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# What Adam Smith Really Thought Should Not Matter

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A COMMENTARY ON Matthias Hühn and Claus Dierksmeier (2016), “Will the Real A. Smith Please Stand Up!” *J Bus Ethics* 131(1): 119–132,  
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## ABSTRACT

Hühn and Dierksmeier argue that a better understanding of Adam Smith’s work would improve business ethics research and education. I worry that their approach encourages two scholarly sins. First, anachronistic historiography in which we distort Smith’s ideas by making him answer questions about contemporary debates in CSR theory. Second, treating him as a prophet by assuming that finding out what Smith would have thought about it is the right way to answer such questions.

**MATTHIAS HÜHN AND** Claus Dierksmeier make extensive and effective use of scholarship in the history of ideas to refute the greed is good caricature of Adam Smith that has become received wisdom among business ethicists. This is a valuable negative service since the persistent misrepresentation of Smith by our discipline is not only a collective failure of scholarship, but has also legitimated a distorted view of the role of ethics in a market economy.

However, I am not persuaded of what the authors claim is their positive contribution: that a better understanding of ‘the real A. Smith’ leads to better normative business ethics research and education.

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