Twitter Thread by @AdamSmithWorks

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The great thing about #AdamSmith is that when he's about to go off on a 65 page tangent, he warns you. Humans, we bring you the DIGRESSIONS ON SILVER! #OhLawdHeComin #WealthOfTweets

Oh King Edward III, it's adorable that you think you can just decree that servants and laborers become permanently content with wages fixed at the rate they were at five years ago. https://t.co/NtOmttquJ3 (I.xi.e.2) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



He's already digressing, and he can't take a minute to share the menu from that famously magnificent feast with us? (I.xi.e.4–5) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Super Important 18thC Vocab Geekery: When Smith says the price of the quarter of wheat wasn't "supposed to be < 4 oz silver" he doesn't mean "shouldn't be." He means "wasn't thought to be." He's not approving of fixed prices. (I.xi.e.7) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

So. Many. Wheat. Prices. (But really, Smith is talking about how much wheat it takes to buy a quantity of silver, NOT how much silver it takes to buy a quantity of wheat.) (I.xi.e.1–14) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Is silver more expensive because demand is going up? Supply is going down? Or a mixture of both? (I.xi.e.14) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

And it *was* getting more expensive, though people thought it wasn't. They were misled for three reasons. (I.xi.e.15–16) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

1. Rents were paid "in kind"(with chickens or corn instead of money) that's called a "conversion price" which is set below market price to protect tenants. People often confuse conversion and market prices.(I.xi.e.17) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

2. Slovenly and lazy copyists who don't get the details right.[We are here for the #SmithSnark, which is some of the best snark.] (I.xi.e.18–22) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

3. Assuming that because the lowest ancient price for wheat was very low, the price never got very high. In fact, the ancient market was volatile and "disorderly," not uniformly cheap. (I.xi.e.23) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Oh hey, did you want to know all the available prices of wheat from 1202 until 1601, in 18th century money, in 12 year periods? Smith's got your back. (I.xi.e.24) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

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OH HEY, DID YOU WANT TO KNOW ALL THE AVAILABLE PRICES OF WHEAT FROM 1202 UNTIL 1601, IN 18TH CENTURY MONEY, IN 12 YEAR PERIODS? SMITH'S GOT YOUR BACK. (I.XI.E.24) #WEALTHOFTWEETS #SMITHTWEETS

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Data shows the price of silver rising, and Smith is confused/annoyed that so many historians/economists have interpreted it as falling. (I.xi.e.24) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

“It is somewhat curious that, though their opinions are so very different, their facts...should coincide so very exactly.” Could this be the first instance of an economist gobsmacked that people interpret data differently? (I.xi.e.24) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Labor is the real measure of value of silver and all commodities. But...is it, though? (I.xi.e.26) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



The important thing is not to be misled into thinking that as the quantity of silver increases, the price will decrease. That’s “altogether groundless.” Demand is a thing, folks. (I.xi.e.33) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith keeps saying that money naturally seeks the best available price for itself. Aristotle is over here with his head exploding. (I.xi.e.34) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

“When we are in want of necessaries we must part with superfluities.” THAT might be one of the best pieces of advice--financial or otherwise—we’ll ever get. (I.xi.e.38) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Ya know what? Let's just press on and do the second period of silver prices real quick. Not even Smith can go on for that long about it. (I.xi.f) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

(Ok, ok, we know this is #WealthOfTweets and not #TweetsOfMoralSentiments, but didya notice that opening sentence here? Smith really likes that “How X soever Y may be” formulation.) (I.xi.f.1) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Everybody agrees that the discovery of the silver mines in America caused the value of silver to crash relative to the value of corn. Smith is about as sure of this as he ever is of anything. You can, as it were, take it to the bank. (I.xi.f.1–5) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

And that’s it for everything interesting between 1570 and 1640 apparently. Your early modernist SmithTweeter is pouting but will proceed on apace tomorrow, to the Third Period of the Digression. (I.xi.f.1–5) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets