

## HOMO ECONOMICUS

I thank Richard Reeves for his review of my new book on Adam Smith (*LR*, July 2018). But he errs in three respects.

First, he sees Smith as a Newtonian who believed that 'the operations of the market were akin to the movements of celestial bodies' according to 'timeless laws'. But as Leonidas Montes has convincingly demonstrated in a series of articles, cited in my book, this is a misreading. As Smith's essay (not 'book', contra Reeves) on astronomy shows, he had a much more subtle understanding of how Newton's physics works than this deterministic picture suggests. And even if he had not, it would have no bearing on whether he was a *laissez-faire* economist, which he clearly was not.

Secondly, Reeves cannot resist assuming that my book has a covertly political purpose, that of recruiting Smith to the ranks of the Conservative Party. But this is nonsense. As I note, Smith was opaque in his personal politics; to make such attributions is a parlour game. In calling him a small-c conservative, I am describing his intellectual disposition in a way that is potentially consistent with membership of any major British political party, then or now. And the evidence is clear: in his anti-utopianism, his refusal to back any of the advanced political causes of the day, his evolutionary style of theorising and his preference for reform over revolution. Smith was indeed a small-c conservative. Reeves offers no argument against this conclusion.

Finally, Reeves suggests dismissively that 'defending an 18th-century agrarian economist ... is not the best use of Norman's time.' But this *ad hominem* remark reflects a serious misunderstanding. For one thing, Adam Smith isn't just some '18th-century agrarian economist': he's the father of economics, the first person to put markets at the centre of political economy, the great critic of crony capitalism and by far the most influential economist who ever lived.

But still more importantly, what is unique about humans as a species is the capacity to deliberate about their own governance. Politicians have a duty not merely to debate policy but also to discuss the basic principles that underlie it. That is what my book seeks to do.

**Jesse Norman MP**  
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## Letters

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## IN MEMORIAM

I, like most of your readers, will have been devastated to read of the death of Jessica Mann. I was a *Literary Review* reader for years before she began her crime column in 2006. It's arrival gave readers a new awareness about the thriller genre. She inculcated in us all her attitudes towards gratuitous violence against women, as Natasha Cooper sets out in her obituary (*LR*, August 2018). I suspect that many of us stopped reading with such 'male' eyes and became genuinely concerned with violence against women in novels.

Every month we (and my belief is that I speak for thousands of your readers) opened your journal and immediately turned to the back for her reviews. Personally, I found that if she liked a book, so did I – and vice versa. She became our help-meet and monthly saviour. I was personally furious that she was allowed a month off in August as holiday: this seemed a great betrayal. I wrote to her personally twice, and on both occasions received charming and erudite responses.

We mourn you, Jessica. Thank you for your life of helping us with your tastes and your ethical attitudes. We are the less without you.

**Robin Vicary**  
London

## EPAMINONDAS &amp; ME

In his review of Alan Garner's memoir *Where Shall We Run To?* (*LR*, August 2018), Felix Taylor tells us that Garner called his grandmother Mrs E Paminondas because of a story she used to tell. I believe Garner's grandmother was relating the stories by Constance Egan, which included *Epaminondas and the Eggs*, in which Epaminondas's mother admonishes the hero with the words, 'Epaminondas, you ain't got the

sense you was born with!' I still have a well-worn, much-loved copy given to me by my grandparents sixty-five years ago.

**Rosemary Wallis**  
Foulsham, Norfolk

## TACKLING THE ISSUE

Might I, very gently, point out that Robert Graves sustained his broken nose not as a schoolboy boxer, as John Sutherland claims (*LR*, August 2018), but in a rugby match in Limerick, when his battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers was stationed there, temporarily, in 1918? In his own words in the poem 'The Face in the Mirror', 'Low tackling caused it'.

**Theo Dorgan**  
Dublin, Ireland

## ARTICLE OF FAITH

No doubt I'm late to the scolding party, but regarding Darrin M McMahon's review of J C D Clark's biography of Thomas Paine (*LR*, June 2018), Paine wrote *Rights of Man*, not *The Rights of Man*. Perhaps a permanent Post-it Note affixed someplace in your office can usefully nix this common solecism from creeping into future issues of *Literary Review* (I never say *The Literary Review*, I swear).

**Brian Hurley**  
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## NOT ALL THAT

I take exception to Kevin Jackson's reflex hagiographic attitude towards Anthony Burgess (*LR*, July 2018) as a peerless book reviewer ('nobody did it better'). Years ago in *The Observer*, Burgess reviewed a critical biography of Djuna Barnes in which he achieved the remarkable feat of never once mentioning the name of the biography's author. Instead, he summarised its content and presented it as his own encyclopaedic knowledge of the American author. The truth is that Burgess expended so much energy trying to prove he was a Renaissance Man that he clearly can't have been one, because the point about truly omniscient talents is that they don't have to prove it.

**John Murray**  
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