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volume 6

THE
ADAM SMITH
REVIEW

Edited by Fonna Forman-Barzilai

ROUTLEDGE



The Adam Smith Review

Volume 6

Adam Smith's contribution to economics is well-recognized but in recent years scholars have been exploring anew the multidisciplinary nature of his works. *The Adam Smith Review* is a refereed annual review that provides a unique forum for interdisciplinary debate on all aspects of Adam Smith's works, his place in history, and the significance of his writings to the modern world. It is aimed at facilitating debate between scholars working across the humanities and social sciences, thus emulating the reach of the Enlightenment world which Smith helped to shape.

The sixth volume of the series contains contributions from specialists across a range of disciplines, including Vivienne Brown, Maria A. Carrasco, Douglas J. Den Uyl, Jon Elster, Niall Ferguson, Samuel Fleischacker, Christel Fricke, Lisa Hill, Duncan Kelly, Karl Ove Moene, John O'Neill, Maria Pia Paganelli, Alessandro Roncaglia, Carola Freiin von Villiez, and Jonathan B. Wight.

Topics examined include:

- Smith and the conditions of a moral society
- the fate of Anglo-American capitalism
- Smith and Shaftesbury.

Fonna Forman-Barzilai is Associate Professor of Political Theory at the University of California–San Diego, USA. She is Editor of *The Adam Smith Review* on behalf of the International Adam Smith Society.

The Adam Smith Review

Published in association with the International Adam Smith Society

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The Adam Smith Review is a multidisciplinary annual review sponsored by the International Adam Smith Society. It aims to provide a unique forum for vigorous debate and the highest standards of scholarship on all aspects of Adam Smith's works, his place in history, and the significance of his writings for the modern world. *The Adam Smith Review* aims to facilitate interchange between scholars working within different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, and to this end it is open to all areas of research relating to Adam Smith. The Review also hopes to broaden the field of English-language debate on Smith by occasionally including translations of scholarly works at present available only in languages other than English.

The Adam Smith Review is intended as a resource for Adam Smith scholarship in the widest sense. The Editor welcomes comments and suggestions, including proposals for symposia or themed sections in the Review. Future issues are open to comments and debate relating to previously published papers.

The website of *The Adam Smith Review* is: www.adamsmithreview.org/

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From the editor

As I assume editorial responsibilities for *The Adam Smith Review*, I would like to thank Founding Editor Vivienne Brown for her vision in establishing the journal, and for so masterfully editing it over these past years. We are all in her debt. In the spirit of publishing the very best peer-reviewed work on Adam Smith across the humanities and social sciences, we press forward!

My thanks to the Editorial Board and to Craig Smith, the new Book Reviews Editor, for their support during the transition of editorial operations, and to Christian Donath, my Editorial Assistant, for his hard work as we prepared the current volume for publication. Thanks also to the University of California–San Diego for material support.

It is my great pleasure to welcome the following new members to the Editorial Board, many of whom contributed substantially to the preparation of this volume:

Christopher J. Berry (University of Glasgow, UK)

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Fonna Forman-Barzilai
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Symposium

Adam Smith and the conditions of a moral society

Introduction

Adam Smith and the conditions of a moral society

Christel Fricke

An international Adam Smith conference celebrating the 250th anniversary of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was held in Oslo, Norway, on August 27–29, 2009. It was jointly hosted and funded by three Oslo-based research institutions: the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature (CSMN/Christel Fricke and Raino Malnes), the Centre for the Study of Equality, Social Organization, and Performance (ESOP/Kalle Moene) and the Seminar on Theory of Science (Ragnvald Kalleberg).

We are here publishing some of the contributions to the conference. All have been peer reviewed and revised for publication in the *Adam Smith Review*.

Adam Smith wrote the TMS before academic disciplines were distinguished as they are today. He deals with a number of topics which are now seen as falling into the area of competence of different academic disciplines, including not only moral philosophy but also sociology, political science, psychology, history, pedagogy, law and economics (the latter in so far as what Smith has to say in the TMS about, for example, the driving forces of human motivation and interaction, as well as about both national and international justice, provides an important background for properly understanding his theory of national economics in the WN). And this list of disciplines may not even be complete.

Whereas philosophy takes its own history to be among its main areas of research, nothing similar is the case for any of these other disciplines. However, reading the TMS today is more than a matter of purely historical interest. For Smith, morality is on the one hand an achievement of human civilization and on the other a result of individual learning. Both of these aspects of the phenomenon of morality are of great interest in present debates. Questions concerning individual humans' emotional dispositions and moral capacities, the role of socialization and moral learning, the impact of culture on moral development, the driving forces and dynamics of human interaction, the process of civilization and the evolution of human morality are high up on the agenda of scholars interested in human nature and, in particular, the nature of morality and its evolution. In his TMS, Smith explores the social, economical and political conditions of a moral society

and its historical development as part of the process of civilization, laying out a blueprint for the moral foundations of modernity. Based on observations of human behaviour, he argues that human beings are by nature disposed to take an interest in other people's well being, even if their own utility is not affected by it. Whereas Smith speaks of human 'sympathy', this disposition is now labelled as 'altruism'. Smith rejects the originally Hobbesian claim that humans are intrinsically selfish, interested in nothing but their own well being and utility. The view of human nature as exclusively selfish survives today in the notion of the 'homo oeconomicus'. Smith's rejection of this anthropological claim has, in the meantime, been strengthened by experimental research in motivational psychology and behavioural economics. Today, his TMS can provide ample inspiration for further research in philosophy and the behavioural sciences. It is for this reason that the organizers of the Oslo conference have joined forces and invited philosophers, economists, political scientists and sociologists to comment on Adam Smith's moral theory from their respective points of view.

The papers published here address the controversy over the questions whether or not the TMS does contain a normative moral theory and, in so far as it does, which view of morality Smith defended. Furthermore, contributors discuss various aspects of Smith's account of the nature and dynamics of the reactive attitudes of gratitude and resentment. These attitudes are shaping human interaction not only inside circles of families and friends but also among members of a commercial society who meet on the marketplace. The papers published here reveal the TMS as a source of philosophical, sociological, political and economic thought which can help us to further develop our modern understanding of human nature and the conditions of a moral society.

Maria Alejandra Carrasco takes a close look at Smith's genetic explanation of the emergence of moral conscience with a particular focus on the transition from developmental psychology to moral philosophy proper. In her account of the way in which Adam Smith builds a 'bridge' from the amoral (psychological) to the moral sphere she distinguishes four kinds of sympathy: (1) sympathy as a transfusion of sentiments which one can find in very young children and even in higher developed animals; (2) identification sympathy as depending on practical imagination which opens up to circumstance and as including a capacity to evaluate an agent's passions and actions; (3) mutual sympathy between an agent and a spectator, where the agent becomes the 'spectator of the spectator'; and (4) moral sympathy, as due to the appearance of the impartial spectator within. Carrasco sees the move from (3) to (4) as representing the transition from the psychological to the moral realm, a reflexive turn that produces second-order or rational desires. The moral ideal – as far as it is at all achievable by humans – is incorporated by the 'wise and virtuous'. Carrasco reads Smith's account of reflection-based impartial sympathy as anticipating Richard Hare's account of an impartial judgment (as approved of by anybody in the same

circumstances) and Kurt Baier's account of such a judgment (as based on a reversibility test).

Carola Freiin von Villiez accommodates both the descriptive and the prescriptive elements of the TMS as essential parts of one normative moral theory. She argues that, according to Smith, communal moral standards are natural side-effects of the interactions between individuals. These interactions are to be understood in terms of a process of moral progress. Von Villiez distinguishes between three main steps in this process, according to the degree of impartiality of the sympathetic feelings of the respective spectator and the corresponding degree of justification of his judgment: at first, the spectator relies on 'empathy' as the criterion for *natural justification*, afterwards on 'social consensus' as the criterion for *conventional justification*, and finally on 'universality' as the criterion for *moral justification*. Only judgments based on universally valid norms, on 'moral norms proper' are moral in the strict sense of the term. The step from the second to the third level is marked by the acquisition of conscience. Persons with conscience do not depend on actual social consensus for their moral judgment; rather, they rely on the internalized spectator and his capacity to distinguish praiseworthiness from actual praise. According to von Villiez, the distinction between praise and praiseworthiness is ultimately conducive to ideally impartial norms, that is, to moral norms proper.

Christel Fricke suggests a third reading of the TMS as a normative moral theory. According to her, the core of this theory is Smith's account of the rules of justice – rather than his theory of conscience, as many scholars assume, including both Carrasco and von Villiez. The rules of justice are not constituted by the spectatorial process between a person concerned and her impartial spectator. This is because an (implicit) endorsement of these rules is a condition for the person concerned and her spectator for engaging in a spectatorial process in the first place and for the possibility of their agreeing on shared moral standards. Shared moral standards arising from a spectatorial process have both factual and justified authority. The rules of justice, however, have absolute authority. Human beings are naturally motivated to act in accordance with the rules of justice; but the process of socialization within a particular culture gives rise to prejudices about who is (and who is not) among those whose feelings and interests have to be respected. Smith's moral account of the socialization of a child (and his account of civilization at large) is therefore ambivalent: On the one hand, socialization is indispensable for a child's moral education. But on the other hand, any process of socialization takes place under contingent conditions and gives rise to prejudices about who is to be respected as an equal. The rules of justice prescribe respect for all people as equals, independently of their cultural identity, and that their interests be taken into account. Universal respect is a requirement of impartiality.

Samuel Fleischacker takes Smith's claim according to which self-deceit is 'the source of half the disorders of human life' literally and explores from this

starting point Smith's notion of the self and the dangers of self-deceit. Sources of self-deceit are to be found in the passions, and a person can limit the impact of the passions on his judgment and volition by relying on rules of action. For Smith, the self is essentially a social self but not, as for Hume, a social construction which is not identical over time. The self is essentially divided between a spectator and an agent. For this reason, self-consciousness as well as self-deceit are for Smith phenomena governed by norms of agency and by moral norms in particular. Finally, Fleischacker relates Smith's account of self-deceit to the phenomenon of *akrasia*.

Duncan Kelly explores Smith's theory of propriety in the framework of his account of 'persuasive agency', claiming that 'the propriety of agency is a measure of how persuasive its claims to our sympathy might be, particularly when seen from the vantage point of the impartial spectator'. Kelly employs the character of Cordelia from Shakespeare's *King Lear* as an example of the challenges of impartial propriety. Cordelia's expression of her love for her father is proper in the eyes of the spectators: Persuasive as her communicative action is, Cordelia gains the spectators' sympathy. But her audience on stage, and her father in particular, fails to recognize the real propriety of her speech – as it is not in accordance with the formal propriety as defined by the etiquette at the court. The case of Cordelia illustrates the possible discrepancy between standards of propriety as arbitrarily defined by a particular group and those impartial standards of propriety to which we appeal in our natural desire for approbation. Action should be governed by propriety, but it should aim at persuading those whose sympathy is with impartial propriety.

The papers mentioned so far draw on Smith's theory of human interaction and its emotional drives as sources of morality without paying much attention to the substantive changes which Smith witnessed in the society of his time. It is these changes that Lisa Hill addresses in her paper: changes from a pre-commercial to a commercial society. Hill draws on sociological theory in order to examine Smith's understanding of the social physics of life in the commercial age. According to her, Smith was fascinated by the social changes he witnessed in his own time, changes brought about by material progress as well as social and economic expansion: He saw strangers meeting in the marketplace, in need of a legal framework that could provide mutual trust where such trust had not been previously established by extensive former personal acquaintance. Accordingly, Smith describes the affective, social and moral psychology of a world that was moving from homogeneity and the exigencies of security to differentiation and the demands of commerce. While being aware of the dissolution of the primordial ties of blood and territory, Smith explained how commercial society could still be adequately regulated and held together – by contract, the cool virtues, the division of labour, a minimal and properly managed state and a regular system of justice and police. Whereas Hill diagnoses a certain ambivalence in Smith's attitude to commercial society, she argues that he saw the ideal of a liberal commercial society to be more 'pacific, orderly and predictable than its stadal

predecessors ... partly because its regulating mechanisms are generated *outside* intensely emotional and exclusivistic social units like the family, the village, the *umma* or the feudal estate'.

John O'Neill shares Hill's interest in the interaction of members of a commercial society as explored by Smith. He takes his starting point from recent debates about the politics of recognition: Is recognition a cultural matter that can be studied without taking economic inequalities into account, or is it intrinsically shaped by economic inequalities? Whereas the debate has extensively explored the Hegelian theory of recognition, including Hegel's discussion of Rousseauian views, O'Neill explores the particular position of Adam Smith and the way Smith responds to the egalitarian challenges raised by Rousseau (and others). According to O'Neill, Smith provides a theory of recognition which understands the economy as a sphere of recognition and the distribution of goods within the economy as closely related to problems of recognition. Smith's attitude to the commercial society is to some extent ambivalent: He is aware of the social invisibility of the poor as an example of misrecognition in commercial society, that is, of the divorce of recognition from its proper object. But, according to O'Neill, Smith is defending commercial society nevertheless, describing it as a social order in which independent agents mutually recognize each other as such.

In his contribution, Jon Elster focuses on the topic of strong reciprocity as explored by Seneca and Adam Smith. Strong reciprocity can be either negative (resentment) or positive (gratitude). On behalf of the phenomenon of strong reciprocity, Elster distinguishes between two questions: There is on the one hand the normative question about the right response to an action (the right degree of resentment or gratitude) and on the other the positive question about the motivational impact these feelings actually have. Elster explores both Seneca's and Smith's answers to these questions, compares them to each other and then looks at their views from the point of view of contemporary experimental research in behavioural economics. He draws attention to two phenomena in particular: Experimental findings confirm that people are naturally disposed to excessive retaliation of suffered harm. But if a third person punishes the offender rather than the victim himself, the punishment is more moderate. Furthermore, Smith is anticipating that a victim would gain more pleasure from punishing his offender himself than from seeing him punished by a third person. This claim has not yet been tested in experiments. Both phenomena provide interesting aspects to be taken into account when addressing the normative question about the right degree of gratitude, resentment and punishment as a response to an act of benevolence or offence.

Vivienne Brown argues that the TMS provides resources for showing why it might be rational for players to cooperate in a one-shot Prisoners' Dilemma game. She develops a new mode of practical reasoning for interdependent players which shows that it might be individually rational, not self-sacrificial, to cooperate in such a game. She argues that the respective mode of reasoning, which shows that 'instrumental cooperation' can be the outcome of

individual maximization given the nature of players' interdependence, is in tune with Smith's account of intersubjectivity in the TMS. According to this account, individual agents internalize their awareness of interdependence: Smith develops an intersubjective conception of the 'self' which allows new insights for understanding social dilemmas.

Karl Ove Moene reminds us of the historical fact that Smith's WN has been instrumentalized by conservative liberalist economists: In Smith's name, they campaigned against any political interference in the market. Smith's reputation as a liberalist capitalist who ignored the needs of the people at the poor end of society has made him a welcome target of left-wing anti-market-mechanism ideology. Moene sets off to free Smith from his ideological captivity. He argues that Smith was defending a policy of economics and society that is best captured by comparing it to the so-called Scandinavian model: The Scandinavian model is distinguished by comprehensive labour market organizations, a large welfare state and a system of routine consultation among government and representatives of interest organizations. The typical policies are wage compression, lowering high wages and raising low wages; the provision of basic goods for all citizens as a right of citizenship; and a government commitment to full employment. In his re-reading of the WN, Moene argues that these aspects of the Scandinavian model of social democratic development owe more to Adam Smith than to Karl Marx.

From psychology to moral normativity

Maria A. Carrasco

Adam Smith ‘constructs’ the moral world, says Samuel Fleischacker, from some amoral, innate tendencies of human nature.¹ Along the same line of interpretation D. D. Raphael affirms that Smith gives a psychological genetic explanation of the emergence of moral conscience;² which originating from our most basic and innate drives, advances to a reasonable account of human moral nature. Psychology – which here, for the sake of clarity, will only refer to ‘our innate desire for pleasure’ – is in this theory like the infrastructure that supports the gradually formed ‘superstructure’ of morality – or the desire for good in itself and for its own sake.³ Our psychological constitution both sustains and is the condition that enables morality. However, the moral dimension in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) is independent of psychology. Many important interpreters affirm that morality is a mere internalization of social norms, which would ultimately be justified in psychology.⁴ On the contrary, I will argue that morality is a new and distinct dimension, which emerges from a different source and has a different kind of normative authority. They are distinct spheres that, despite their genetic connection, can be distinguished in Smith’s ethics.

My proposal is that Adam Smith builds this ‘bridge’ from the amoral to the moral through the development of his notion of sympathy – ‘the backbone of Smith’s theory’, as Carola von Villiez calls it.⁵ Reconstructing the TMS around this concept – which along with the impartial spectator are the two ‘pillars’ of this ethics – will show how Smith is able to give an account of the human moral dimension starting from the empirical *factum* of our innate drive to sympathize.⁶ Nonetheless, this will not mean that psychology is the cause of morality as if it were an epiphenomenon or could be reduced to it. Human moral conscience develops gradually, in the same way as self-consciousness or the capacity for abstract reasoning do. At some stage of the normal process of maturation we ‘acquire’, so to speak, moral conscience,⁷ and become – as Smith characterizes us – morally accountable beings (Corr. p. 52, TMS III.1.4).

The difference and independence of the psychological and the moral dimensions is manifest in Smith’s brief but unequivocal description of that small group of men who – I will contend – embody his underlying normative ideal: the ‘wise and virtuous’. These men, who represent the apex of virtue in

Smith's theory, also suffer from conflicts of motivation, revealing that there are two distinct motives (psychological and moral) competing in their breasts. In spite of their continuous efforts to identify themselves with the 'impartial spectator within' and to cultivate the resolution of mind and delicacy of sentiments required for virtue (cf. TMS VII.iii.3.10), their innate psychological tendencies or passive feelings will always coexist with their habitual *moral* feelings.

In order to make my point, I will start by presenting the (reconstructed) evolution of Smith's concept of sympathy. In the first section, I will explain psychological sympathy in order to, in the second section, show why and how what I call 'moral sympathy' reveals a new and different dimension in human beings. In the third section, I will describe what I take to be Smith's normative ideal, embodied in the 'wise and virtuous'. And I will finish suggesting that the structure of moral judgments in the TMS is intrinsically connected to Smith's normative theory, and that his innovative concept of sympathy changes the metaethical qualification of his system: his self-described sentimentalist morality (cf. TMS VII.iii.3.16) becomes an ethics closer to a kind of modern practical reason theory.⁸

From amoral to moral sympathy: the psychological dimension

Roughly speaking, it is possible to identify four kinds of sympathy in Smith's TMS, which are qualitatively different and increasingly complex, although they are not mutually exclusive.⁹ Two of them might be called 'one-way sympathies', and the other two, 'two-way or mutual sympathies'. These 'mutual sympathies' are Smith's specific creations, and those that change the axis of his theory from a mere sentimentalism to an ethics closer to practical reason. Nevertheless, each of these concepts is the foundation or the ground upon which the following one rests.

One-way sympathies¹⁰

The first two kinds, or one-way sympathies, are quickly described in the first chapter of the book. One is the most basic meaning, the contagion or transfusion of sentiments – as Smith characterizes it – between an agent and a spectator (TMS I.i.1.6). This 'mechanical' sympathy lacks one of the central features of Smith's final notion: the identification through practical imagination between the actors. However, it already gives us some important information about this concept: morality is a social phenomenon; it emerges from the interaction between human beings.

Mechanical sympathy is simply to laugh when somebody else is laughing or to yawn when another yawns. Even animals are subject to this 'infection of feelings', such as when dogs start howling upon hearing other dog's howls. The most primitive manifestation of it, or some kind of proto-empathy, might be motor mimicry.¹¹ As Robert Gordon reports, infants and animals may also

replicate emotions, i.e. have some sort of very basic sympathetic responses which travel by way of a purely non-cognitive channel.¹² Smith does not ignore this rudimentary understanding of the concept of sympathy, probably because its observation was the starting point of all the theories that give a prominent role to this notion, and also because it was not completely absent among his contemporaries. Hutcheson, for instance, describes it as an internal sense through which, '*previous to any reasoning or meditation*, we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and sorrow with them in their misfortunes'.¹³ But Smith does qualify it as a very imperfect sympathy (TMS I.i.1.9); and he not only broadens its meaning to 'a fellow-feeling with *any* passion whatever' (TMS I.i.1.5. My emphasis) but he also shows that there are some cases, like resentment (TMS I.i.1.8), where this kind of sympathy cannot explain the spectator's affective reactions. This case, indeed, makes him reformulate the definition of sympathy. But his new definition retains the social element, innateness and psychological strength that the first notion manifests.

The second one-way sympathy, introduced as early as in the second paragraph of the TMS, already includes a feature that will afterwards be the core of Smith's concept of sympathy: practical imagination. This new concept, which I will call 'identification-sympathy', is not just a transfusion but, as it were, an 'entering' of the spectator into the agent's breast and what he thinks the other is feeling. In Smith's own words: 'The emotions of the by-stander always correspond to those with what, by bringing the case home to himself he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer' (TMS I.i.1.4). Some of his examples are the torments we feel while seeing our brother on the rack (cf. TMS I.i.1.2) or the restlessness at the sight of the ulcers exposed by beggars (cf. TMS I.i.1.3).

Therefore, in identification-sympathy, the spectator must be 'open to context;' he does not merely replicate the agent's feelings but, through an imaginary change of positions, he now focuses on the circumstances that produce those feelings.¹⁴ Haakonssen, comparing this notion with Hume's, says that Smith 'simply ... broaden[s] the causal factors in the creation of the sympathetic reaction of the spectator *to include* the situation in which the original passion and its expression occurred'.¹⁵ However, regardless of the truth of this claim, this twist cannot be seen as a *simple* one, since it implies the most profound consequences for Smith's technical understanding of sympathy and his whole moral theory. First, it introduces reason into this innate psychological tendency; and second, it sets the foundation for the judgments of propriety of the agent's passions/actions.

Regarding the latter, Smith says: 'We blush for the impudence or rudeness of another though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behaviour; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, have we behaved in so absurd a manner' (TMS I. i.1.10). This situation does not express contagion but a clear judgment of the other's conduct. How can Smith justify this judgment? Evaluation implies comparison, and within the framework of identification-sympathy, that will be

made between the agent and what *I* imagine would be *my feelings* in that situation. '[I]t is only this "tension" between persons that gives rise to all evaluations of persons, of which the act of sympathy is the necessary first step'.¹⁶

Despite Smith not actually describing this mental process, he gives enough hints to reconstruct it. In order to be evaluative, 'sympathy' has to become a twofold process. First of all, I (the spectator) must completely identify with the agent: 'I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters' (TMS VII.iii.1.4);¹⁷ and then, in the second step, I only change positions or circumstances with the agent, keeping my self-identification (i.e. I do not change 'persons and characters').¹⁸ Finally, I compare the agent's (attributed) feelings with those I imagine I would feel in that situation, and only if they coincide will I judge them as proper to what 'the situation deserves' (TMS I.i.2.6). This is what I will call 'subjective propriety'.¹⁹

Phenomenologically, this evaluation through identification-sympathy can be explained as the superimposing of two maps. We all live our lives within an egocentric map, self-identified and with our particular circumstances. When we have to identify with another, 'to enter into his breast' or to imaginarily become the other person, we must re-center that map or, as Gordon puts it, to make 'an imaginary shift in the reference of indexicals'.²⁰ This is the job that actors usually do: they bracket out their self-identification to get completely absorbed in the role they are playing (personality, circumstances, etc.).²¹

This first movement of complete identification, this 'simulation', as Gordon calls it, 'is a procedure we consciously use in everyday moral thinking'.²² However, complete identification has no standard with which it could be compared, and thus no possibility of evaluation.²³ That is why there is a second step, which is a similar process except that we keep our self-identification. Propriety assessments then, require a second re-centering of our egocentric map, but only with regard to the relevant circumstances of the situation (if I were performing Hamlet, I would imagine how *I*, Maria, would act in *his* circumstances).²⁴ I finally compare these maps, superimposing the partially adjusted map of the spectator (Maria in Hamlet's circumstances) on top of the reconstructed imaginary map of the agent (Hamlet), and according to their correspondence I approve or disapprove of him.²⁵

The other consequence that this 'broadening the casual factors' of sympathy produced in Smith's innovative notion was the introduction of reason. Resentment is the best example: Before sympathizing with the agent's resentment, the spectator 'analyzes' the situation to define how appropriate those feelings are. Here Smith patently introduces intentionality and practical imagination in this innate psychological tendency, which in this case cannot be shared with irrational animals. Indeed, before 'barking' at the supposed aggressor of his master, as a dog automatically does, the human spectator evaluates if the victim's resentment is proportionate to the harm received (cf. TMS II.i.4.3). And only if the spectator thinks that the victim's feelings are

proper, does he sympathize with him. Clearly this case involves some 'measure of understanding – at times sophisticated understanding;²⁶ not theoretical but some sort of comprehension of the situation of the other.

There are two particularly interesting examples of identification-sympathy in the TMS, which refer to extraordinary situations and thus better reveal other relevant features of the formal structure of Smith's concept of sympathy. The first is 'illusive sympathy', as when we identify with a dead person who obviously cannot feel the sentiments we imagine he would feel if he were conscious of his circumstances (cf. TMS I.i.1.13 and II.i.2.5). This situation shows that for Smith the key to 'propriety' is not the agent's actual feelings but those 'we imagine they should be'. The second is 'conditional sympathy' (TMS I.i.3.4), where Smith shows how this imaginary identification may also work the other way round: sometimes we are not able to correspond to the agent's feelings, but since we know from experience that they are proportionate to their situation, we approve of them.

All these cases manifest the fundamental qualitative difference between this second one-way sympathy and mere contagion. Identification-sympathy involves an act of practical imagination; it requires the assistance of reason. We ought to be able to identify 'kinds of situations', to abstract their essential features in order to categorize them. Only through this cognitive process can we later recognize concrete situations with all their contingent circumstances, and know what the appropriate feelings for them are. To know 'from experience' means that we have already categorized situations, and hence we are able to recognize their exemplars and to judge accordingly, without needing to return to our actual affective reactions.

Consequently, in this still very basic level of sympathy, there are already some essential elements of the increasingly complex concept Smith is putting forward. First of all, interpersonality: sympathy requires two actors, an agent and a spectator. Second, openness to context. Identification with the other's feelings is an understanding, through practical imagination, of the situation the other is experiencing. And finally, evaluation and judgment of propriety. Identification-sympathy implies the comparison between the agent's actual or virtual feelings with those that would be the spectator's feelings in the same circumstances. From this comparison arises the judgment of subjective propriety according to what the spectator's thinks the situation deserves. All these characteristics, quickly exposed in the first pages of the TMS, already change Smith's concept of sympathy from his predecessor's mere 'power of perception' (TMS III.4.5)²⁷ into a 'principle of approving of propriety' of the sentiments of the other.

Mutual sympathy

The first great leap Smith makes with his novel notion of sympathy, which will signify the decisive qualitative difference with his contemporaries' 'spectatorial ethics', is the introduction of mutual sympathy.²⁸ Smith does not seem

to give to this new feature the meta-ethical importance it has for the definition of his theory, which will eventually set it apart from classic sentimentalism. Without any preamble, in the second chapter of the book he brings in his original notion of the 'pleasure of mutual sympathy'. 'Nothing pleases us more – he says – than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary' (TMS I.i.2.1); and further: 'As the person who is principally interested in any event is pleased with our sympathy, and hurt by the want of it, so we, too, seem to be pleased when we are able to sympathize with him, and to be hurt when we are unable to do so' (TMS I.i.2.6). This seemingly innocent empirical observation transforms at least in two different ways the spectatorial ethics. First, it makes it a 'mutual spectatorship': the agent, until now uninvolved with the judgment, becomes an active participant in the sympathy process. He turns out to be a 'spectator of the spectator', and as he vividly desires the pleasure of mutual sympathy, he strives to identify himself with the spectator; he looks at himself through the other's eyes and brings his feelings up to the point which the spectator would approve of them. Second, the spectator, who has so far been evaluating 'from the outside', shall also enter into the situation to get the pleasure of mutual sympathy, moderating his feelings in order to match them with the agent's.²⁹ Henceforth, under this new concept, sympathy becomes performative. There is observation, but an observation that also and necessarily implies action: both the spectator and the agent have to modify their feelings if they want the pleasure of mutual sympathy. And their efforts will give rise, correspondingly, to the virtues of humanity and those of self-command.³⁰

Unsurprisingly, Smith's highly original notion was not well understood by his contemporaries. After the first edition of the TMS he was criticized by his friend David Hume, who said that sympathizing with painful feelings could never give pleasure and ironically commented that, if that was the case, 'A hospital would be a more entertaining place than a ball'.³¹ Naturally, for him, sympathy just meant one-way sympathy. Therefore, Smith had to explain his innovative concept in a footnote added in the TMS's second edition saying what was only implicit in the first:

It has been objected to me that as I found the sentiment of approbation, which is always agreeable, upon sympathy, it is inconsistent with my system to admit any disagreeable sympathy. I answer, that in the sentiment of approbation there are two things to be taken notice of; first, the sympathetic passion of the spectator; and, secondly, the emotion which arises from his observing the perfect coincidence between this sympathetic passion in himself, and the original passion in the person principally concerned. This last emotion, in which the sentiment of approbation properly consists, is always agreeable and delightful.

(TMS I.iii.1.9)

Smith, in this passage, distinguishes between the three steps I have already described for subjective propriety judgments: complete identification, partial identification and comparison. However, once he includes the common desire for mutual sympathy, the ‘superimposed maps’ no longer remain static. If the spectator finds no coincidence between his and the agent’s feelings, he will strive, through the virtues of humanity, to better identify himself with the agent, to better *understand* his situation and get as close as possible to his affective responses. The agent, in turn, who is now a spectator too, will struggle to moderate his passions/actions while applying the virtues of self-command. And the point of propriety will correspond to where they are able to coincide: it will be a ‘consensual propriety’. Henceforth, following the *factum* of our innate psychological tendency of the pleasure of mutual sympathy, the formal structure of the judgments of propriety in Smith’s TMS is completely transformed.³² In this third stage, there is no longer an external judge imposing his standards from a third person viewpoint, but propriety is set by internal consensus.

Furthermore, when mutual sympathy becomes more widespread,³³ it also has deep social consequences. Being relational, the spectator’s private feelings will no longer be the measure of propriety, but it will require the contrast, attunement and eventual concordance of both the agent’s and the average spectators’ feelings. Propriety then becomes culture-relative and is embodied in social norms, which will be the new standard for judgments. The agents, seeking the pleasure of mutual sympathy, will have to adjust their sentiments to what they think their culture believes each particular situation deserves. And the spectators will try to correspond to what, in von Villiez’s terms, would be the ‘communal observer’.

This consensual propriety is indeed normative, but its authority is completely factual, it proceeds from our desire of mutual sympathy or to feel approved of by our peers.³⁴ And this psychological sympathy, meaning the concordance of sentiments between two real, affectively connected and socially embedded people, is necessarily relativistic. However, if in the TMS morality is not reducible to psychology, Smith cannot stop here.³⁵ Psychological sympathy might suffice for the harmony within society (cf. TMS I. i.4.7); but regarding morality, where more than a social bond is aimed for, psychological sympathy is not enough.

Mutual moral sympathy

Smith’s Copernican revolution, which finally shifts his psychological sympathy into moral sympathy and our raw sentiments into moral sentiments, is mainly developed in the Part III of the book. The point of inflection is the appearance of the impartial spectator within, who by ‘moralizing’ our self-centered passions through impartiality, changes – as far as human weakness allows – a conventional and relativistic ethics into one closer to practical reason.

Identification-sympathy is a surprisingly appropriate vehicle for this ethics, which connects the universality of reason (given, in this case, through impartiality) with the particularities of each different situation. Practical reason, that is nothing but reason guiding action, has to be ‘open to context’: to our ever-changing world, full of contingencies that cannot be captured in universal theoretical laws, but where real actions take place.³⁶ Henceforth, an ethics of practical reason will always be ‘situation-relative’, because circumstances are always changing and judgments have to be made each time anew.³⁷ Identification-sympathy then, is a perfect vehicle for identifying, as practical reason’s judgments require, the relevant circumstances that in each particular occasion need to be considered.

Therefore, based on the infrastructure of mutual psychological sympathy, Smith shows how at some point of our development moral conscience naturally and necessarily appears. A very young child – he says, has no self-command,

but, whatever are its emotions, whether fear, or grief, or anger, it endeavours always, by the violence of its outcries, to alarm, as much as it can, the attention of its nurse, or of its parents. While it remains under the custody of such partial protectors, its anger is the first and, perhaps, the only passion which it is taught to moderate.

(TMS III.3.22)

Nevertheless, when that child starts going to school, he faces for the first time people who are not disposed to accept his innate self-centered desires. At this point he realizes that without restraining the expression of his passions he will never get their approval and the most desired pleasure of mutual sympathy. The indifferent eyes of our peers are the efficient cause that forces us to look at ourselves from the outside, from their unconcerned standpoint, where we discover that we are nothing ‘but one in a multitude of equals’ (cf. TMS III.3.4). These indifferent spectators are like the mirrors or looking-glasses Smith alludes to – following Hume’s metaphor about a hypothetical solitary human creature – in which we see ourselves as we really are (cf. TMS III.1.4). That is precisely why, just like the solitary man, when we ‘enter into society’ our ‘desires and aversions ... will now often become the causes of new desires and new aversions’ (TMS III.1.3). Indeed, our raw uneducated passions will give rise, for the first time, to *moral sentiments*.

Therefore our psychological desire for mutual sympathy is the first motivation for moral conduct, or as Griswold says, ‘the midwife of virtues’.³⁸ Our peers’ indifferent eyes prompt us to look at ourselves ex-centrally, to distance ourselves from our first-order desires inducing us to that reflexive turn that will produce second-order or rational desires, finally bringing the ‘impartial spectator’ to existence. *He* is the one that will inform those second-order passions – our same passions although mediated by internalized patterns of deliberation – continuously reminding us that, as we are all equals,

we can never make an exception of ourselves if we wish to gain other people's sympathy.

However, in this Third Part of the TMS Smith emphasizes that we desire not only praise (or 'other people's sympathy') but also praiseworthiness (cf. TMS III.2.1); that these desires, in spite of their resemblance and connection are different and independent of one another (cf. TMS III.2.32); that none of them may be derived from the other (cf. TMS III.2.2), and that '[i]n every well-formed mind [the desire of praiseworthiness] seems to be the strongest of the two' (TMS III.2.7). Indeed, for Smith, 'The secret of education is to direct vanity to proper objects' (TMS VI.iii.46); i.e. the mere desire of *praise* to that of *praiseworthiness*. Hence the reflexive turn we are psychologically forced to make and through which we see ourselves as we really are – one in a multitude of equals, 'in no respect better than any other in it' (TMS III.3.5) – also opens to us a new dimension, unveiling a different motive for actions (praiseworthiness instead of praise) with its own and different justification (equality instead of pleasure).³⁹

Moreover, this moral dimension is not an external imposed reality for us.⁴⁰ Mutual respect as beings of equal worth is already implicit in our most primitive concerns, as our 'immediate and instinctive approbation of the most sacred and necessarily law of retaliation' (TMS II.i.2.5).⁴¹ But most importantly, after realizing we are all equals, when somebody hurts us we resent the fact that the person who inflicted the injury looks at us as if we are inferior; 'we resent disrespect of our dignity, our status as persons who *may not* be treated in certain ways'.⁴² And because of sympathy, when another is hurt we resent the harm done to them in exactly the same way as if the injury was inflicted on us. In other words, identification-sympathy implies what Darwall has described as 'reciprocal recognition of one another as having equal dignity'.⁴³

Consequently, our self-distancing reveals to us a *moral value* (equal dignity) which becomes a different standard to guide and measure our actions. We are able to perceive it because morality is natural for us (Smith, probably responding Hume, affirms that we detest vices *for their own sake*: 'why should it not; if we hate and detest them because they are the natural and proper object of hatred and detestation' – TMS II.ii.3.8; and that we also love virtue 'for its own sake, and without any further view' – TMS VII.iii.2.7). Furthermore, this moral value is also universally binding, independent of our interests or desires, since it gives reasons to every 'equal' to respect it.⁴⁴

In sum, psychological sympathy becomes moral sympathy when its motivation (or 'the sentiment or affection of the heart ... upon which all virtue or vice depends' – TMS II.i introd.2) changes: when we start to intend praiseworthiness or virtue in our passions/actions instead of the pleasure of actual praise.⁴⁵ This happens when our first-order passions start to be informed, mediated or modeled by the 'impartial spectator within' (or 'reason, principle, conscience' – TMS III.3.5); when they become second-order passions or, properly speaking, *moral sentiments*.⁴⁶

Henceforth, returning to the superimposed maps example, in mutual moral sympathy the spectator's map is not his own egocentric or culture-centric map, but the supposed impartial spectator's. *Before* judging, *before* sympathizing or entering into the agent's breast, the actual spectator brackets out his natural self-centeredness, his consciously known cultural prejudices, his interests, biases and emotional ties;⁴⁷ in order to become, as much as possible, a 'man in general', an 'abstract man', 'the representative of mankind' (TMS III.2.31). After this self-removal, he 'draws a new map' founded on the impartial spectator's feelings, and thus with some fixed and stable references that should be the same for every moral being.⁴⁸ This is the 'map' that we will compare with the agent's. Hence in moral judgments we project ourselves into the other person as an *impartial* spectator,⁴⁹ ponder their feelings from that *impartial* standpoint and judge of their propriety according to what that particular situation in its particular context *impartially* deserves. The agent, who may now be the same spectator judging himself, will struggle to align his passions with this new standard; and far from the psychological 'how would *I* feel if *I* were in your circumstances', when making moral judgments we renounce to our self-identification to ask: 'How would *anybody* feel if they were really you (with all your particular characteristics) in your circumstances?' This *anybody* is the 'impartial spectator within'. Sympathetic-impartiality then will be the means of attaining propriety, which might now be called 'moral (not just consensual) propriety', since it is no longer the coincidence of the actual spectator's partial feelings but the coincidence with the moral feelings of the impartial spectator.⁵⁰

In conclusion, the inciting incident of our moral life is that moment when our first-order desires start to be mediated by the impartial spectator. First-order desires will never disappear from our nature though, and will often struggle with the newly acquired habit of self-command. This is why Smith suggests that the entrance into 'the great school of self-command' is the entrance into the moral domain and that it coincides with the emergence of the impartial spectator in our breast (cf. TMS II.3.22). Moreover, if first-order and second-order desires may coexist and even oppose each other, they must belong to different dimensions in human beings, each of them with their own particularities. This may be illustrated by a very simple example. When, after listening to a friend's account about treating unjustly another, the other friend says 'I really understand where you are coming from, but I cannot justify your action', she is implicitly showing that psychological sympathy and moral sympathy belong to different spheres (and that they are not exclusive). The 'I' who *understands* is my actual being; it is 'I' evaluating from my particular position in the world. The 'I' who does not *justify* though, is also myself, but not self-identified. This time, I am evaluating from a standpoint we can all share, and from which I can rationally argue why that particular action is morally wrong. Otherwise, my *understanding* would be enough to justify actions.⁵¹

Therefore, if ‘moral beings are accountable beings’, (TMS III.1.4) as Smith says, psychological sympathy and consensual propriety are not enough for that accounting. We need *rational* reasons, and not only subjective feelings, to validate our judgments or to give them – as von Villiez asserts – truly ‘intersubjective authority’. And only moral or impartiality mediated sympathy can open that *locus* where we may all coincide; this is to say, our common moral world.

Smith’s normative ideal

Despite saying that his theory is about facts and not values (cf. TMS II. i.5.10), if we accept that Smith recognizes an independent moral dimension in human beings we acknowledge that he believes in moral good and evil.⁵² He does not clearly distinguish these dimensions until describing the emergence of moral conscience, but from the beginning of the book he suggests his normative ideal. He says:

Two different roads are presented to us, equally leading to the attainment of this so much desired object [to be respected and to be respectable]; the one, by the study of wisdom and the practice of virtue; the other, by the acquisition of wealth and greatness. *Two* different characters are presented to our emulation; the one, of proud ambition and ostentatious avidity; the other, of humble modesty and equitable justice. *Two* different models, *two* different pictures, are held out to us, according to which we may fashion our own character and behaviour.

(TMS I.iii.3.2. My emphasis)

We all want praise, to feel approved of, to feel sympathy. But despite wisdom and virtue being the only human features that strictly deserve praise, as Smith emphatically declares (cf. TMS I.iii.3.1–3), few people take that path. The road is open to everybody;⁵³ but it is harder, slower, narrower and not always as visible as wealth and honor, which is the ‘second road’ we may choose to attain others’ sympathy. Virtue or true praiseworthiness may even require the sacrifice of worldly praise, keeping only the consolation of the ‘impartial spectator’s approval’ or that ‘second tribunal’ which we can appeal to judge of our conduct (cf. TMS III.2.32).

The wise and virtuous

Smith dedicates relatively few pages to describe the ‘wise and virtuous character’ in his work. But these passages reveal at least that he acknowledges their existence, or the possibility of their existence, and what he considers the consummation of morality: ‘the best head joined to the best heart’ (TMS VI. i.15). Indeed, Smith distinguishes from the beginning between ‘virtue’ – or ‘excellence, something uncommonly great and beautiful, which rises far above what is vulgar and ordinary’ (TMS I.i.5.6) – and mere propriety, understood

as decency, the common degree of virtue most people reach and aspire to.⁵⁴ There are scarce references to the 'wise and virtuous' in the book, but they are an important clue to understanding his notion of morality and the underlying normative ideal of the 'common moral world' he attempts to explain as emerging from our psychological tendencies.

The 'wise and virtuous' in Smith's theory are the best students in the 'school of self-command', perhaps the only ones who have really taken on board its meaning. They are the ones who are permanently exercising that habit in order to identify themselves, as much as possible, with the 'impartial spectator within' and his moral evaluations. Unlike the majority of people, content with minimal propriety of just following general rules,⁵⁵ the wise and virtuous understand that, in our ever-changing practical world, every situation is different, and the indeterminable circumstances that have to be taken into account ask for renewed moral judgments to capture the most subtle differences and attain perfect propriety. This is exactly the reason why self-command is a *habit*, a disposition that has to be developed and improved, although 'the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection' (TMS III.3.22). A wise and virtuous man then, is continuously sharpening the 'eye of [his] mind' (TMS III.3.2) because, unsatisfied with social norms, he would rather follow the 'ideal of perfection' that he has been gradually forming

from his observations upon the character and conduct both of himself and of other people. It is the slow, gradual, and progressive work of the great demigod within the breast ... [The virtuous man] has studied this idea more than other people, he comprehends it more distinctly, he has formed a much more correct image of it, and is much more deeply enamoured of its exquisite and divine beauty. He endeavours as well as he can, to assimilate his own character to this archetype of perfection.

(TMS VI.3.25)⁵⁶

There are some authors who identify this 'archetype' with a 'perfect communal observer' or perfectly internalized social norms; however, this poses some problems. In the first place, if it were this perfect *superego*, the love of praiseworthiness would derive from love of praise, as Smith emphatically denies. But it would also be difficult to justify why Smith qualifies what the majority of people do – to follow the road of wealth and honor (cf. TMS I.iii.3) – as a *corruption* of moral sentiments; or why he says that 'when custom and fashion coincide with *the natural principles* of right and wrong, they heighten the delicacy of our sentiments' (TMS V.2.2. My emphasis), or that 'the man who associates chiefly with the profligate and the dissolute ... must soon *lose*, at least, all his *original abhorrence* of profligacy and dissolution of manners' (TMS VI.ii.1.17. My emphasis). If social or communal norms set the moral standards, there would be nothing to *lose*.

On the contrary, although the wise and virtuous can never be completely sure about their moral choices, they can, and indeed do, go against what is