in Eastern Europe. (1974: Chapter 2, "The New European Division of Labor", pp. 66-131). For Wallerstein, freedom in one part of the world capitalist system coexisted with slavery in another part.

With the expansion of commercial society came the expansion of slavery. Commercial society became populated by people who were free economic individuals. There was a freeing up of economic individualism where people were able to pursue their self interest, including their will to dominate other people. This seems to have helped contribute to the expansion of slavery.

This point was briefly taken up by Adam Smith's illustrious student, and later colleague at Glasgow, John Millar⁵. It is interesting to consider how the topic of slavery was treated in Millar's *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society*; Millar's work closely follows the arguments given in Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*⁶.

As with Smith, Millar holds that slavery originated in the earliest times from war (p. 193) as well as from the poor needing aid from the wealthy (pp. 192-93). In commercial society, slavery is unproductive economically; "the work of a slave is really dearer than that of a free man" (p. 203). In spite of this, slaveholders are reluctant to give up their slaves and their power since, "the possession of power is too agreeable to be easily relinquished" (p. 204).

Following Smith, Millar holds that the wealthier the nation, the worse the slaves are treated. This is due partly to the greater inequality between the condition of the slave and the wealth of the slaveowner, and the corresponding diminution of sympathy from the slaveowner towards the slaves (p. 204). In agreement with Smith, Millar holds that Christianity seems compatible with slavery (pp. 222-225) and that it was only with difficulty that slavery was ended in parts of Europe (p. 228).

As with Smith, Millar has an ambivalent attitude towards the ancient Greeks and Romans. These societies had slavery; hence, "In the ancient states, so much celebrated upon account of their free government, the bulk of their mechanics and labouring peo-

5. On the relationship between Smith and Millar see RAE (especially p. 43 and pp. 53-54); SCOTT and LEHMANN. Lehmann is correct in noting that »just as we owe much of our more intimate personal knowledge of the teacher [Smith], his manner in the classroom, the range, broad content and general character of his lectures, to the pen of his pupil [Millar]... so, too, a study of the life and thought of one of his most distinguished pupils should throw even further light on that of his great master" (p. 4).

6. The closeness of Millar and Smith is strikingly evidenced by the 1978 publication of the more detailed second student notes of Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, the "Report of 1762-3". A thorough study of the remarkable dependence of Millar's work upon Smith in light of the publication of these detailed student notes needs to be done.

ple were denied the common privileges of men" (p. 230). They were slaves.

Slavery hurts the good morals of a people, induces vicious habits in the slaveowners, and promotes inhumanity and extravagant vices (p. 235). Millar regrets that there are still some traces of slavery in Scotland among the coal and salt miners (p. 228).

Millar alludes to the paradox that in spite of its economic inefficiency, the "practice of slavery was no sooner extinguished by the inhabitants in one quarter of the globe [parts of Western Europe] than it was revived by the very same people in another [North and South America] where it has remained ever since" (p. 230).

Millar wants to get rid of the slavery which remains in the dominions of Great Britain.

In agreement with Smith, he argues that the Scottish coal miners receive a premium for their labor upon account of their bondage. According to Millar, the coal masters would economically benefit from a general law abolishing the slavery of the miners (p. 237). Moreover, there are advantages which "would be reaped in a much higher degree by a single proprietor who should have the resolution to give liberty to his workmen, and renounce the privileges which the law bestows upon him, with respect to those who might afterwards engage in his service" (p. 238). That is, the master who freed his slaves and then hired them back at a lower rate could undersell his competitors. Yet, why is this not done?

In the colonies, Millar argues that the slaves should be better treated: "small wages should be given them as an encouragement to industry. If this measure were once begun, it is probable that the master would soon find the utility of pushing it to a greater extent" (p. 240). That is, if slaves were paid wages, their productivity would rise, and this could eventually lead to the end of their slavery. Yet, this too is not done.

With charming understatement, Millar concludes that "it affords a curious spectacle to observe, that the same people who talk in so high a strain of political liberty [i.e. the colonial slaveowners] ... should make no scruple of reducing a great proportion of the inhabitants" ... into slavery (p. 240). Echoing the

pessimism of Smith concerning human nature, Millar concludes his work with the observation that this demonstrates "...how little the conduct of men is at bottom directed by any philosophical principles" (p. 240)⁷.

Millar's treatment of slavery in *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* is strikingly similar to Smith's. Millar goes a bit farther than Smith in pointing out that slavery expanded with the expansion of commercial society, in spite of its being economically inefficient. Millar offers suggestions on how to use the market mechanism to encourage the eradication of slavery. Yet, as with Smith, he does not go into detail why the market system itself cannot get rid of slavery, nor why slavery seems to have expanded with the expansion of the commercial system.

4. To conclude, let us return to Smith: for Smith, slavery is bad.

In spite of its economic inefficiency, it has a tendency to persist in society. Slavery's abolition in Europe was fortuitous (1978, pp. 187 ff.). The abolition of slavery is a key to the increase, or even the desirability of the increase in the wealth of nations. The more free or richer a society is, the worse will its slaves be treated. The "invisible hand" in societies which allow slavery, operates in such a way that increases in the wealth of the rich, leads to increased misery for the poor free citizens as well as for the slaves themselves. It seems that the beneficial workings of the "invisible hand" are dependent upon commercial societies which are not based upon the institution of slavery.

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7. I have used the first edition of Millar's work, the edition which appears to be most influenced by Smith. In later editions Millar added several paragraphs after the above quote which gave the work a more optimistic conclusion. See LEHMANN, pp. 321-22.

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Appendix: Adam Smith and the Late Resolution of the Quakers of Pennsylvania: A Response to a False Report.

Few passages of *The Wealth of Nations* have been quoted as often as Adam Smith's acerbic remark in Book III, chapter ii, that "The late resolution of the Quakers in Pennsylvania to set at liberty all their negro slaves, may satisfy us that their number cannot be very great. Had they made any considerable part of their property, such a resolution could never have been agreed to" (Smith 1976, I, p. 388). Smith's view shaped the historiography of abolition, notably the argument advanced Eric Williams (1944), and contested by Seymour Drescher (1977), that slavery was abolished in the British Empire only after it became unprofitable and economically insignificant. Quaker manumission of slaves in Pennsylvania raised Quaker prestige in Europe. However, the resolution of the Pennsylvania Quakers cited by Smith had not yet taken place when he wrote. He was taken in by a misleading, premature report.

On August 30, 1769, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a Presbyterian physician in Philadelphia of Quaker heritage, wrote to Jacques Barbeau Dubourg, a Paris physician, botanist and later editor of a French translation of Franklin's scientific writings (cf. Davis 1966, pp. 443-44, 486-87). As published by Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours in the Physiocratic journal *Éphémérides du citoyen* (1769, IX, pp. 172-75), Rush's letter announced that:

Nos Quakers viennent de donner tout nouvellement un exemple bien noble de leur amour pour la liberté. Dans une Assemblée ou la plupart d'entr'eux se trouvoient, ils se sont convenus d'une voix unanime, de mettre tous leurs esclaves negres en liberté; et la majeure partie des Membres de cette Societé a déjà executé ce projet.

Edward Seeber (1937, p. 86) remarks, in a footnote to his quotation of this passage, that "Dr. Rush's statement in this letter, if correctly reproduced, is puzzling, for no such general emancipation by the Quakers was either voted or effected in 1769".

Notwithstanding the lack of a basis in fact, Rush's letter, as extracted in Du Pont's article "Affranchissement des Negres en

Pennsylvanie" in *Éphémérides*, had great influence in writings known to Smith. Du Pont returned to the supposed Pennsylvania emancipation in a 1771 *Éphémérides* article on the economic case against slavery, written at Turgot's request (Seeber 1937, pp. 87, 104-105). A catalogue of Adam Smith's library, compiled for him in 1781, listed the *Éphémérides du citoyen* complete for 1767, 1768 and 1769, twelve volumes bound in six for each year, and an additional six volumes bound as three for an unstated year (Yanaihara 1951, p. 98). Rush's letter was used, together with "an impassioned address allegedly given in a Quaker meeting on behalf of the enslaved negroes" (Seeber 1937, p. 87), by Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal in his *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Indes*, of which Smith owned a set in three volumes (Yanaihara 1951, p. 100). In 1771, Voltaire praised the Quaker manumission of 1769, in articles later embodied in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (Seeber 1937, p. 88). Smith owned the works of Voltaire in nine volumes (Yanaihara 1951, p. 115). James Millar wrote in his *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* in 1771 that "The Quakers of Pennsylvania, are the first body of men in those countries, who have discovered any scruples upon that account, and who seem to have thought that the abolition of this practice is a duty they owe to religion and humanity" (Millar 1960, p. 311). Smith's copy of this work by Millar, now owned by the University of Tokyo, was shelved by Smith next to *The Wealth of Nations* (Yanaihara 1951, pp. 44, 122). Smith also owned three works by the Philadelphia Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet (Yanaihara 1951, p. 112).

Although the report originating with Rush that Smith received through the writings of Du Pont de Nemours, Raynal, Voltaire and Millar was erroneous, the Quakers of Pennsylvania did take the lead in manumission a few years later. Having discouraged additional purchases of slaves since 1754, their Yearly Meeting urged manumission upon Friends in 1774, and that in September 1776 made it compulsory, six months after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*. "[O]nly seven Philadelphia Quakers freed slaves in 1774 and five in 1775... Even among Quakers, the loss of an investment of 50-100 pounds — equivalent to the annual income of many artisans, and a sum that would have paid

the annual rent on all but the largest houses in Philadelphia – was not easy to swallow... Forty-four Quakers freed 80 slaves in 1776. Twenty-eight owners freed 56 slaves in 1777 and 1778, although the date of freedom of these, all under age, was deferred from one to 21 years. Nine more Quakers reluctantly released their slaves in 1779 and 1780” and only eight left the Society of Friends rather than free their slaves (Nash and Soderlund 1991, pp. 89, 91). Contrary to Smith, the Quakers of Philadelphia did make a substantial financial sacrifice when they freed their slaves.

Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund (1991), while not mentioning Rush’s 1769 letter and its impact, report a letter from Rush to the English abolitionist Granville Sharp in 1774, announcing that the abolitionist spirit “prevails in our counsels and among all ranks in every province” and predicting the disappearance of American slavery within forty years. “Rush overestimated the abolitionist fever in 1773-74, and in fact he did not himself contract the infection, for he retained possession of his own slave, William Gruber, for many years after writing Sharp” (Nash and Soderlund 1991, p. 78). Rush’s previous unreliable report led Adam Smith to write one of his most famous passages about a resolution that the Quakers of Pennsylvania had not yet taken.

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