Historicizing Fear

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The Smithian myth of a peaceful commercial transition to capitalism still looms large among historians. Adam Smith (1723–1790) is a well-known Scottish economist. Nonetheless, Smith’s forgotten Scottish contemporary, James Steuart (1713–1780), contended that fear accompanied the creation of British English markets in commodities. Starting from a critique of the contemporary ideological image of Great Britain as the forerunner of a free liberal society, a sketch of the labor history of the Low Countries also appears to be highly ambiguous regarding fear and freedom in the economic and political transformation of capitalism. When comparing the changing power relations between elites and common people in the two socio-geographic settings, fear surfaces in dissimilar contexts and at different times.

**TWO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MODES OF CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM: JAMES STEUART AND ADAM SMITH, BETWEEN FEAR AND FREEDOM**

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the British social formation underwent a deep and fundamental transformation. Until the ascension of Elizabeth I, England (and in the eighteenth century, Great Britain) could be described as a semi-peripheral economy within the sphere of western Europe. The country lacked the financial resources needed to vie with France or Spain on the battlefield or to compete economically with the Low Countries in the sector of the high-quality wool
industry. The political situation was highly volatile and detrimental to England’s trade interests when commercial and feudal elites fought against each other and among themselves.

Elizabeth decided to devote the limited resources available to the centralization of state-building abilities, the fusion of political communities, the pacification of disgruntled elites, the development of naval power, the support of chartered joint-stock companies, and a stable expansion of mostly petty production of wares in the English home market.

In the seventeenth century, an oligarchic constitutional monarchy replaced the absolutist king. In the eighteenth century, according to the dominant thesis, a full-fledged market society of consumers surfaced in which the middle classes obtained a higher social and political status. The dominant historiographical narrative of a peaceful market society consisting of a flourishing middle class resembles a vulgar Whiggish fable from the late eighteenth century. This narrative comes with two main fallacies. First, it presumes a teleological development from the commercialization of British society to a modern capitalist society. Second, the commercialization of Great Britain was also based on coercive and exploitative practices entailing fear and submission. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, common people continually fought against the oligarchic state and the elites. The ensuing revolts were the result of a long process over several centuries of primitive accumulation of capital—the coercive separation of independent rural producers from their means of production—and the proletarianization of both rural and urban laborers. The enrichment of the elites and the higher middle class occurred in a context of a distributional polarization in which a considerable group of people had no hope of retaining the status of a respectable independent producer—the freeborn Englishman. Being a wage laborer implied social degradation to a relation of dependence on a master. Before the Industrial Revolution, wages did not cover the daily costs of the means of subsistence. In addition, with the loss of control over his work, the laborer could no longer live according to a traditional life cycle of marriage, acquisition of property, and securing the prospect of offspring. Furthermore, the laborer’s master could rely on the visible iron hand of the law when he could not fulfill the agreement of servitude to deliver a certain amount of goods or services. Vagrants, beggars, and paupers were arrested and sent to workhouses to live their lives in unpaid slavery.

Until the 1970s, historians and experts in the history of economic thought asserted that the principles of the nascent discourse of a modern market society could be discerned in the contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. In particular, the representation of Adam Smith’s economic thought has been the subject of many contradictory interpretations. Today, the contention
that Smith was a theorist and defender of unbridled free-trade capitalism is untenable. He wrote his *Wealth of Nations* in a time when industrialization and social capital-wage labor relations were still undeveloped. Although he embraced the achievements of the relatively new constitutional monarchy and the commercialization of the economy, he criticized other aspects and practices of the British economy. His work contained a harsh critique of the oligarchic politics of the British state and the manifold late feudal asymmetric power relations it perpetuated. He denounced the extensive political and economic coercion of landlords, merchants, and rich master craftsmen and coercion's impact on the daily lives of common people. Furthermore, his book should be considered a part of his overall moral philosophy and science of humanity. In his *four stages* theory of history, Smith portrayed commercial society in a broad and pervasive manner as the result of a slow and partial realization of the ideal natural order.

Smith warned that history represents a trial-and-error process—people only possess a limited sense of rationality and are prone to many forms of self-deception—in which humankind did not actively follow a preconceived design or plan. However, in his many shifts to a normative evaluation of the feudal and commercial aspects of British society, he explained how a philosophical contemplation could add something to the secret linear progression of human conduct. The commercial society, once achieved, is irreversible because people recognize its benefits. Commercialization lowers the sense of a permanent state of fear. When people obtain a certain degree of natural liberty—that is, the liberty to pursue personal welfare under non-specified political conditions—they no longer have to fear the arbitrary exercise of authority of those in power. Our first step toward a state of opulence and natural liberty entailed the enhancement of our personal security by political and moral means. The state needed to be impartial and to represent this impartiality through the promotion of the virtue of justice. Each person has been endowed with equal formal rights, and Smith posited a limited intervention of the state to ensure that economic polarization between common people and elites could be contained. Furthermore, the impartial state and the legal apparatus should replace traditional common-law institutions based on arbitrariness and the monopolization of power by local and national elites. Smith, expressing a remarkably propitious opinion about the social worth of the toil and trouble of jobbing workers, condemned the bondages of dependence between the small independent skilled producers, apprentices, and journeymen (or day laborers) and the privileged group of rich master craftsmen and merchant traders who prohibited the free choice of work occupations. In the eighteenth century, an apprentice was still subject to personal violence and maltreatment by his master. Journeymen and casual laborers lacked bargaining power concerning piece-rate payments and other remunerations.
because the corporative guild institutions sided with master craftsmen. Local city councils and government institutions functioned as the political means of protection of the interests of the oligarchic elites.

Smith claimed that to be free of fear of arbitrary domination, individuals could only assert their independence when they acknowledged that their interdependent social relations translated into duties and shared virtues. He emphasized that a commercial society promoted the idea of individual autonomy but at the same time gave ground to its dissolution: capitalists tended to immerse themselves in a pool of greed, and workers degenerated into mindless beasts. Other values are needed to complement the ideal of the exchange of goods between independent producers: a parochial moral economy and civic virtues of republican humanism. James Steuart, the most prominent contemporary disputation of Smith, also welcomed a society without fear of arbitrary coercive domination by an oligarchic elite. Likewise, Steuart supported the idea of “managed markets,” the utmost importance of sufficient demand in the home market, and “the science of a legislator” and its ideal of the impartial state. Whereas Smith asserted that popular sovereignty, the rule of law, and communal ties were grounded in the individual rights of freeborn men, Steuart maintained, in agreement with William Petty, that individual self-interests collated with state decision-making capabilities: the individual depends on a strong and wealthy nation.

The biggest divergence from Smith’s descriptive and normative analysis of commercialized British society can be found in Steuart’s version of a stages theory of history. Smith presumed that humans’ natural disposition to exchange goods created the necessary space for natural liberty and opulence. Production exists because symbols of wealth—money, goods, and labor—are circulated. Exchange of goods and the division of concrete labor are the reasons for long-term growth. Steuart regarded the existence of a commercial society (a developed space of exchange of use values) as the result of the intensification of labor productivity. He viewed the clustering of concrete labor activities as the means of the accumulation of wealth—both money and goods. Steuart described what Marx would later call “primitive accumulation”: the separation between rural farmers and their means of production and the direct appropriation of their means of subsistence. This separation resulted in the destruction of a self-sufficient household economy. Primitive accumulation had been supported by the forceful hand of the state to secure the procurement of a constant supply of goods for a small group of rich merchants. Steuart vacillated between two ideas. He could claim, on the one hand, that commercial society abolished the relations of fear and domination between peasants and lords. On the other hand, he could say that prosperity by trade only occurs when idle hands are forcefully set to work.
Idleness could not only be found in the enlarged pool of paupers and proletarianized day laborers. Steuart, pace Smith, also observed that the household economy encouraged indolent behavior. If landlords and rich yeomen succeeded in implementing modern husbandry through the concentration of farmland, a more efficient mode of exploitation could induce growth for the entire nation, and labor reserves could be mobilized toward manufacturing activities. Initially, only a class of merchants reaped the benefits of the exchange of produced goods, but Steuart hoped the “secrets of trade” would become public knowledge after a period of time.

Smith’s stages of history theory expressed moderate optimism about the linear progression of a free commercial society. Such a society would lead to a community without fear because relations of bondage and servitude would be dissolved. Steuart asserted that particular forms of fear are a necessary ingredient for economic growth: the uncertainty of permanent subsistence of the common worker in the commercial society is the most direct incentive for parsimoniousness and productive conduct. The state had the duty to intervene when idleness persisted among its citizens.

When comparing these two models to historical data and archival sources, it appears that both thinkers were partly right. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, English and ensuing British society “drifted into the waters of a formally free market by default. In the course of the revolution [Cromwell], the executive government lost its arbitrary powers over local authorities. The dismantling of the prerogative courts made economic regulation a matter for Parliament. But Parliament, in contrast to the Privy Council, proved too unwieldy a body to pass significant bills of regulation for the country as a whole. The tortuous history of legislation after the Restoration shows that corporate regulation ended not because of a growing alliance to laissez-faire but as a result of the deadlock between diverse commercial interests.”

This process did not result in a modern labor market in which labor could be contractually bought and sold. The promulgation of new laws only sanctified political rights of the legal category of free craftspeople. Produced goods could be exchanged without any governmental or corporative restrictions; but day laborers, wage workers, and servants did not receive legal recognition of their particular precarious occupational situations. When they failed to fulfill their obligations to an employer, which legally meant a failure to deliver a certain amount of exchangeable goods, the latter could invoke the harsh and inflexible long arm of the law to impose fines or a direct sentence of imprisonment. De jure wage laborers were treated as independent producers; de facto, they lost all social status, along with “their birthright and claim to freedom... They no longer had the right to exclude
others from the use and enjoyment of their labor power, and so they had forfeited their property in it altogether.\textsuperscript{18}

Fear was a constant element in the patriarchal relation between employer and wage laborer, whether the latter worked under the same roof or functioned within a subcontracting or putting-out network. In the eighteenth century, this form of legal servitude would enable employers to physically lock up their workers in textile mills. When a day laborer lacked personal income, being sent to a workhouse was an imminent and permanent threat to his personal well-being. Private and public poor relief, almost absent, had been inscribed in the same tradition of contempt for impoverished workers.\textsuperscript{19} The industrial class obtained political power through the \textit{1832 Reform Act}, which allowed it to introduce new Poor Laws and the laissez-faire re-conversion of the labor market. These Whiggish reforms unintentionally allowed the Chartist movement and early socialists to promote the promulgation of social reform laws and the creation of formal liberty of contract between employer and worker. At the same time, workers emphasized the communal values of a traditional economy in an effort to make employers more attentive to their social obligations.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{COMMERCIALIZED WORKSHOPS, MANUFACTURES, AND POLITICAL REFORMS: BETWEEN FEAR AND COMMUNITY}

From structural and comparative perspectives, the historical conditions for the emergence of wage labor and the commodity market differed significantly between Great Britain and the Low Countries—especially the southern region. Feudalistic rural relations and corporative urban regulations still existed until the arrival of the French Jacobins and Napoleonic armies. At the end of the eighteenth century, both France and the Low Countries abolished the old privileges and customs (such as the overlapping local courts and competing legal institutions, the guild organizations, and the complex electoral procedures of appointing magistrates). The sudden collapse of both the feudal state system—within or without early reforms—and the absolutist monarchist regime has many explanations. The simplistic model of an inevitable eclipse of the Ancien Régime and the unstoppable rise of laissez-faire capitalism requires fundamental revision. The continental pre-modern commercialized society had been characterized by a slow but steady rise of rural productivity and demographic growth. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century, both the United Provinces and France suffered recurrent short-term cycles of recession combined with stagnant governmental tax revenues, which curbed their state-building abilities. General public opinion regarded these situations as a secular decline of the standard of living (when looking backward to an ideologically constructed past of prosperity and wealth). In fact, however, the intensified exploitation of labor
allowed for a growth of national income.21 The inequality of incomes between elites and the common people rose, which caused an alarming growth of beggary and pauperism.

Politically, in France the absolutist state could no longer mediate the ongoing conflicts between urban merchants and the bourgeoisie, financial speculators, independent farmers, and dominant aristocracy. In the United Provinces, the old factional fights within the aristocratic and mercantile oligarchy—the regents and the Orangists—undermined their legitimacy as the guardians of the body politic. The French Jacobins and their Dutch associates, the Patriots, developed new and discursive political practices that interpellated the common people as civilians of a unitary nation, transcending particularist interests and local communal identities. They regarded popular sovereignty and the idea of the public interest as pivotal in reviving an industrious and mercantile spirit.22 Nonetheless, for a long time, these modernist ideas struggled to become ascendant.23

Hitherto, social conflicts could be mediated by a complex set of changing strategic combinations between different elites. In late medieval and early modern times, the urban bourgeoisie played a distinctive role in the cycles of centralization and decentralization of late feudal-era state power. Urban centers became an important base for levying taxes for the central government, and the bourgeoisie relied on the continuing expansion of offices to secure their social status and place in the political networks.24 The degree of imposition of the particular interests of elites depended on the overall configuration of the accumulation of political power. Furthermore, the pre-modern bourgeoisie consisted of numerous class factions with contradicting agendas, whose determination depended on local political networks, professional status, labor activities, rental properties, and so on. It was only when the capital–wage labor relation came to the fore that the industrial bourgeoisie could subsume the interests of other factions under its economic leadership.

The best-known case of contradicting interests within the heterogeneous bourgeoisie entailed the recurring collisions among urban wholesaling merchants, retailers, and independent craftsmen in all western European cities over the right to engage in specific commercial activities.25 These conflicts expressed a pre-modern rationality that defined the regulated boundaries between the circulation of goods and the concrete division of craft labor. Each corporative organization articulated a shared discourse about the common right to protect its collective livelihood and the necessity of economic coordination to avoid various sorts of manipulation or corruption. Moreover, rich trade guilds, from late medieval times until their abolition, attempted to institutionally incorporate smaller crafts in their quest for accumulation of political power. Furthermore, the very profitable wool industry in the Low Countries presents the best example of the tendency toward a vertical
production chain of subcontracting craftspeople. At the top of the chain, master craftspeople weavers and merchants organized the workflow processes between different guilds and the exchange of final goods and then siphoned off a much-contested rent-seeking premium.

In addition to exercising their political and economic dominance, these weavers and merchants introduced new disciplinary rules upon their subordinates and relied in part on city officials for help with enforcement. While apprentices and journeymen of small masters were tied to the reciprocal corporative social codes, day laborers in larger workshops were brought to submission through the exertion of direct economic control. These workshops introduced the first forms of time management. Also, workshop masters emphasized the communal importance of their enterprises, which gave them authority to close the door or gate at the beginning and end of each workday. Latecomers were refused work.26 Next to the uncommon use of corporeal punishment for the worst cases of misconduct, casual laborers feared the master’s overwrought act of symbolic exclusion from the workplace. Aside from the deprivation of remunerations for buying the means of subsistence, workers risked being exposed as disloyal to the bonum commune of the city, thus putting themselves at risk of becoming unwanted paupers. In an upward economic cycle, these hands could be called “attached,” in the sense that even day laborers were identified as the outer part of the social circle of a well-reputed employer. In the context of a downward economic cycle, fear of social exclusion was constant for people who lacked corporative rights.27 Unskilled laborers, mostly newly arrived immigrants, lived on occasional earnings and did the most toilsome work.28 The influx of skilled labor was heavily regulated; in several cases, guild masters emphasized the cultural uniqueness of their crafts and expressed fear of the arrival of “foreign hands” from neighboring cities.29 When unemployment rates rose, the declassing of laborers incited fear of social conflict and occasional violence within all layers of the urban bourgeoisie. Even the first generation of Patriot bourgeois authors of pamphlets and belles-lettres, nonplussed by the sudden vexed reactions of the lower classes, viewed the corporative hierarchy as necessary to keep the demands of proletarianized workers at bay.30 Obstreperous workers were less deterred by the disciplinary practices of municipal lawmakers.

In the eighteenth century, merchants and the rural bourgeoisie outside city walls were unhindered by the respective corporative regulations and could profit from the policy changes of central governments. These policies pursued an economy of scale that mobilized populations, wealth, and resources to the benefit of state-building abilities. The sovereign—emperor, king, or prince—relentlessly tried to curb or at least actively steer the obstinate behavior of the protectionist cities. The bourgeoisie had already been involved in extensive trade networks between provincial villages
and major cities—commercial activities with the household economy or ground speculation. They seized the opportunity to control a more constant supply of cheap goods—textile, ceramics, ironworks, paper—through the establishment of manufactures and rural workshops.

Although these manufactures could generate a significant profit, the chances of commercial survival after the initial start-up and first cycles of expansion were almost nonexistent. Along with the volatile nature of the loan-capital market and the unstable political framework, merchants swiftly became aware that the absence of a labor market prevented them from finding a permanently motivated workforce. The disciplinary regime of the manufactures was imposed for two main reasons: first, to create a new vertical hierarchy with oversight techniques to ensure workers’ compliance with the instructions of the merchant-owner and overlookers-master craftsmen and second, to implement a chain of quality control.

But both skilled and unskilled laborers rejected this regime because similar to the British case, they adhered to the pre-modern social identity of independent producers. In most cases, these laborers did not fear the employer’s authority. When rejecting a wage cut or deplorable labor conditions, workers one-sidedly terminated their employment without giving notice—individually or collectively—by actively sabotaging machinery or deliberately delivering faulty goods. The merchants sought the coercive assistance of local officials, whose interests lay elsewhere (the social peace of the village community prevailed over specific labor conflicts). Without legal coercive means—as in the British case—these employers had little means to incite fear in the hearts of resisting workers.

**THE EARLY FACTORIES: INDUSTRIAL HIERARCHIES, SOCIALISM, RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS, COMMUNAL IDENTITIES, AND POPULAR ANXIETY FOR THE OTHER**

The French occupational regime, supported by Jacobin comities, abolished the corporative structures. Whether this policy was supported by the local population depended on numerous reasons: local political affinities, communal rivalries, the degree of equality and social mobility in the guild community, rent-seeking and occupational opportunities, and the general degree of aversion or sympathy toward a foreign occupier in a time of competing embryonic and un-crystallized ideological factions. Furthermore, the degree of success guilds had in obstructing forced self-dissolution depended on whether their acts were perceived as merely economic protection of their livelihoods or as political subversion against the new regime.

After Napoleon’s defeat, both the upper bourgeoisie and the nobility legally reaffirmed the institutionalization of a modern labor market. In the buildup to
its ideological class project, the bourgeoisie sought to align its interests with other elites while creating an economic and political space to stimulate its industrial and financial activities. A significant proletarianized group of formally free laborers provided cheap labor. But between 1830 and 1880, an uneven development of industrial activities existed between the Netherlands and Belgium. Belgium quickly started to produce cheap textiles, ironwork supplies, and coal for international markets, but the Netherlands still relied on financial services and trade.

In small, provincial Dutch towns, traditional craftsmen remained a part of middle-income groups. For example, grounded in local communal networks, a coppersmith in a small rural town in the province of Groningen passed his working days repairing the items of local customers or frequently lent pots and pans he had produced to families celebrating religious holidays. The rates of remuneration were fixed, but he doubled his rates when items came from outside his town.35 This coppersmith resembled the Smithian model of the tranquil life of the independent producer whose conduct is guided by a sense of individual and communal duty that flourishes in the absence of fear for the corruptive self-love of the elites. In Delft, a few prominent rentier families, diversifying their investments, failed to build small glassmaking and textile workshops. They lacked the necessary technical knowledge and experience, and they realized that managing a small factory was rather different from earlier rent-seeking activities.36

Early industrial success in the Netherlands is found on the periphery of the country, in Maastricht. In the 1840s, Petrus Regout, the son of middle-class merchants, made his fortune by producing ceramics and glasswork. The old and impoverished garrison town provided him with the cheap, willing hands he needed for his factory; low property prices and political networks provided him with the room he needed for continual expansion. With Liege stretching to the south, Maastricht became part of the industrial axis of the Walloon region, which provided Regout with the necessary coal and other basic materials he needed. Maastricht became the first industrialized city of the Netherlands.37

In contrast to the hesitant attempts in the north, Regout combined these favorable conditions with new management techniques. He recruited skilled independent craft workers from the western German kingdoms and Liege. In an effort to obtain advanced British factory secrets, he offered generous contracts to their engineers and imported new machinery. Regout’s administrative personnel could plan production in part with the use of a full-cost accounting system.

An analysis of the Regout factory hierarchy should avoid the false dichotomy of the feared patriarchal-conservative and the liberal technocratic-humanist factory owner. Regout and his offspring used discursive elements of the moral economy of the factory as a communal system to defend their rigid disciplinary practices. These
practices entailed not only the attempt to control the worker’s attitude and behavior within factory walls but also his communal and family life in the city. First, Petrus Regout presented himself as a “father among his sons” to the outer world. The factory was the social and material assurance of job security and the general well-being of the workers and their families. Without the father figure, Maastricht would be in economic decline and moral decay. Second, Regout and his sons heralded their acquired wealth as a gift to Maastricht’s communal life. Labor had to be disciplined according to the general and daily demands of the factory as a system of output of commodities. Otherwise, the total worth of factory capital and thus “social wealth” would diminish.

Regout was liberal in the sense that he redesigned his old factory building according to modern German blueprints. Cell-like production departments were efficiently arranged according to the logical sequence of the production process. This spatial creation of a microcosmic setting of power enhanced the rational extraction of surplus labor power. It also expressed a desire for a general docility of workers through fear of ubiquitous, controlling eyes. Despotic-patriarchal and liberal measures were not mutually exclusive. Laborers were strictly forbidden to drink or eat, to move from one department to another without explicit authorization, or to talk to certain colleagues. Even outside factory walls, laborers could be intransigently punished when management caught them red-handedly working for another employer. Regout preferred to hire extended families as a means of controlling workers. The patres familias were held accountable for production irregularities caused by their workmen. Regout paid overlookers commissions or complete wages according to output rates. A few foremen were sanctioned to recurrently abuse laborers both physically and verbally, but management’s main concern was the ability to increase labor productivity. Overseers had to prevent sabotage by implementing a system of fines for the production of faulty goods. More than once, these fines were used as the preferred means of creating a fear-suffused environment without giving a satisfactory justification for the penalization.

The company grew rapidly in terms of both output and labor force. This growth generated an intricate hierarchy between labor tasks. The factory had to employ perhaps the most hated and feared employees: foreign craftsmen and engineers. On the work floor and in the community, these specialists were culturally alienated from the workers. Several reasons can be discerned why these employees were comprehended as the “other.” Their different languages were apprehended as a secretive code; they had better housing; their fixed, high wages demoted the status of local skilled laborers; and their technical assistance appeared to be very intrusive. Whereas overlookers had to function within the communal ties of their neighborhoods, foreigners could only be related to their economic ties with management and the factory owner.
Local laborers were forced to go to the factory by pure economic necessity. During a session of a government commission on social conflicts, a laborer testified that children twelve years of age and even younger had to work in constant fear. If they had a choice, “they would prefer to become a metal smith or a cabinetmaker . . . because there exists a great difference between being an independent craftsman or being a factory-worker. The craftsman presents himself with more decency and is more civilized.” In the 1890s, after a first failed strike, relatively well-paid craftsmen decided to break the chain of fear and organize themselves in a secretive labor union. At the same time, the Dutch social democratic political movement had finally been unified and rapidly gained influence among a countrywide industrial proletariat. In a few years, local craftsmen, with the support of social democratic politicians, acted openly against management with a first successful strike. Initially, the board of directors tried to ignore this conflict, but when even the invited intervention of local Catholic priests proved fruitless, fear of more socialist agitation gained the upper hand. Although these workers initially had only very concrete and specific corporative demands on issues such as salaries, commissions, and job security, Maastricht gradually became a well-known bulwark of the organized labor movement. Fear would remain a constant factor among workers. Management, in accord with Catholic-steered labor organizations, was able to postpone union recognition until after World War I.

CONCLUSION

The British market society had been determined by both the Smithian paradigm of freedom and the Steuartian paradigm of fear. So long as someone remained an independent producer and fulfilled duties in the exchange of goods, that person still belonged economically and culturally to the middle class. The huddle of wage laborers—especially casual laborers—consisted of judicial outcasts, whom the government tried to discipline with severe punishment. These workers had to condone the misconduct of employers who were eager to reach for the tawse. Socially and communally, the status and reputations of these workers had been sullied by their exertion in low-valued labor tasks. Smith hoped legal reforms would engender a freer exchange between producing individuals through the proscription of institutionalized antediluvian practices. His hope was that the unequal relations between casual laborers and well-off masters could be remedied. After all, Smith asserted, in the main, inequality had been cast in the mold of exclusive corporative rights. But at the same time, these corporative rights protected the interests of smaller masters against the exploitative tendencies of rich merchants. Smith, in a subtle way, ignored remarks about the positive effects of guild restrictions. He warned, in an
inextricable but perspicacious line of reasoning, that the sudden creation of a legal framework based on impartiality would not fundamentally change the behavior of some avaricious and tyrannizing masters. Workers still did not possess the pecuniary means to redress the injustices inflicted upon them.

Steuart, in contrast, depicted these unequal relations as a necessary means to elevate British society onto a plane of riches for the few, accompanied by the abundant circulation of goods. Fear of the debased (but abstemious) classes and the incessant reminder of the social existence of the other, outside bourgeois culture lingered in the minds of all individuals endowed with property incomes. With money came suspicions and jaundiced views of the subaltern classes. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the main, the long and seemingly endless transition toward a modern capitalist society was affected by the inability of apprehensive legislatures to extirpate social conflicts. Conservative polemists and political economists failed to insinuate their fatalistic precepts into the persistent moral economy of laborers and paupers. These laborers supported the exhortations of progressive reformers to decant Smith’s support for the idea of an impartial law into a new set of judicial measures that would ensure their political rights.

In the Low Countries, corporative regulations protected the status and social welfare of guild members. But these members also feared the possibility of “declassation” in downward economic cycles. They tried to extort trade protections against unaffiliated entrants or monopolizing merchants from municipal and central authorities. Smaller craftsmen were apprehensive of the steady decline of their monetary means of subsistence within the context of growing income polarization. Wage laborers were among the declassed individuals, and they could easily shift ideologically between supporting the master craftsmen to rallying for the abolishment of corporative restrictions.

Public opinion vacillated. The public sympathized with guild members’ lamentations about unfair competition and intrusions on their old corporative rights. But in contrast, the public was also considering the newfangled discourse about the general interest and the abolishment of legal prerogatives. In nineteenth-century factories, a relationship of fear existed between employers and workers, but factory hierarchies also induced fear among different categories of wage laborers. The factory as a place of complex coordination between labor tasks required an enhanced system of institutionalized disciplinary measures. Thus management used an intermediary layer of engineers, skilled foreign workers, and staff personnel to inculcate a culture of subordination. Contrary to eighteenth-century corporative antagonisms among social groups, the nineteenth-century factory was indeed an assemblage of, in the Foucauldian sense, a disciplinary *dispositive*—a coherent set of power relations and regulatory devices.
NOTES

3. Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, 118–137.
10. See Stone, “The English Revolution,” 99. Charles I imposed corporative regulations on numerous crafts and trades in an attempt to recentralize government control over the sphere of goods circulation. The king gave extensive powers to a few rich merchants and master craftsmen, which disturbed a balance of collective interests of the moral economy within local communities. This decision from above reflected negatively on the reputations of the respective guilds because they became associated with corruption, coercion, and despotic practices.
23. For example, de Keyzer, “Opportunisme, corporatisme en progressiviteit.”
24. For the late medieval southern Low Countries, see Dumolyn, “Political and Symbolic Economy”; for France, see Heller, “The Longue Durée.”
25. For Antwerp, see Van Damme, *Verleiden en verkopen*, 164–169.
27. See Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 538–539. As a reaction to their precarious social status, journeymen decided to create parallel corporative organizations.
31. See Van Aken-Fehmers et al., *Delfts aardewerk*. Regarding the ceramic industry in the region of Delft, only one of more than thirty manufactures and workshops still existed during the Dutch industrial takeoff in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.
32. For an exemplary case in the southern Low Countries, see Lis and Soly, *Een groot bedrijf in een kleine stad*, 78–97.
40. Letter from Petrus Regout to city court concerning a labor dispute, 1852, 858.
42. See also, Lefebvre, *L’invention de la grande*, 126–135.

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