

The 'Narrowness' of Britain's Adam Smith

From Smith's 1759 Theory of the Moral Sentiments:

[S]elf-preservation, and the propagation of the species, are the great ends which nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals. Mankind are endowed a desire of those ends, and an aversion to the contrary.... But ... it has not been entrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason, to find out the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts. Hunger, thirst, the passion which unites the two sexes, the love of pleasure and the dread of pain, prompt us to apply those means for their own sakes, and without any consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends which the great Director of nature intended to produce by them....

The administration of the great system of the universe, ... the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man.... To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension—the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country.

