Twitter Thread by @AdamSmithWorks

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Today we start the last book of #AdamSmith's #WealthOfNations.

Allons-y!

#WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



Book Five of #WealthOfNations is all about the duties of the sovereign and how to pay for them. In this first part of chapter 1, we're talking about the cost of defense. (V.i.a) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



The sovereign's duty to protect the country can only be done through military force, but how you get the money to pay for that military varies according to time, place, and circumstance. (V.i.a.1) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

In a hunter/gatherer society, everyone is always already a warrior, and since there isn't really a sovereign or nation, no expense is required to maintain defense. Much the same is true of shepherding cultures. (V.i.a.2) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Armies of hunters are limited in size to a few hundred men (as they have to sustain themselves through the available game). Shepherds can muster larger forces because they bring their sustenance in the form of flocks. (V.i.a.3–5) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

#AdamSmith thinks wars among Indigenous American populations are contemptible because they're small, but large invading cultures like the Tartars are impressive & dreadful.
We SmithTweeters boldly support smaller & fewer wars. (V.i.a.5) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Farmers are also prepared for soldiering as a result of their daily labor. If the fighting can happen after planting and before harvest, farmers can usually afford to join the fight. So a farming culture is also fairly inexpensive to defend. (V.i.a.7) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Once you move away from these forms of society, though, the increasing sophistication of manufactures and war make it impossible for professional soldiers to support themselves. (V.i.a.8) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Leave your fields for a bit? Crops keep growing.
Leave your loom? There's no loom-fairy to do your weaving. With no weaving, you don't make money.
(We know there's no field-fairy, work with us.)
If you want soldiers, you have to pay them. (V.i.a.9) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Plus, wars are way longer now. Extended campaigns instead of stand-alone skirmishes mean there's really no way for soldiers to maintain another trade.
The more developed a society, the fewer inhabitants are willing or able to go to war. (V.i.a.10–11) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

In the ancient world, learning to be a soldier was a standard part of becoming educated. But as the art of war becomes more sophisticated, it becomes a specialty. (V.i.a.12–15) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

(We, the SmithTweeters, never quite know what to make of Smith's claim that war is "certainly the noblest of all arts." Does he mean it? Is he being ironic? Is he questioning what it means for something to be "noble?") (V.i.a.14) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

When soldiering becomes a specialty the government can either force people to learn how to be soldiers or treat soldiering as a profession.
The first gives you a militia, the second, a standing army. (V.i.a.16–19) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

The invention of firearms means that the fitness and skill level of individual soldiers is no longer as important. Instead of skill, you need regularity, order, and obedience in your soldiers. (V.i.a.20-21) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith notes, with confidence that a militia is always going to be inferior to a well-disciplined and well-exercised standing army.
American SmithTweeting contingent whistles Yankee Doodle in upstart colonial
(V.i.a.23–25) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Oh, okay. The colonials get some props from Smith a little later. If the war with Britain drags out long enough they may become a match for the standing army. (V.i.a.27–28) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

That said, standing armies are just irresistibly superior unless militias are engaged in such long campaigns that they equalize. (V.i.a.27–28) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

And now...a brief history of standing armies.

There were a lot of them. (V.i.a.29–38) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

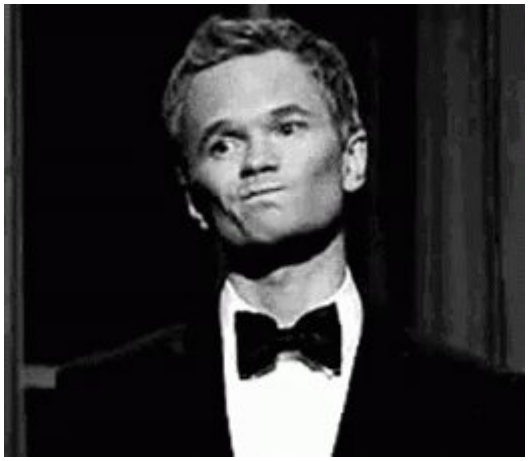
When one nation develops a standing army, other nations must follow suit for their own protection. (V.i.a.37) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Oh, hey, here's that "savage nations" thread. Just in case that's something you might be thinking about right now as Smith carefully explains that only standing armies can protect against barbarian invasions... (V.i.a.39–40) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

https://t.co/40ylHzfS6v

> We have to pause now, because we have to have a whole new tweet thread on #AdamSmith and \u201csavage nations,\u201d because he\u2019s going to keep using this kind of phrase, so we need to talk about it. #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets
>
> — @AdamSmithWorks (@adamsmithworks) January 4, 2021

...And equally carefully explains that you need a standing army in order to civilize barbarians and establish the law of the sovereign with "irresistible force." (V.i.a.40) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



Lots of people argue that standing armies are dangerous to liberty. That can be true. But if the king is the general, the nobility are the chief officers, and the commanders support the civil authority, a standing army isn't a threat. (V.i.a.41) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

(Does anyone else think that's a whole pile of conditions that need to be met before a standing army isn't a concern? Especially given the references to Caesar and Cromwell? Maybe it's just us…) (V.i.a.41) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



On the other hand, says Smith, a standing army can give a sovereign a sense of security that means he doesn't have to crack down as hard on the people as he would otherwise.
So, weirdly, a standing army can→more liberty. (V.i.a.41) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

The duty of maintaining national defense gets more expensive as society becomes wealthier and war becomes more complicated. Cannons cost more than javelins. (V.i.a.43) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

This means that, unlike in ancient times, it's now easier for developed and wealthy nations to defend themselves. That's good, Smith says, for preserving and extending civilization. (V.i.a.44) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

(We, the SmithTweeters, are not military historians. But we're pretty sure that a lot of what Smith says here doesn't hold up throughout the 20th century... Anyone want to help us out with that before we come back tomorrow to talk about justice?) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets