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Leonardo André Paes Müller

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Présentée et soutenue publiquement par :
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La philosophie d'Adam Smith : imagination et spéculation

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École Doctorale de Philosophie

Philosophie, Histoire et Analyse des Représentations Économiques (PHARE)

In memory of
Ivo André Bay Müller
1957-2014

To my wife,
Ana

*Nunca desembarcamos de nós. Nunca chegamos a outrem,
senão outrando-nos pela imaginação sensível de nós mesmos.*

Fernando Pessoa, *Livro do desassossego*

*But Jeannie, in the strict and severe tone of morality in which she was educated,
had to consider not only the general aspect of a proposed action,
but its justness and fitness in relation to the actor,
before she could be, according to her own phrase, free to enter upon it.*

Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements | 6 |
| Abstract | 7 |
| Abbreviations | 8 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| Chapter 1 – Senses and sentiments | 14 |
| 1. Hutcheson’s moral sense – 2. The external senses: a. external senses perceptions; b. language of nature: visual perceptions; c. preconceptions of externality; d. directive function – 3. The internal senses: a. profusion of senses; b. how far the analogy between external and internal senses goes?; c. deflated notion of internal sense: faculties at work; d. reflex senses – 4. Organizing the internal senses: the four kinds of moral judgements – 5. Moral faculties – 6. Moral and nature – 7. Sentiments | |
| Chapter 2 – Sympathy and imagination | 52 |
| 1. The term sympathy – 2. Imagination and sympathy – 3. Boundaries of sympathy – 4. Types of sympathy: a. passion originated in the body; b. love; c. unsocial passions; d. social passions; e. selfish passions – 5. The perception of fellow-feeling – 6. Sympathy and language – 7. Imagination’s moral theater | |
| Chapter 3 – Partiality and impartiality | 86 |
| 1. The problem of partiality – 2. Habit: Partiality and precision – 3. Moral substance and antinomical frame – 4. Conscience as a tribunal – 5. The “natural sense of equity” – 6. The role of virtue | |
| Chapter 4 – Merit and fortune | 112 |
| 1. Merit sentiments: Gratitude and resentment – 2. The objects of gratitude and resentment I – 3. The objects of gratitude and resentment II – 4. Fortune and its effects I: Merit and demerit: (a) intensity decrease; (b) intensity increase – 5. Fortune and its effects II: Propriety and impropriety – 6. Fortune under the eyes of an impartial spectator – 7. Authority of fortune: People, labor and sentiments – 8. The empire of fortune – 9. Fortune vs. conscience – 10. Tranquility and liberalism – 11. Idleness and passions’ extravagance | |
| Chapter 5 – Duty and rules | 161 |
| 1. Self-command vs. self-deceit – 2. Natural does not mean simple: Remorse as the sense of justice – 3. Duty and its judgement: The morals of reason – 4. The role of utility – 5. Kinds of artifice – 6. Constitution of a legal grammar – 7. Rules regulatory function: Usury laws – 8. Overturning the natural course of society: Bounties – 9. The nature of society | |
| Chapter 6 – Beauty and utility | 208 |
| 1. The beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility as a peculiar kind of aesthetic judgement – 2. Utility and utilitarian considerations – 3. Philosophical history of the beauty of utility: a. Epicurus: Utilitarian individualism; b. Hobbes: Deductivist mechanicism; c. Hume: Utilitarian organicism; d. Mandeville: Much ado about nothing – 4. How utility persuades: Ambition – 5. How providence works: The the corn merchant – 6. Species and character – 7. Who thinks abstractly? – 8. Survivance and speculation | |
| Conclusion | 252 |
| Bibliography | 255 |

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Abstract

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith establishes a pluralist scheme to explain moral approbation, with four kinds of moral judgments: 1) regarding the motives of the agent, the judgment determines its propriety or impropriety; 2) regarding the immediate effects of the action, the judgement determines its merit or demerit; 3) analyzing if this act is a particular case of a general rule, the judgement determines if the agent has acted according to his duty; and 4) regarding the remote effects of the action, that is, the way this action is a part of the global operations of society (a judgement that Smith calls the appearance of utility). These four kinds of moral judgments are grounded in imagination and form the totality of the principle of approbation that structure the speculative part of his moral philosophy.

Key-words: imagination, speculation, sympathy, duty, utility

Abbreviations

David Hume (1711-1776)

| | |
|--------|--|
| THN | <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , 1739-40 |
| Essays | <i>Essays Moral, Political, and Literary</i> , 1741 |
| EHU | <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , 1748 |
| EPM | <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , 1751 |

Adam Smith (1723-1790)

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| TMS or <i>Theory</i> | <i>Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> , six editions between 1759 and 1790 |
| WN or <i>Wealth</i> | <i>An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nations</i> , 1776 |
| EPS | <i>Essays on Philosophical Subjects</i> , 1793 |
| LRBL | <i>Lectures on Rethoric and Belles Lettres</i> , 1762-3 |
| LJA | <i>Lectures on Jurisprudence</i> , 1762-3 |
| LJB | <i>Lectures on Jurisprudence</i> , 1766 |
| Corr. | <i>Correspondence</i> , from and to Smith |

Citations to Smith's work are to the Glasgow edition (published in hardcover by Oxford University Press and in paperback by Liberty Fund). Passages are referenced using the Glasgow edition's system (e.g., TMS I.ii.3.4, meaning *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section II, Chapter 3, Paragraph 4) followed by page number.

Introduction

Adam Smith published six editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* between 1759 and 1790.¹ In the last part of this work (the sixth part of the five first editions, the seventh of the last),² he presents his account of the history of moral philosophy, including his own moral system. Right away, he offers the two questions that every “system of moral philosophy” (TMS VII.i.intro.1, p.265) should answer:

In treating of the principles of morals there are two questions to be considered. First, wherein does virtue consist? Or what is the tone of temper, and tenour of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praise-worthy character, the character which is the natural object of esteem, honour, and approbation? And, secondly, by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us? Or in other words, how and by what means does it come to pass, that the mind prefers one tenour of conduct to another, denominates the one right and the other wrong; considers the one as the object of approbation, honour, and reward, and the other of blame, censure, and punishment? (TMS VII.i.2, p.266)

He goes on to point out that

the determination of this second question, though of the greatest importance in speculation, is of none in practice. The question concerning the nature of virtue necessarily has some influence upon our notions of right and wrong in many particular cases. That concerning the principle of approbation can possibly have no such effect. To examine from what contrivance or mechanism within, those different notions or sentiments arise, is a mere matter of philosophical curiosity. (TMS VII.iii.3, p.315)

On the one hand, there is the practical part of moral philosophy, with questions about the nature of virtue, and on the other, there are theoretical (or speculative) questions

¹ *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: first edition, 1759; second, 1761; third, 1767; fourth, 1774; fifth, 1781; and sixth, 1790. His second major work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nations*, was published in 1776 (second edition, 1778; third, 1784; fourth, 1786; and fifth, 1789). A few days before his death, Smith asked two friends to burn all his manuscripts, with the exception of “some detached essays” (Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith*, in EPS, p.327), which were later published (1793) under the title *Essays on Philosophical Subjects. Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages* followed the second edition of *Theory* (1761) (LRBL, p.201). These and two other letters published in *The Edinburgh Review* (1755-6; in EPS, p.229) were everything Smith allowed to be published. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at least three notebooks of Smith’s students at the University of Glasgow were discovered and published: one on his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1762-3) and two on his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1762-3 and 1766). If we add his correspondence and a few more manuscript sheets, we have the complete works of Adam Smith.

² For more about the modifications Smith made, especially in the second and sixth editions, see the introduction and the critical apparatus in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (TMS Introduction, pp.34-46).

of moral philosophy, around the principle of approbation.³ The sixth and final edition of *Theory* covers both of these aspects and includes a speculative section (parts I through V), a practical section (part VI), and a historical section (part VII).

The principle of approbation is the subject of this dissertation. The first chapter will discuss Smith's pluralist scheme, composed of four kinds of moral judgments, to assist in the understanding of moral approbation: Every sentiment or action may be judged (1) according to its causes, (2) according to its effects, (3) as a particular case of a general rule, and (4) as a constituent part of an organized whole. The majority of this dissertation will focus on the systematic analysis and presentation of each of these kinds of judgments: Chapters 2 and 3 will present the first judgment, propriety; Chapter 4 the second type, merit; Chapter 5 the third, duty; and Chapter 6 the last one, which Smith called beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility. However, there is a question we should address first: Why moral sentiments? In other words, why does Smith choose to ground the principle of approbation in sentiments? The remainder of this introduction aims at providing an answer.

In his historical account of the speculative moral philosophy, Smith presents three kinds of moral systems that tried to answer the speculative question, each built around one possible source of moral approbation: self-love, reason, and sentiment (TMS VII.i.intro.1, p.265). In fact, it is a history of modern moral philosophy, or more specifically, British moral philosophy: Hobbes,⁴ Cudworth, and Hutcheson,⁵ respectively advocating self-love, reason, and sentiment. Therefore, Smith's history of the speculative moral philosophy is a history of the then most recent developments of moral philosophy that lead to his theory of moral sentiments, presented as the apex of these developments.⁶

His method of presenting philosophical systems consists of searching for the point where each one has "bordered upon the truth" (TMS VII.ii.4.14, p.313). This means at least three things. First, Smith never discards the totality of a system (those he considers completely wrong are not even mentioned, although his theory still rejects their mistaken

³ Concerning the practical part, a letter dated March 31, 1789, and addressed to Thomas Cadell, Smith's publisher at the time, should be remembered: "Ever since I wrote to you last I have been labouring very hard in preparing the proposed new edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. (...) Besides the Additions and improvements I mentioned to you; I have inserted, immediately after the fifth part, a compleat new sixth part containing a practical system of Morality, under the title of the *Character of Virtue*. The Book now will consist of seven Parts (...)" (Corr. 287, pp.319-20).

⁴ The names Pufendorf and Mandeville appear in a footnote (TMS VII.iii.1.1, p.315).

⁵ In addition to Hutcheson's, Hume's and Smith's own systems are presented in this section.

⁶ The fact that the title of the book is *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (and not *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*) is significant. It is strong evidence that Smith felt his theory was the definitive moral philosophy centered on the principle of approbation with sentiments as its source.

arguments⁷); second, he is not completely satisfied with simply pointing out what is mistaken; and, third, he retains the points he agrees with by incorporating them into his own theory of moral sentiments.⁸

Systems that ground morals in self-love do not form a cohesive group, but they all agree that there is no natural principle binding men to society. According to these philosophers, men are not naturally sociable and they unite only because they understand that their chances of survival will increase in a community (TMS VII.iii.1.1, p.315). Again, Smith does not completely discard this kind of moral conception, but he insists that it is only a particular type of moral judgment: that concerning “the beauty which the appearance of utility bestows” (TMS IV, title of the two chapters, p.179 and p.187), presented in Part IV of *Theory*. The problem with this kind of moral account is that it is excessively abstract and philosophical, presupposing not only that individuals all believe their survival will be better assured in society, but also that this belief is the most important driving force behind their union. Smith preserves these arguments only as confirmations of the (good) operations (and, in the last case, of the good constitution) of human nature, never as the sole motivating force behind society.

Two other kinds of moral philosophy emerged in opposition to these moral systems based on self-love. The core of this opposition is the idea that society is natural: There is something in human nature that impels us to form society, something beyond pure egoistic reasoning. This is an idea of Stoic origin that was widespread in various versions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁹ In his historical reconstitution,

⁷ For instance, this is how Smith treats the most important Scottish work of political economy before the appearance of *Wealth*, Sir James Steuart’s *An Inquiry upon the Principles of Political Economy*. In a letter to his editor he states: “In the Book which I am now preparing for the Press [i.e., *Wealth*] I have treated fully and distinctly of every part of the subject which you have recommended to me; and I intended to have sent you some extracts from it; but upon looking them over, I find that they are too much interwoven with other parts of the work to be easily separated from it. I have the same opinion of Sir James Stewart’s Book that you have. Without once mentioning it, I flatter myself, that every false principle in it, will meet with a clear and distinct confutation in mine” (Corr. 132, pp.163).

⁸ In section 6.3 I present a detailed description of Smith’s procedure concerning those philosophers who treated morality in utility terms (Epicurus, Hobbes, Mandeville, and Hume). As an example, Smith retains the descriptions of vanity from Mandeville’s system, criticizing a double mistake: There is no doubt that vanity is one of the main causes (perhaps the main cause) of moral corruption in modern commercial societies, but, on the one hand, there are non-egoistical actions (benevolent and just actions), and on the other, vanity does not deplete egoism (prudence is a form of egoism irreducible to vanity). This is the way Smith incorporates Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* into his own moral philosophy: by putting its principle (vanity) in its proper place, by weighting it correctly, and by determining its correct position in a (more) complete theory.

⁹ Catherine Larrère insists the idea of natural sociability is central to the “invention of economics/economy.” From natural law to French liberalism (Turgot), including mercantilism and physiocracy, all, without exception, shared the sociability thesis (1992). Still in France: “À pergunta sobre a origem das sociedades humana, os autores enciclopedistas respondem com a tese da sociabilidade natural” (Souza in Diderot &

Smith insists that among the human faculties, reason was the first option and choice of these philosophers to oppose self-love, since it appears to work with the distinctions of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, the same way it distinguishes true from false. However, as then “the abstract science of human nature was but in its infancy,” and many of the mental faculties were not yet well distinguished and analyzed, this sort of theory was somewhat confused (TMS VII.iii.2.5, p.319). Reason certainly has an important role to perform in the (inductive) formation of general rules and their applications as “standards of judgment” (TMS III.4.11, p.160); however, it can work properly only from previous sense perceptions (TMS VII.iii.2.7, p.320). It is only by starting from the materials our sensibility provides that reason can, inductively, form general rules (TMS III.4.8, p.159) that apply to particular cases (TMS VII.iii.2.5, p.160). Therefore, it cannot be the ultimate source of morality:

If virtue, therefore, in every particular instance, necessarily pleases for its own sake, and if vice as certainly displeases the mind, it cannot be reason, but immediate sense and feeling, which, in this manner, reconciles us to the one, and alienates us from the other. (TMS VII.iii.2.7, p.320)

If the idea of humankind’s natural sociability is the basis for non-selfish and non-rationalistic theories of morals, it is “immediate sense and feeling” that offers the concrete starting point to some British formulations throughout the eighteenth century. Shaftesbury was perhaps the first to cover some ground, but it was Hutcheson who gave this system a more definitive form, building it around the notion of a moral sense. The first chapter aims to reconstruct some central questions of Smith’s theory of moral sentiments from the way he criticizes Hutcheson’s moral sense, especially the way he understands the passage from the immediate sense and feeling to the sentiments, a passage that is the result of the conjoint operations of imagination and sympathy. One might say that imagination replaces the reason of rationalistic theories (see Chapter 2) and sympathy aims to enlarge the narrow individual point of view of the selfish systems (see Chapter 3).

It is around the importance of sympathy that Smith approaches the other important philosopher of the moral sentiments tradition, Hume. However, the relationship between their respective philosophies is manifold and complex. The way Smith approaches and retains some terms (sympathy, imagination) and arguments (against reason, against social

D’Alembert, 2015, p.9). As we will briefly see, the British tradition of moral sense or moral sentiments also accepts this idea.

contract), at the same time that he rejects some other notions (the most important is that of impression; see 2.7) and theories (justice as an artificial virtue; see 6.3c), renders it very difficult (if not impossible) to expose in general terms their philosophical relationship. In many instances, Smith is offering a different explanation for the same facts, which we can see in the way he employs many Humean metaphors while making small shifts that completely alter their meaning (that of the mirror to illustrate the sympathetic reflection, and that of the soul to show the vital power of sympathy, see 2.7). Even Smith's rejection of some of Hume's most important metaphysical assumptions is inseparable from the way he embraces the epistemological role of these assumptions as nothing more than hypotheses whose value lies in their explanatory powers (see 6.8). That is why, unlike Smith's criticism of Hutcheson, located around his refusal to understand the moral sense as a peculiar faculty (see 1.1), the critical reading of Hume's philosophy will be presented in Chapters 2 through 6 as the topics unfold according to the internal logic of Smith's speculative system—namely, a pluralistic principle of approbation, composed of four kinds of moral judgments.

Chapter 1 – Senses and sentiments

Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), *Daniel Deronda*

Un sentiment, n'est ce pas le monde dans une pensée ?

Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

1. Hutcheson's moral sense

A good way to understand the central problem of a theory of moral sentiments is to follow Smith's criticism of Hutcheson's moral philosophy.

¹ According to Smith, his teacher's theory of moral sense offers the correct starting point to any theory aiming to ground morality in sentiments but commits at least two mistakes: First, he goes too far in his analogy between the internal and external senses, and second, he is wrong in supposing only one moral sense is the source of morality.²

In Smith's account, Hutcheson starts criticizing self-love and reason as sources of morality:

Dr. Hutcheson had been at great pains to prove that the principle of approbation was not founded on self-love. He had demonstrated too that it could not arise from any operation of reason. Nothing remained, he thought, but to suppose it a faculty of a peculiar kind, with which Nature had endowed the human mind, in order to produce this one particular and important effect. When self-love and reason were both excluded, it did not occur to him that there was any other known faculty of the mind which could in any respect answer this purpose. (TMS VII.iii.3.4, p.321)

By supposing a “new power of perception which had never been heard before” (TMS VII.iii.3.2, p.321), that is, the moral sense, Hutcheson goes too far in the analogy

¹ Since I am only interested in how Smith reads Hutcheson, I will not even try to expose his moral sense theory. Some references about it: Bonar (1930), Frankena (1945), Jaffro (2000a, 2009), and Biziou (2005).

² There is a third critique: For Hutcheson, there is no virtue without benevolence as its motive. For Smith, on the other hand, there is a virtuous form of egoism, prudence (this also works as a criticism of Mandeville, who reduced all egoistic behavior to vanity). Hutcheson did not consider other possible sources of virtue because he did not analyze the motives of the action in relation to the situation that begot it, as Leonidas Montes correctly saw: “Smith also complains that Hutcheson's system, which makes virtue consist in benevolence focuses just on beneficial effects, omitting the important question of the causes of other virtues: ‘The view and aim of our affections, the beneficent and hurtful effects which they tend to produce, are the only qualities at all attended to in this system [Hutcheson's]. Their propriety and impropriety, their suitability and unsuitability, to the cause which excites them, are disregarded altogether’ (TMS VII.ii.3.15, p.304)” (2004, p.102).

between the external and internal senses. As soon as some theoretical consequences start to be analyzed, the problems become clear:

The qualities he allows, which belong to the objects of any sense, cannot, without the greatest absurdity, be ascribed to the sense itself. Who ever thought of calling the sense of seeing black or white, the sense of hearing loud or low, or the sense of tasting sweet or bitter? And, according to him, it is equally absurd to call our moral faculties virtuous or vicious, morally good or evil. These qualities belong to the objects of those faculties, not to the faculties themselves. (TMS VII.iii.3.8, pp.322-3)

Hutcheson carries the analogy to the point of denying that moral judgments are morally qualified. If the moral sense is focused only on itself, the problem is somewhat hidden: As it is absurd to say that vision is yellow or green or hearing is too high or too low (in the musical sense of the terms), it would be absurd to say that the moral sense is either good or bad, useful or useless, virtuous or vicious. The moral sense would perceive goodness or badness in an action but would not be good or bad in itself, the same way sight perceives the colors but is not colorful itself. There is the first issue for Smith:

If any man, therefore, was so absurdly constituted as to approve of cruelty and injustice as the highest virtues, and to disapprove of equity and humanity as the most pitiful vices, such a constitution of mind might indeed be regarded as inconvenient both to the individual and to the society, and likewise as strange, surprising, and unnatural in itself; but it could not, without the greatest absurdity, be denominated vicious or morally evil. (TMS VII.iii.3.8, p.323)

This problem goes even deeper as soon as the activity of the moral sense comes to the stage—that is, as soon as one inquires how to judge a moral judgment. Following the analogy between external and internal senses, as it is absurd to state that the act of seeing has a color, or that the act of tasting has a taste of its own, it would be absurd to state that the moral sense's activity is either good or bad, virtuous or vicious. In a word, it would be absurd to say that a moral judgment is qualified. The question is whether every moral judgment not only can but also should be morally judged:

Yet surely if we saw any man shouting with admiration and applause at a barbarous and unmerited execution, which some insolent tyrant had ordered, we should not think we were guilty of any great absurdity in denominating this behaviour vicious and morally evil in the highest degree, though it expressed nothing but depraved moral faculties, or an absurd approbation of this horrid action, as of what was noble, magnanimous, and great. (TMS VII.iii.3.9, p.323)

Here, however, Smith does not fully isolate these two levels of his criticism: first, the nature of the moral sense, and second, the moral qualification of a moral judgment, the moral sense's activity. Instead, he deals with them together—he does not distinguish between the effects of a “depraved moral faculty” or the bad use of a ‘regular’ or ‘normal’ one. His main argument against Hutcheson's account lies in the spontaneity of our moral judgments about other people's moral judgments (working as a response for both levels):

Correct moral sentiments, on the contrary, naturally appear in some degree laudable and morally good. The man, whose censure and applause are upon all occasions suited with the greatest accuracy to the value or unworthiness of the object, seems to deserve a degree even of moral approbation. We admire the delicate precision of his moral sentiments: they lead our own judgments, and, upon account of their uncommon and surprising justness, they even excite our wonder and applause. (TMS VII.iii.9, p.323)

Evidently, between a correct moral judgment and a virtuous action the path is not straight: “Virtue requires habit and resolution of mind, as well as delicacy of sentiment; and unfortunately the former qualities are sometimes wanting, where the latter is in the greatest perfection” (TMS VII.iii.10, p.324). Between a theoretical moral virtuoso and a virtuous man lies the discipline of self-command (TMS VI.iii.1, p.237). Nevertheless, this does not mean that correct moral judgments should not be praised or, inversely, that incorrect ones should not be censored.

In the next paragraph, although denying that internal senses could be founded on any sort of peculiar faculty or isolated power of perception, Smith allows a positive meaning for the word ‘sense’ in this context, and even for the expression ‘moral sense’ (TMS VII.iii.3.11, p.324). This positive meaning of ‘sense’ is Smith's own, but he presents it only after he has shown how to avoid two further objections concerning the ‘general features’ and the moral qualifications of sentiments (TMS VII.iii.3.12-4, see from 1.3d to 1.5). After that, he can state his own theory of moral sentiments, based on four kinds of moral judgments,³ four different kinds of approval (TMS VII.3.15-6). However, before presenting Smith's notion of internal sense and his scheme of moral theory (in addition to the rest of his criticism of Hutcheson), it may be interesting to see

³ Among the secondary literature, Samuel Fleischacker emphasizes most the importance of judgments for a correct understanding of Smith's moral theory. See especially his *A Third Concept of Liberty* (1999), where he approaches Smith's theory to Kant's Third Critique (see also 1990 and 2002). Charles Griswold (1999) and Emma Rothschild (2001) have also stressed this point. For a bigger picture, see Nina Hazard (2012). A different, yet extremely interesting, global approach to Smith's moral philosophy is Maria Carrasco's attempt with the notion of practical reason (2004). Jack Weistein, on the other hand, has insisted on some pluralistic aspects of Smith's philosophy (2014).

how he understood the external senses, in order to correctly determine up to what point he allows the analogy between external and internal senses to be made.

2. The external senses

a. External sense perceptions

The text on the five external senses⁴ starts with a very brief introduction about their bodily locations and goes on to discuss how touch provides us with the notion of an extended, divisible, bounded, moveable, and impenetrable solid substance based on the resistance felt⁵ (EPS, pp.135-40). This concept of substance is an imaginary device capable of organizing the sensible data furnished by all five external senses⁶ and virtually all our external experience.

However, touch also provides a second kind of perception, a non-resistant one: temperature feeling. As it is felt throughout our bodies, this feeling is usually associated with the touch, but this is a language mistake:

It is not, however, I think, in our language proper to say that we touch, but that we feel, the qualities of heat and cold. The word feeling, though in many cases we use it as synonymous to touching, has, however, a much more extensive signification, and is frequently employed to denote our internal, as well as our external, affections. We feel hunger and thirst, we feel joy and sorrow, we feel love and hatred. (EPS, p.140)

The difference between perceptions of a solid substance and temperature feelings lies in the way they are felt: The latter “are naturally felt, not as pressing upon the organ, but as in the organ.” The main point is that temperature feeling “does not necessarily suggest the presence of any external object, nor could we from thence alone infer the

⁴ There are few studies about this text. A good exception is Glenney (2011).

⁵ On this point, Smith is close to Condillac’s *Traité des sensations* (1754). See especially the second part, entitled *Du toucher, ou du seul sens qui juge par lui-même des objets extérieurs*. In a way, touch is the most metaphysical of the external senses because it strongly impels us to acknowledge the existence of the external world and independent objects.

⁶ Taste: “When we say that the food which we eat has an agreeable or disagreeable taste in every part of it, we do not thereby mean that it has the feeling or sensation of taste in any part of it, but that in every part of it, it has the power of exciting that feeling or sensation in our palates” (EPS, p.142). Smelling: “This external body we consider as the cause of this sensation, and we denominate by the same words both the sensation and the power by which the external body produces this sensation” (EPS, p.142). Hearing: “We soon learn from experience, indeed, that the sensation is frequently excited by bodies at a considerable distance from us; often at a much greater distance than those ever are which excite the sensation of Smelling” (EPS, p.143). Sight will be presented in section 4.b.

existence of any such object” (ibidem). Although usually associated with experience, these are two different categories of perceptions:

By the frequency and uniformity of this experience, by the custom and habit of thought which that frequency and uniformity necessarily occasion, the Internal Sensation, and the External Cause of that Sensation, come in our conception to be so strictly connected, that in our ordinary and careless way of thinking, we are apt to consider them as almost one and the same thing, and therefore denote them by one and the same word. (EPS, p.141)

From the analysis of touch on, Smith establishes the two kinds of perceptions supplied by our external senses in general: primary (resistant) and secondary (non-resistant). Internal sensation and the external cause of that sensation are easily distinguished concerning the objects of touch and external senses in general (that is the token of Smith’s following analysis of taste, smell, and hearing), but they are not as easily distinguishable concerning internal senses.⁷ These non-resistant sensations have “four secondary qualities”: They have neither extension nor figure, they are incapable of movement and are not divisible, and they do not suggest the notion of an external solid substance (EPS, p.145).

b. Language of nature: Visual perceptions⁸

Although seeing something is much closer to a sensation than to the perception of an external object, visual sensations immediately suggest the idea of distance: “We are apt, however, to imagine that we see objects at a distance from us, and that consequently the externality of their existence is immediately perceived by our Sight” (EPS, p.148). However, since touch and sight are heterogeneous senses, the relationship between visual and tangible distance brings a series of problems. Fundamentally, the visual data have two dimensions, the tangible three⁹ (EPS, p.151). The distance suggested by the visual data must somehow be associated with the tangible distance provided by touch:

⁷ For instance, in the sense of propriety, the pleasant sensation (the internal feeling) is not easily distinguishable from the perception of the concordance between the original and sympathetic feelings in the breast of the spectator (the object and cause of that pleasant feeling). See the answer to Hume’s letter in the second edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, of 1761 (TMS I.iii.1.9, p.46).

⁸ Smith starts his analysis of vision stating that everything he has to say about it “if not directly borrowed from him, has at least been suggested by what he has already said” (EPS, p.148). There is at least one problem with this statement: Although Smith assumes Berkeley’s central thesis (that visual objects are signs of tangible objects), he ignores some of the most important arguments (especially the non-geometrical frame of visual perceptions; see next footnote). Nevertheless, this is more of an emphasis issue, depending on what the reader stresses most, the continuity or the discontinuity between these works.

⁹ The geometrical quality of the visual and tangible objects is one point separating Smith from Berkeley: “...we may conclude that plains are no more the immediate object of sight than solids. What we strictly see

Visible objects, Colour, and all its different modifications, are in themselves mere shadows or pictures, which seem to float, as it were, before the organ of Sight. In themselves, and independent of their connection with the tangible objects which they represent, they are of no importance to us, and can essentially neither benefit us nor hurt us. (EPS, p.152)

Through habit and experience, we associate and correct our visual data using tangible data (EPS, p.153). We attach to our visual sensations characteristics of tangible ones, such as magnitude and even stability and autonomy. This representative quality of the visual data is what Smith holds of Berkeley's thesis about a natural language:¹⁰

Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude that the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. (BERKELEY, *New theory*, §147, p.231)

Visual perceptions are signs of tangible objects, as combinations of sounds are signs of objects or combinations of letters are signs of sounds,¹¹ but their connection is much stabler than those of ordinary languages (*New theory*, §144; EPS, p.158). Regardless of this stability, it is necessary to be educated in this language:

That this affinity and correspondence, however, between visible and tangible objects could not alone, and without the assistance of observation and experience, teach us, by any effort of reason, to infer what was the precise tangible object which each visible one represented (...). (EPS, p.158)

are not solids, nor yet plains variously coloured: they are only diversity of colours" (BERKELEY, *New theory*, §158, p.235). To him, thus, the rules of perspective have no place in determining distance (*New theory*, §§8-15). On the contrary, distance is completely determined by experience (cf., BERKELEY, *Theory vindicated*, §59). To Smith, on the other hand, "The tangible world, as well as all the different parts which compose it, has three dimensions, Length, Breadth, and Depth. The visible world, as well as all the different parts which compose it, has only two, Length and Breadth. It presents to us only a plain or surface, which, by certain shades and combinations of Colour, suggests and represents to us (in the same manner as a picture does) certain tangible objects which have no Colour, and which therefore can bear no resemblance to those shades and combinations of Colour" (EPS, p.151). Is this geometrical frame nothing more than a "suggestion" allowed by Berkeley's theory? If yes, then Smith is correct in saying he is nothing but a follower of Berkeley. If not, the opening statement of the chapter on vision must be reviewed (EPS, p.148). Personally, I think Smith's formulation directly clashes with Berkeley's, but this is irrelevant to my purposes here.

¹⁰ For Berkeley's and Smith's (among others') eighteenth-century theories of language, see Jaffro (2014).

¹¹ Smith criticizes Berkeley for a confusion between these two levels of linguistic relationship: This last "comparison, however, it must be observed, is here totally changed. The connection between visible and tangible objects was first illustrated by comparing it with that between spoken language and the meanings or ideas which spoken language suggests to us; and it is now illustrated by the connection between written language and spoken language, which is altogether different" (EPS, p.157).

In order to prove this, Smith goes after a controlled experience: the case of a blind man who starts to see. More precisely, it is the case of a 13-year-old child surgically cured of a cataract, as described by his physician, Dr. William Cheselden.

c. Preconceptions of externality

In a little more than a year, this young man learned the natural language in, roughly, three stages. The first, where he confusedly said “he thought all objects whatever touched his eyes (as he expressed it) as what he felt did his skin” (apud EPS, p.159), was for Smith the beginning of a process of distinguishing the internal from the external world. The second decisive step occurred after two months, when he started to realize paintings were (bidimensional) representations of solid objects: “to that time, he considered them only as party-coloured planes, or surfaces diversified with variety of paints” (ibidem). To Smith this was a clear sign he had begun to master perspective rules (EPS, p.160). The third and definitive stage happened around one year after he had begun seeing: On a trip to Epsom Downs, the view amazed him, and he named the experience “a new kind of seeing” (ibidem). This was a clear index he had completely mastered visual language up to the point of delighting in the view of objects he had never touched (ibidem).

The fast pace of this progress was possible, first and foremost, because of the low level of arbitrariness involved in the visual language, but it also raised suspicion about something else at work here:

But though it may have been altogether by the slow paces of observation and experience that this young gentleman acquired the knowledge of the connection between visible and tangible objects; we cannot from thence with certainty infer, that young children have not some instinctive perception of the same kind. In him this instinctive power, not having been exerted at the proper season, may, from disuse, have gone gradually to decay, and at last have been completely obliterated. Or, perhaps, (what seems likewise very possible,) some feeble and unobserved remains of it may have somewhat facilitated his acquisition of what he might otherwise have found it much more difficult to acquire. (EPS, p.161)

This “instinctive perception” may be likewise observed in other animals (EPS, pp.161-3). Indeed, “It seems difficult to suppose that man is the only animal of which the young are not endowed with some instinctive perception of this kind” (EPS, p.163). The main difference between men and other animals is the longer period of “entire [parenting] dependency,” in which the child develops a precise handling of this visual language through “observation and experience” and “by the known principle of association of

ideas” (ibidem). Nevertheless, as even a two- or three-month-old baby distinguishes the face of his/her mother in a crowded room, Smith thinks there is some sort of instinctive perception anticipating subsequent experience developments concerning the proper handling of the visual data (EPS, pp.163-4). This instinct works mainly by suggesting the existence of an external world and even external and independent objects (EPS, p.164).

From this moment on, Smith searches for these preconceptions in all the other external senses, one by one. Taste is the first, but, as it is impossible for anyone to taste something without simultaneously touching the food, any preconception this sense is capable of providing will be associated with the last and cannot be properly isolated and studied. Something entirely different happens with smelling. As soon as mammals are born, they reach for their mother’s breast, which can be done only by smelling the milk:

That when the stomach is empty, the Smell of agreeable food excites and irritates the appetite, is what we all must have frequently experienced. But the stomach of every new-born animal is necessarily empty. While in the womb it is nourished, not by the mouth, but by the navel-string. (...) As soon as it comes into the world, this new set of tubes and canals, which the providential care of Nature had for a long time before been gradually preparing, is all at once and instantaneously opened. They are all empty, and they require to be filled. An uneasy sensation accompanies the one situation, and an agreeable one the other. The smell of the substance which is fitted for filling them, increases and irritates that uneasy sensation, and produces hunger, or the appetite for food. (EPS, p.164)

The externality’s preconception provided by the smell operates through the feeding process: The lack of food creates an unpleasant feeling, eating a pleasant one. Smelling food triggers this unpleasant feeling, forcing the animal to search for its source:

The Smell not only excites the appetite, but directs to the object which can alone gratify that appetite. But by suggesting the direction towards that object, the Smell must necessarily suggest some notion of distance and externality, which are necessarily involved in the idea of direction; in the idea of the line of motion by which the distance can best be overcome, and the mouth brought into contact with the unknown substance which is the object of the appetite. That the Smell should alone suggest any preconception of the shape or magnitude of the external body to which it directs, seems not very probable. (...) The Smell, however, as it suggests the direction by which the external body must be approached, must suggest at least some vague idea or preconception of the existence of that body; of the thing to which it directs, though not perhaps of the precise shape and magnitude of that thing. (...) The Smell, too, may very probably suggest some even tolerably distinct perception of the Taste of the food to which it directs. (EPS, pp.165-6)

In this long quotation can be found all five levels of the external world’s preconception provided by smell: 1) the direction of the object that can suppress hunger;

2) the notions of distance and externality, implied in the idea of direction; 3) the idea of movement required to reach this object and bring it to the mouth; 4) the object whose existence is also suggest by this sense but whose shape and extension are entirely unknown (usually, external senses' preconceptions do not provide the particular details of substances, except one); and 5) the flavor. Obviously, this preconception is not a clear and fully developed concept of food but an anticipation opening the field to further investigation (including, of course, the eating process). In an earlier passage, Smith generalizes this perceptive suggestion to all corporeal appetites, including sexual drive:

But all the appetites which take their origin from a certain state of the body, seem to suggest the means of their own gratification, and even long before experience, some anticipation or preconception of the pleasure which attends that gratification. In the appetite for sex, which frequently, I am disposed to believe almost always, comes a long time before the age of puberty, this is perfectly and distinctly evident. The appetite for food suggests to the new-born infant the operation of sucking, the only means by which it can possibly gratify that appetite. It is continually sucking. It sucks whatever is presented to its mouth. It sucks even when there is nothing presented to its mouth, and some anticipation or preconception of the pleasure which it is to enjoy in sucking, seems to make it delight in putting its mouth in the shape and configuration by which it alone can enjoy that pleasure. (EPS, p.165)

Without discussing children's sexuality, Smith continues with his analysis of preconceptions. First is the perception (or sensation) of temperature, whose final cause is self-preservation¹² (EPS, pp.167-8). In cases of extreme heat or cold, the animal may move, searching for relief:

But the very desire of motion supposes some notion or preconception of externality; and the desire to move towards the side of the agreeable, or from that of the disagreeable sensation, supposes at

¹² We can understand this in two ways: First, all sensations (that is, non-extensive, non-figurative, non-moveable, and non-divisible perceptions) are also preconceptions, and we have only two kinds of perceptions (resistant and non-resistant); or, preconceptions are developments from the data provided by these sensations (and we have a third kind of perception). The central passage is the following: "In a calm day when there is no wind, we scarcely perceive the external air as a solid body; and the sensations of Heat and Cold, it may be thought, are then felt merely as affections of our own body, without any reference to anything external. Several cases, however, may be conceived, in which it must be allowed, I imagine, that those sensations, even when excited in this manner, must suggest some vague notion of some external thing or substance which excites them" (EPS, p.167). Are these two different kinds of sensation or only one? Either way, the important point is the (here, spontaneous) association of an idea (here, of an external object) with a feeling. This combination of sensation and idea opens the field to intellectual developments and guarantees the continuity between preconceptions and further knowledge, either confirming or contradicting them.

least some vague notion of some external thing or place which is the cause of those respective sensations. (EPS, p.167)

The following preconceptions are those provided by hearing. Particularly loud and unknown noises put us in an alert state: “Alarm is always the fear of some uncertain evil beyond what is immediately felt, and from some unknown and external cause.” This is a sharpened sense in “cowards” (EPS, p.168).

The final cause of these three senses may now be easily stated:

The three senses of Seeing, Hearing, and Smelling, seem to be given to us by Nature, not so much in order to inform us concerning the actual situation of our bodies, as concerning that of those other external bodies, which, though at some distance from us, may sooner or later affect that actual situation, and eventually either benefit or hurt us. (EPS, p.168)

In Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism and Stoicism developed a common notion, that of *prolepses*.¹³ Like any concept shared by more than one philosophical school, there are many different views about how they actually work, but there are at least two roles both schools agreed on: *Prolepses*, in general, are criteria of truth¹⁴ and anticipate knowledge that will posteriorly be developed by other means.¹⁵ A third,

¹³ “Preconceptions, they [the Epicureans] say, is as it were a perception, or correct opinion, or conception, or universal ‘stored notion’ (i.e. memory), of that which has frequently become evident externally: e.g. ‘Such and such a kind of thing is a man.’ For as soon as the word ‘man’ is uttered, immediately its delineation also comes to mind by means of preconception, since the senses give the lead. Thus what primarily underlies each name is something self-evident. And what we inquire about we would not have inquired about if we had not had prior knowledge of it. (...) Nor would we have named something if we had not previously learnt its delineation by means of preconception. Thus preconceptions are self-evident. And opinion depends on something prior and self-evident (...)” (Diogenes Laertius in Long & Sedley, 17E, vol.1, pp.87-8; vol.2, p.92-3). For a commentary, see Long & Sedley (especially 17 and 40, vol.1, pp.88-90 and pp.249-253); Goldschmidt (in Brunschwig, 2006, pp.41-60); Long (1986, pp.23-4, p.56 e p.124). Laurent Jaffro (2000b) has showed the importance of this concept for Shaftesbury and Hutcheson (for Shaftesbury, see also Nascimento, 2012, pp.61-71). Despite many works on the importance of Stoicism for Smith’s philosophy (Waszek, 1984; Brown, 1993; Vivenza, 2001; Forman-Barzilai, 2011), as far as I know, no one has ever pointed out that Smith’s comprehension of internal senses is indebted to the ancients’ *prolepsis*.

¹⁴ “Thus Epicurus, in the *Kanon*, says that sensations, preconceptions and feelings are the criteria of truth” (Diogenes Laertius in Long & Sedley, 17A, vol.1, p.87; vol.2, p.91). “And Chrysippus (...) says in the first of his books *On reason* that sense perception and preconceptions are the criteria; preconception is a natural conception of universals” (Diogenes Laertius in Long & Sedley, 40A, vol.1, p.241; vol.2, p.243).

¹⁵ “Epicurus’ word for this is *prolepsis*, that is what we may call a delineation of a thing, preconceived by the mind, without which understanding, inquiry and discussion are impossible” (Cicero in Long & Sedley, 23E, vol.1, p.141; vol.2, p.147). Even some skeptics were disposed to accept this second function: “It is agreed that a preconception and conception must precede every object of investigation. For how can anyone even investigate without some conception of the object of investigation? (...) We grant this, then, and are so far from denying that we have conception of the object of investigation that, on the contrary, we claim to have many conceptions and preconceptions of it, and that we come round to suspension of judgement and indecision owing to our inability to discriminate between these and to discover the most authoritative of them” (Sextus Empiricus in Long & Sedley, 40T, vol.1, p.249; vol.2, p.243).

eminently moral task, that of serving as criteria for the commanding faculty (*hegemonicon*) of the human soul, was exclusive of the Stoics.^{16,17} Smithian preconceptions perform these three tasks.

d. Directive function

Preconceptions of one external sense do not present any resemblance to those of another sense (perhaps because of external senses' heterogeneity), with one exception, the anticipation of flavor by smelling:

Smell appears to have been given to us by Nature as the director of Taste. It announces, as it were, before trial, what is likely to be the Taste of the food which is set before us. Though perceived by a different organ, it seems in many cases to be but a weaker sensation nearly of the same kind with that of the Taste which that announces. It is very natural to suppose, therefore, that the Smell may suggest to the infant some tolerably distinct preconception of the Taste of the food which it announces, and may, even before experience, make its mouth, as we say, water for that food. (EPS, p.166)

Smell directs taste by telling what objects this last sense can or cannot try: The pleasant smell of a meal arouses the appetite, as the unpleasant smell of a rotten fruit, for instance, indicates it should be avoided.¹⁸ The directive role of smell over taste mimics in the rudest field of sensibility (external senses) the role of what Smith dubs the "moral

¹⁶ "When a man is born, the Stoics say, he has the commanding-part of his soul like a sheet of paper ready for writing upon. On this he inscribes each one of his conceptions. The first method of inscription is through the senses. For by perceiving something, e.g. white, they have a memory of it when it has departed. And when many memories of a similar kind have occurred, we then say we have experience. For the plurality of similar impressions is experience. Some conceptions arise naturally in the aforesaid ways and undesignedly, others through our own instruction and attention. The latter are called 'conception' only, the former are called 'preconceptions' as well. Reason, for which we are called rational, is said to be completed from our preconceptions during our first seven years" (Aetius in Long & Sedley 39E, vol.1, p.238; vol.2, p.240). "He [Chrysippus] says that the theory of good and bad things introduced and approved by himself is most in harmony with life and connects best with the innate preconceptions" (Plutarch in Long & Sedley 60B, vol.1, p.369; vol.2, p.[Fill in page number?]).

¹⁷ The preconceptions of god were also a point of discordance between the Epicureans and the Stoics, especially around the issues of providence: "Moreover they themselves [the Stoics] are unceasingly busy crying woe against Epicurus for ruining the preconception of the gods by abolishing providence. For they say, god is preconceived and thought of not only as immortal and blessed but also as benevolent, caring and beneficent" (Plutarch in Long & Sedley 54K, vol.1, p.327; vol.2, p.[Fill in page number?]). Since Smith's theory retains a role for providence (e.g., the famous invisible hand passage in TMS IV.1.10, p.185), it is again closer to the Stoics'. According to Smith, Epicurus reduced virtue to prudence (TMS VII.ii, pp.294-300). Smith's relationship with Stoic philosophy is much richer and more complicated than could possibly be dealt with here (see the editors' introduction to TMS pp.5-10; Waszek, 1984; Vivenza, 2001, among many others; a much more comprehensive list can be found in Forman-Barzilai, 2011, p.6, footnote 16).

¹⁸ In the following paragraph, Smith points out that among the class of non-arthropod invertebrates ("which Linnaeus ranks under the class worms"), smell is of even greater importance, since they have neither audition nor sight (EPS, pp.166-7).

faculties” over the whole of human sensibility (external and internal senses), some moral and aesthetic judgments, and even moral actions (see 1.7).

The importance of the text *Of The External Senses* may be summed up as follows. First, data provided by one sense (specially tangible data) can be used to correct perceptions of another sense, imagination being the faculty operating this correction. Second, beyond proper perceptions (resistant ones and sensations), external senses provide preconceptions of things that are out of reach (smell, hearing, and sight suggest what can only be properly perceived by touch), urging further investigation. Third, these senses provide a double starting point of knowledge, pure sense perceptions of what they can actually feel, and preconceptions about what is out of their reach. And lastly, the text on the external senses provides simpler models for understanding more complex operation of internal senses (the directive function of smell over taste being one of them).

3. The internal senses

a. Profusion of senses

At the beginning of his *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, Francis Hutcheson criticizes the arbitrariness of acknowledging only five (external) senses and lists another four (internal) senses: the sense of beauty, the public sense, the moral sense, and the sense of honor (*Illustrations*, p.17). There is some irony in the fact that Smith criticizes Hutcheson on this point (TMS VII.iii.3.3; VII.iii.3.7) in the same work where he speaks of more than 30 different internal senses,¹⁹ some of the most relevant of which are the

¹⁹ I enumerated the following: senses of propriety and impropriety (TMS I.i – section title; II.i.5.4; III.4.8; V.1.2; VI.iii.18; and several other occurrences); sense of injury (TMS I.iii.3.2; II.i.5.8; VII.iii.3.11), also known as resentment (TMS VII.iii.3.11); sense of superiority (TMS I.iii.2.4); sense of importance (TMS I.iii.2.5); sense of atrocity (TMS I.ii.3.2; II.i.5.6; II.iii.2.4); senses of merit and demerit (TMS II.5 – chapter title; I.ii.2.1; III.4.8; and several other occurrences); sense of justice (TMS II.ii.2 – chapter title; III.3.37; VII.iv.33); sense of equity (TMS II.iii.2.8); sense of ill desert (TMS II.i.5.7); sense of guilt (TMS II.ii.2.2; II.iii.2.5), which may be fallacious (TMS II.iii.3.5); sense of what is due to others (TMS II.iii.1.5); sense of horror (TMS II.i.5.6); sense of utility (TMS II.iii.3.2); sense of duty (TMS III – part title; III.5.1 – definition; and several other occurrences); senses of praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness (TMS III.2.32); sense of humanity (TMS III.3.37); sense of disgrace (TMS III.2.13); senses of honor (TMS III.3.45; VI.iii.42; VII.iii.3.7) and shame (TMS VII.iii.3.7); sense of beauty (TMS V.1.9; V.2.1; VII.iii.3.6-7); sense of the dreadful enormity (TMS V.2.2); sense of the vengeance and punishment due (TMS V.2.2); senses of neatness and elegance (TMS V.1.2); sense of decency (TMS VI.iii.12); sense of dignity (TMS VI.iii.18; VI.iii.38); sense of our own weaknesses and imperfections (TMS VI.iii.27); sense of the agreeable effects and utility of virtues (TMS VI.concl.6); and sense of benefits (TMS VII.iii.3.11), also known as gratitude. Besides these, Smith lists Hutcheson’s senses (TMS VII.iii.3.7), points out the good sense (TMS III.2.15; III.6.5; VI.ii.1.41) and the common sense (TMS III.2.5; III.6.1; III.6.12; VII.iv.12), and speaks of a man of sense (TMS II.iii.2.7; VI.iii.37; VII.ii.3.6) and of the senses together (TMS III.5.6; IV.2.6; V.2.5, among other occurrences). There is also a purely linguistic use, as a synonym of meaning (e.g., TMS III.5.9).

senses of propriety and impropriety, the senses of merit and demerit, the sense of justice, the sense of duty, and the senses of beauty and utility. Without much overstatement, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* may be considered a treatise on internal senses. The whole problem is how to understand them.

b. How far does the analogy between external and internal senses go?

Smith criticizes Hutcheson for taking this analogy too far—that is, for considering the moral sense as a peculiar faculty, as a sixth (or seventh) sense. The main difference lies in the resistant perceptions of touch: The notion of substance thence derived organizes external experience and establishes a clear distinction between the external and internal worlds. Nevertheless, the external and internal senses have some things in common, especially around the second type of perceptions, sensations:

The word feeling, though in many cases we use it as synonymous to touching, has, however, a much more extensive signification, and is frequently employed to denote our internal, as well as our external, affections. We feel hunger and thirst, we feel joy and sorrow, we feel love and hatred. (EPS p.140)

Feelings include appetites (hunger and thirst), mental pleasure and pain (joy and sorrow), and emotions or passions (love and hatred). This passage context points to a difference between resistant perceptions, exclusively perceived by touch, and other sensations felt by the external senses including touch (such as temperature). Despite their several differences (in contrast to substances, sensations have neither extension nor figure, and are incapable of motion and of being divided; EPS, pp.144-5), they have in common a precise bodily location: “They are naturally felt, not as pressing upon the organ, but as in the organ” (ES, p.140). Since the external faculties are peculiar faculties or powers of perception, these sensations can be pinpointed to their respective organs: Smells are felt in the nostrils, taste by papillae, etc. (EPS, p.135). Internal senses share with the external senses a *manner* of feeling but not their precise location. Joy and sorrow (or grief)—that is, mental pleasure and pain (TMS I.iii.1.3, p.44)—are harder to precisely locate than bodily pleasure and pain. The same happens with emotions or passions: They are felt as if in the body, although more diffusedly—in someone’s breast,²⁰ or in

²⁰ For instance: “(...) all the emotions of our own breast (...)” (TMS I.i.2.1, p.13). “(...) an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator” (TMS I.i.1.4, p.10). “(...) that passion arises in our breast (...)” (TMS I.i.1.10, p.12). “(...) an antidote against fear and anxiety, the great tormentors of the human breast (...)” (TMS I.i.1.12, p.12).

someone's heart, obviously, in a metaphorical sense,²¹ or even in someone's mind, wherever that might be.²²

This difficulty in precisely locating internal sensations is another strong piece of evidence against Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense as a peculiar faculty: There is no moral organ as there is a visual (the eyes) or a smelling one (the nostrils). Nevertheless, if they are not a peculiar faculty or power of perception, how do we understand the internal senses?

c. Deflated notion of internal sense: Faculties at work

Instead of "supposing any new power of perception which had never been heard of before," Smith simply assumes that "Nature (...) acts here, as in all other cases, with the strictest oeconomy, and produces a multitude of effects from one and the same cause," namely, sympathy (TMS VII.iii.3.3, p.321). Sympathy will be briefly presented in the last section (and will be further developed in the next two chapters). For the moment, it is enough to say that it is directly involved in the individual's ability to spontaneously approve or disapprove of particular actions and judgments. Indeed, even the criticized notion of a moral sense can be rehabilitated, as long as this idea of a peculiar faculty or power of perception is abandoned. Generally speaking, internal senses must be understood in this deflated or weak sense:

Approbation and disapprobation, it may be pretended, are certain feelings or emotions which arise in the mind upon the view of different characters and actions; and as resentment might be called a sense of injuries, or gratitude a sense of benefits, so these may very properly receive the name of a sense of right and wrong, or of a moral sense. (TMS VII.iii.3.11, p.324)

It is in this restricted way that all internal senses, including the moral one, must be understood in Smith's work: a sensation that results from the concurrence of sensibility and intellectual faculties (imagination, understanding, reason) at work in the perception of a particular case:

²¹ "It enlivens joy by presenting another source of satisfaction; and it alleviates grief by insinuating into the heart (...)" (TMS I.i.2.2, p.14). "The agreeable passions of love and joy can satisfy and support the heart without any auxiliary pleasure" (TMS I.i.2.5, p.15). "(...) all the passions of his heart (...)" (TMS I.i.2.6, p.16).

²² "In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible (...)" (TMS I.i.1.4, p.10). "There is no passion, of which the human mind is capable (...)" (TMS I.ii.3.8, p.38). "His mind, at the thought of it, is filled with cheerfulness, serenity, and composure" (TMS II.ii.2.4, p.85). "The agony of his mind may (...)" (TMS III.2.11, p.119).

It may be said, perhaps, that though the principle of approbation is not founded upon any power of perception that is in any respect analogous to the external senses, it may still be founded upon a peculiar sentiment which answers this one particular purpose and no other. (ibidem)

The principle of approbation, then, consists of the sum of internal senses, each one capable of perceiving a “peculiar sentiment”—that is, a specific emotional reaction to a particular situation. Smith is far from being a pioneer in using this term like this,²³ but he has furnished a moral theory capable of comprising a myriad of internal senses (as long as they are understood in this weak sense). This is why the list presented in the section above (see 1.3a, footnote 19) is an open one: There is always a new internal sense to be discovered or invented (there is no difference here). In fact, there is no internal sense that is not an individual sense of a particular situation. Take Louis XIV’s sense of superiority, for instance:

The sound of his voice, noble and affecting, gained those hearts which his presence intimidated. He had a step and a deportment which could suit only him and his rank, and which would have been ridiculous in any other person. The embarrassment which he occasioned to those who spoke to him, flattered that secret satisfaction with which he felt his own superiority. (TMS I.iii.2.4, p.54)

The objective data of his rank and some other personal virtues (“which seems, however, not to have been much above mediocrity”) merely reinforced his internal sense, that was the true basis of the fascination caused by him, “the most perfect model of great prince” (ibidem). In this case, the term *sense* designates the action of individual faculties (sensibility, imagination, understanding, etc.) in a series of particular situations willing to find a suitable sentiment: In the subordination of his subjects, Louis XIV felt the sentiment of his superiority.

d. Reflex senses

External senses, being peculiar faculties, are direct senses. Internal senses, however, are reflex senses:

²³ The first edition of Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) includes nine meanings for the term *sense*: 1) “faculty or power by which external objects are perceived; the sight; touch; hearing; smell; taste”; 2) “perception by the senses, sensation”; 3) perception of intellect; apprehension of mind”; 4) “sensibility, quickness or keenness of perception”; 5) “understanding; soundness of faculties; strength of natural reason”; 6) “reason, reasonable meaning”; 7) “opinion; notion; judgement”; 8) “consciousness; conviction”; 9) “moral perception”; and 10) “meaning; import” (pp.1787-8). Excepting the last (purely linguistic), the other eight are relevant here, especially the second and third ones.

The reflex or consequent senses, on the other hand, were those faculties from which the mind derived the perception of such species of things as presupposed the antecedent perception of some other. (TMS VII.iii.3.6, p.322)

This means they usually work upon a primary emotional response, reflecting on their general features and individual characteristics, sorting them out, and, in the process, judging them. Emotion and passion have a double nature: They are at once sensitive and rational (or, more correctly, judicative). Every emotion is a more or less spontaneous, refined, or proper feeling about an object (desiring something implicitly means having judged the desired object as a proper object to be desired). Internal senses work upon the first, spontaneous, sensitive reaction, correcting and refining it.

Here, Smith brings the first objection against Hutcheson's theory to which he believes his theory provides a full answer. Every emotion or passion is particular; that is, it is felt by a certain individual in a specific situation. At the same time, it has some "general features" that allow its distinction among other emotions or passions. In a word, there are several "species" or "characters" of sentiments (see 6.6). The anger I felt against my noisy neighbor is closer to the anger I felt against a reckless driver who almost hit me than to the gratitude I felt concerning the dinner my wife left me. Something different happens concerning the sensation of approbation or disapprobation: My friend can sympathize with my anger against my neighbor and with my gratitude toward my wife and approve them both (TMS VII.iii.3.13, pp.324-5).

Smith's solution is the sense of propriety. Actually, the sense of propriety is his paradigm of an internal sense. It has two levels: first, of emotional sharing, and second, of emotional comparison. This second level provides a new "emotion" that is always agreeable in cases of accord and disagreeable in cases of disaccord, regardless the 'nature' of the emotion shared (its 'general feature'), retained in the first level (TMS I.iii.1.9, p.46, footnote). Approbation and disapprobation sentiments are not "emotions of a particular kind which had nothing in common with the sentiments we approve of" but a combination of this first-level sympathetic response with that second-level response to the sentimental accord or disaccord arising in the spectator's breast:

Our approbation of both [i.e., a tender, delicate, humane sentiment and a great, daring, magnanimous one] may, upon different occasions, be perfect and entire; but we are softened by the one, and we are elevated by the other, and there is no sort of resemblance between the emotions which they excite

in us. (...) The same thing holds true with regard to disapprobation. Our horror for cruelty has no sort of resemblance to our contempt for mean-spiritedness.²⁴ (TMS VII.iii.3.13, pp.324-5)

In a way, internal senses are nothing more than the work of our faculties (sensibility, imagination, understanding, reason) while facing and judging a particular situation and our primary spontaneous body response:

Some [...] actions shock all our natural sentiments. We hear every body about us express the like detestation against them. This still further confirms, and even exasperates our natural sense of their deformity. It satisfies us that we view them in the proper light, when we see other people view them in the same light. (TMS III.4.7, p.159)

As the sympathetic first-level response, this first shock is the material our internal senses work upon in order to justify and communicate them (see 1.7). Indeed, the *senses* terminology allows Smith to deal with the interactive dynamics of (a general) human nature applied to (particular) circumstances.²⁵ It also clarifies Hutcheson's confusion:

That faculty, which Mr. Locke calls reflection, and from which he derived the simple ideas of the different passions and emotions of the human mind, was, according to Dr. Hutcheson, a direct internal sense. (TMS VII.iii.3.6, p.322)

Hutcheson took an internal sense as an immediate source of moral approbation, furnishing complete moral judgments to every particular situation, no matter how different they were from one another. Smith's myriad of internal senses, on the other hand, allows him to theoretically tackle this situational diversity and particularity, but in order to do so they first must be organized in a systematic fashion.

4. Organizing internal senses: The four kinds of moral judgment

Internal senses are reflexive and judicative processes of developing emotions' double nature. They can be organized into the following two principles:

- a. Frequently, they are presented in two asymmetrical but complementary forms, one positive and the other negative (the senses of propriety and impropriety,

²⁴ Hutcheson's unique moral sense would not be able to deal with the different "species" of sentiments: "But this could not happen if approbation consisted in a peculiar emotion which had nothing in common with the sentiments we approved of, but which arose at the view of those sentiments, like any other passion at the view of its proper object" (TMS VII.iii.3.13, p.325).

²⁵ For Hume, see Didier Deleule (especially the second chapter, "Sujets généraux, circonstances particulières," 1978). See also Christopher Berry (2012).

justice and injustice, beauty and deformity). For instance, the sense of injustice (i.e., resentment) is more important than the sense of justice.

- b. There is a familiarity between some senses. For instance, the sense of beauty is close to the senses of neatness and elegance, and it opposes itself to the sense of deformity, which is close to the sense of the dreadful enormity. The same thing happens for the sense of demerit, close to the senses of injury, atrocity, guilt, ill desert, and horror, and the sense of merit, close of the senses of justice and equity. Another ‘family’ can be established around the senses of propriety and impropriety (close to the senses of importance and superiority) and for the sense of duty (close to the senses of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, disgrace, honor, and humanity).

Indeed, these four families of senses (aesthetics, merit, propriety, and duty) are akin to the four kinds of judgment Smith proposes in the place of Hutcheson’s theory that moral sense is the sole source of morality and virtue:

When we approve of any character or action, the sentiments which we feel, are, according to the foregoing system, derived from four sources, which are in some respects different from one another. First, we sympathize with the motives of the agent; secondly, we enter into the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions; thirdly, we observe that his conduct has been agreeable to the general rules by which those two sympathies generally act; and, last of all, when we consider such actions as making a part of a system of behaviour which tends to promote the happiness either of the individual or of the society, they appear to derive a beauty from this utility, not unlike that which we ascribe to any wellcontrived machine. (TMS VII.iii.3.16, p.326; TSM, p.406)

These are the four sources of morality and virtue for Smith. There is not a fifth possibility:

I have never heard any instance alleged in which this principle could be said to exert itself alone and unmixed with sympathy or antipathy [i.e., propriety or impropriety], with gratitude or resentment [i.e., merit or demerit], with the perception of the agreement or disagreement of any action to an established rule [i.e., duty], or last of all with that general taste for beauty and order which is excited by inanimated as well as by animated objects [i.e., beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility].²⁶ (ibidem)

²⁶ Some complex sentiments are a combination of different kinds of judgment. Remorse, for instance, “is made up of shame from the sense of the impropriety of past conduct; of grief for the effects of it; of pity for those who suffer by it; and of the dread and terror of punishment from the consciousness of the justly provoked resentment of all rational creatures” (TMS II.ii.2.3, p.85).

Smith's criticism of theories establishing reason as the source of morality points out that duty judgments are the place where reason plays its largest role, forming rules in an inductive manner from previous experiences and applying them to particular cases. However, without previous experiences reason has nothing to work upon, and therefore it cannot be the ultimate source of morality. On the other hand, in his criticism of theories focusing on self-love as source of morality, Smith insists that whatever is truthful about them might be better grasped by the sort of aesthetical judgment he calls beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility (TMS VII.iii.1.2, p.316).

Ruling out duty and appearance of utility, propriety and merit remain. Smith addresses them thoroughly in his sympathy theory. Strictly speaking, sympathy operates only these two sorts of judgment. In duty judgments, it plays a central role in the process of rule formation, but it does not intervene in their application to particular cases. Beauty of utility's judgments are completely separate from sympathy.²⁷ Morality, therefore, is not coextensive with sympathy: There are moral judgments that are not sympathetic judgments just as there are sympathetic judgments that are not moral (as in the sympathetic sharing of someone's wonder for the Newtonian system of physics or a Michelangelo sculpture).

This scheme of four kinds of moral judgments appears also to organize the speculative part of the book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Parts I to V):

- Part I's title is "Of the Propriety of Action";
- Part II's title is "Of Merit and Demerit; or, of the Objects of Reward and Punishment";
- Part III's title is "Of the Foundation of our Judgments concerning our own Sentiments and Conduct, and of the Sense of Duty";
- Part IV's title is "Of the Effect of Utility upon Sentiment of Approbation," and its two chapters are entitled, "Of the beauty which the appearance of UTILITY bestows upon (...)" and
- finally, Part V does not present a fifth kind of judgment but deals with "The Influence of Custom and Fashion upon the Sentiment of Approbation and Disapprobation"; that is, the effects of custom and fashion upon our ideas of beauty and deformity (our "sense of beauty and deformity"; TMS V.1) and upon our moral sentiments (TMS V.2). According to this section's arguments, all perversions are local

²⁷ "It is to be observed, that so far as the sentiment of approbation arises from the perception of this beauty of utility, it has no reference of any kind to the sentiments of others" (TMS IV.2.12, p.192).

and limited to particular practices, but “the general style of character and behavior” is always, in the end, determined by the “natural propriety of action” (TMS V.2.14, p.209). This fifth part is where Smith states that sociability is natural and every human society is founded on our “natural principles of right and wrong” (TMS V.2.2, p.200)—that is, what Smith still allows to be called our “moral sense” (TMS VII.iii.3.11, p.324) or our “moral faculties” (TMS III.4.8, p.159).

5. Moral faculties

Smith’s solution to the first objection he raises against Hutcheson (regarding the general qualitative spectrum of emotions) is the following: The emotions are channeled by the four kinds of moral judgments, being further organized by the sense of propriety in a typology (see 2.5). The second objection concerns the qualification of moral judgments:

(...) not only the different passions or affections of the human mind which are approved or disapproved of, appear morally good or evil, but that proper and improper approbation appear, to our natural sentiments, to be stamped with the same characters. I would ask, therefore, how it is, that, according to this system, we approve or disapprove of proper or improper approbation? (TMS VII.iii.3.14, p.325)

The only “reasonable answer” is to observe the spectator of the action and judge his moral judgment (his approbation or disapprobation) accordingly—that is, to compare it with our own approbation or disapprobation. When both moral judgments coincide, we approve his judgment; when they do not we disapprove of it (*ibidem*). Smith’s response to Hume’s criticism clearly shows how the sense of propriety is the core of his sympathy theory (TMS I.iii.1.9, pp.46, footnote; see 2.6).

Nevertheless, this answer is not complete. In his criticism of Smith’s moral theory (1820), Thomas Brown insists that the mere sympathetic coincidence between an agent’s and a spectator’s affective reactions to an action does not solve the question of how we approve or disapprove of it. For him it is necessary that Smith “tacitly assumes” a “previous feeling of propriety or impropriety.” There would have to be “a principle of moral discrimination already existing in us.”²⁸ In a way, is this not what happens? If

²⁸ His criticism of Smith is the subject of lectures LXXX and LXXXI of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, the first edition of which is from 1820. They are reprinted in *Adam Smith: Critical Responses*, edited by professor Hiroshi Mizuta (2000, II). It is interesting to quote the complete passage:

external senses provide preconceptions and anticipations of things beyond their proper reach, why would internal senses not provide us with something similar? In at least one passage of *Theory*, Smith speaks of moral anticipations (TMS III.5.5). If this is the case, then the most pressing question is how to understand this precedence, the anteriority of the moral senses, or, in other terms, the spontaneity and even instantaneity of some of our moral reactions.^{29,30}

The relationship between “immediate sense and feeling” (TMS VII.iii.2.7, p.320) and their development in a full moral judgment is the object of one the most obscure chapters of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, entitled, “Of the influence and authority of the general rules of morality, and that they are justly regarded as the laws of the deity” (TMS III.5, pp.161-70). It deals with the final cause of our “moral faculties.” A first observation about the explicit topic of this chapter must be made. The rules of morality are an indispensable part of duty judgments, being an internal element of the work of the sense of duty. According to our global scheme, then, this chapter would not provide us a good foundation for the apprehension of the work of this sensitive ground of propriety and merit judgments. Two remarks: first, Smith resorts to resentment (the sense of justice and, therefore, a question of merit), allowing the reader to develop a model of the anticipative and corrective role of these feelings vis-à-vis justice as a whole (its rules,

“If, indeed, we had previously any moral notions of action as right or wrong, we might easily judge of the propriety or impropriety of the sentiments of others, according as our own do or do not sympathize with them; and it is this previous feeling of propriety or impropriety which Dr. Smith tacitly assumes, even in contending for the exclusive influence of sympathy, as itself the original source of every moral sentiment. The sentiments of others could not fail, indeed, in that case, to appear to us proper, if they coincided with sentiments which we had before, in our own mind, recognized as proper, or morally suitable to the circumstances – improper if they differed from these. But, if we have no previous moral notions whatever, the most exact sympathy of feelings can tell us only that our feelings are similar to the feelings of some other person, – which they may be, as much when they are vicious as when they are virtuous, or when they are neither virtuous nor vicious; – the most complete dissonance, in like manner, can tell us only that our feelings are not similar to those of some other person” (2000, II, p.254). See also Daniel Dewar’s remark (1826): “The great error of this theory [i.e., Smith’s] is, that it takes for granted the existence of those moral feelings the origin of which it is designed to trace to that sympathetic process just described” (in MIZUTA, 2000, II, p.269).

²⁹“To the man who first saw an inhuman murder, committed from avarice, envy, or unjust resentment, and upon one too that loved and trusted the murderer, who beheld the last agonies of the dying person, who heard him, with his expiring breath, complain more of the perfidy and ingratitude of his false friend, than of the violence which had been done to him, there could be no occasion, in order to conceive how horrible such an action was, that he should reflect, that one of the most sacred rules of conduct was what prohibited the taking away the life of an innocent person, that this was a plain violation of that rule, and consequently a very blamable action. His detestation of this crime, it is evident, would arise instantaneously and antecedent to his having formed to himself any such general rule” (TMS II.4.8, p.159).

³⁰ By now it has become clear that, for Smith, spontaneity must not be understood as irreflexivity. Every moral response is, at once and at least, sensible and imaginary (the sense of propriety’s first level is a sympathetic response—that is, an emotion created by an imaginary process). But, as will be seen in the analysis of the sense of duty, this sensory response may also include rules (an artificial, yet rational device), understanding, and reason (through arguments summoned to emphasize rules’ authority).

institutions, and punishments). Second, the sense of duty is also an internal sense and, as such, works in the same way as the rest of them. Albeit providing a bigger role to reason, it is still an instinctive reaction, previous to any reasonable arguments that corroborate it—in a way, the sense of duty prompts us to follow any rule whatsoever.³¹ These points will get clearer as the analysis continues.

First, in this chapter Smith defines the moral faculties:

It is thus that the general rules of morality are formed. They are ultimately founded upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve, or disapprove of. (TMS III.4.8, p.159)

The moral faculties are our “natural sense of propriety and merit” and the origin of our general rules of morality: We infer these from previous and repeated performances of our moral faculties judging particular cases. Second, he also presents the final cause of these faculties:

Since these [i.e., our moral faculties], therefore, were plainly intended to be the governing principles of human nature, the rules which they prescribe are to be regarded as the commands and laws of the Deity, promulgated by those vicegerents which he has thus set up within us. (TMS III.5.6, p.165)

Once again, they appear as the origin of those general rules. They become divine laws because of this peculiar origin and always retain the same goal, regardless of the metaphysics supporting them:

Upon whatever we suppose that our moral faculties are founded, whether upon a certain modification of reason, upon an original instinct, called a moral sense, or upon some other principle of our nature, it cannot be doubted, that they were given us for the direction of our conduct in this life. (TMS III.5.5, pp.164-5)

Among the three possible foundations enumerated here, reason and moral sense will be later criticized and discarded. The third possibility includes both self-love and Smith’s own solution. However, the passage suggests that, no matter what this foundation is supposed to be, its purpose remains always the same: to be the directing principle of our moral life. Indeed, Smith is much clearer about how not to understand it. Our senses

³¹ Hume’s theory of justice provides a similar example of this sort of reasoning: Although justice is an artificial virtue, the moral obligation of following the rules of property is natural (THN 3.2.2). Thomas Reid presents something quite similar: “Customs and manners, by which we and our forefathers for many generations have been governed acquire an authority and a sanctity independent upon their reasonableness or utility” (Some thoughts on the utopian system, p.136).

of propriety and merit are not analogous to the external senses—they are neither “peculiar faculties” nor specific “powers of perception” (TMS III.4.5, p.158 and VII.iii.3.3, p.321)—but they also must not be seen as a sort of appetite or passion:

Our moral faculties are by no means, as some have pretended, upon a level in this respect with the other faculties and appetites of our nature, endowed with no more right to restrain these last, than these last are to restrain them. No other faculty or principle of action judges of any other. Love does not judge of resentment, nor resentment of love. Those two passions may be opposite to one another, but cannot, with any propriety, be said to approve or disapprove of one another. But it is the peculiar office of those faculties now under our consideration to judge, to bestow censure or applause upon all the other principles of our nature. (ibidem)

Appetites and passions may serve as criteria only for judging themselves. The moral faculties, on the other hand, judge not only themselves but also these other appetites and passions. If there is any sort of analogy, its limits must be extremely well settled:

They [i.e., the moral faculties] may be considered as a sort of senses of which those principles are the objects. Every sense is supreme over its own objects. There is no appeal from the eye with regard to the beauty of colours, nor from the ear with regard to the harmony of sounds, nor from the taste with regard to the agreeableness of flavours. Each of those senses judges in the last resort of its own objects. Whatever gratifies the taste is sweet, whatever pleases the eye is beautiful, whatever soothes the ear is harmonious. The very essence of each of those qualities consists in its being fitted to please the sense to which it is addressed. It belongs to our moral faculties, in the same manner to determine when the ear ought to be soothed, when the eye ought to be indulged, when the taste ought to be gratified, when and how far every other principle of our nature ought either to be indulged or restrained. (ibidem)

Concerning the adjudicative role of the moral faculties in relation to their objects, the difference between the external senses and appetites and passions is smaller than the difference between these two and the moral faculties. The jurisdiction of any external sense³² is limited to itself and to similar senses: My vision can correct itself (when opening a window I realize that the shadow on my right is a coat hanging in a chair) and the vision of others (a short-sighted friend thinks he saw my mother, but I see correctly that it is a woman unknown to us). Passions, on the other hand, do not correct anything by themselves, but they can appear as criteria for my judgment of the same passion in

³² The sole exception is the sense of smell anticipating flavor. The sense of touch provides us the notion of a solid substance capable of organizing the external world’s experience, but it does not furnish us any sort of criteria for judging the data of any other sense. In a general manner, the external senses are heterogeneous among themselves.

others: My love for my kids can appear as a standard for someone else's, and vice versa. Another passage of *Theory* states exactly this:

Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them. (TMS I.i.3.10, p.19)

Both passages bring the same examples (vision, audition, resentment, and love). They also insist in a comparative process at the core of propriety and merit judgments. Its first aspect is quantitative: The agent's resentment can exceed or lack in intensity (someone who had a car stolen may want the burglar to die or only apologize), and it may also exceed or lack in extensity (the resentment may be directed toward those who dismantled the car and sold the parts but not those who bought them). Nevertheless, presented in these general terms, the comparison lacks a context allowing the determination of this correct quantitative level. Smith is explicit about the need of contextualizing moral judgments: "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (TMS I.i.1.10, p.12). A particular situation (or someone else's case, as he also puts it³³) allows determining also the second aspect of the comparison: the qualitative dimension—that is, the correct sentiment to be felt in this particular situation. It is only inside a particular situation that a sentiment can be considered either suitable or extravagant (qualitative aspect), and, if suitable, it may be judged as proportional or out of proportion (quantitative aspect):

If, upon bringing the case home to our own breast, we find that the sentiments which it gives occasion to, coincide and tally with our own, we necessarily approve of them as proportioned and suitable to their objects; if otherwise, we necessarily disapprove of them as extravagant and out of proportion. (TMS I.i.3.9, pp.18-9)

An extravagant sentiment (someone loving when supposed to be hating, for instance) precludes all quantitative comparison and any determination of proportionality. If, on the other hand, the sentiment is proper (or fit, or suitable, or convenient—all

³³ "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case" (TMS I.i.1.2, p.9). I will discuss systematically these topics in the next chapter.

synonyms in Smith's theory) and proportional it is approved, or, in other terms, it satisfies the sense of propriety. If it is proper but out of proportion, the approval or disapproval is conditional to the degree of disproportion, and the satisfaction incomplete. If it is extravagant, there is complete disapprobation and dissatisfaction concerning the sense of propriety. Roughly speaking, that is how the moral faculties work:

What is agreeable to our moral faculties, is fit, and right, and proper to be done; the contrary wrong, unfit, and improper. The sentiments which they approve of, are graceful and becoming; the contrary, ungraceful and unbecoming. The very words, right, wrong, fit, improper, graceful, unbecoming, mean only what pleases or displeases those faculties. (TMS III.5.5, p.165)

The difference between the moral faculties, on one side, and the passions, on the other, is the ability (and authority) to judge not only itself and those alike but also the suitability of a passion *in a determined situation*. The same reasoning goes in relation to the external senses: The moral faculties judge the suitability of the exercise of an external sense *according to a particular situation*. It is up to the moral faculties to determine if and to what degree a situation is appropriate to the degustation of an alcoholic beverage, or to the enjoyment of a meal or a piece of music. To determine when and how principles of human nature can, should, or must be pleased or restrained, or exerted and to what degree, is the final cause of the moral faculties, or, in Smith's words, their governing or directive principle.

8. Moral and nature

To a contemporary ear, the most problematic aspect of Smith's account of the moral faculties is the anticipative role of natural emotional reactions. Perhaps the most obscure passage on this topic is the following: "These researches, however, when they came to take place, confirmed those original anticipations of nature" (TMS III.5.5, p.164). The first thing to do is to contextualize it. The fifth chapter of the third part of *Theory* begins by presenting the sense of duty and its role:

The regard to those general rules of conduct, is what is properly called a sense of duty, a principle of the greatest consequence in human life, and the only principle by which the bulk of mankind are capable of directing their actions. (TMS III.5.1, pp.161-2)

Almost no one operates all kinds of moral judgment in the vast majority of situations (at least not fully and thoroughly), and there are several reasons for this³⁴ (lack of sensibility³⁵ or intelligence,³⁶ excessive sensibility³⁷ and lack of time,³⁸ lack of will³⁹ or information⁴⁰, partiality, influence of fortune,⁴¹ etc.). The sense of duty steps in in moments like these, directing our conduct according to general rules.⁴² These rules can be of several kinds, from the most precise (criminal laws and property rules) to the most fluid (fashion dicta),⁴³ but they all intervene in our conduct following the same pattern:

Your friend makes you a visit when you happen to be in a humour which makes it disagreeable to receive him: in your present mood his civility is very apt to appear an impertinent intrusion; and if you were to give way to the views of things which at this time occur, though civil in your temper, you would behave to him with coldness and contempt. What renders you incapable of such a rudeness, is nothing but a regard to the general rules of civility and hospitality, which prohibit it. (TMS III.5.2, p.163)

³⁴ The general conditions for sympathetic judgments are the following: “the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded” (TMS I.i.4.6, p.21). In the absence of any of these conditions—full information about the situation (objective) and the agent (subjective), interest in the agent (partiality), will (especially to overcome partiality or, when there is no partiality, to reap this information disinterestedly) and time (to gather and process this information, making comparisons, unfolding the consequences, etc.)—the judgments of propriety and merit cannot be fully completed. All these aspects will be resumed in the following two chapters.

³⁵ TMS I.ii.intro.1, p.27 and TMS I.ii.3.3, pp.34-5.

³⁶ TMS I.i.1.10, p.12.

³⁷ For instance, the “paroxysm of distress” (TMS III.3.28, p.148) and more generally (TMS III.4.3, p.157), where it is closely connected with the question of available time before making a decision.

³⁸ In general terms (TMS III.4.12, p.161). Regarding the appearance of utility’s judgment (TMS I.ii.3.4, p.35).

³⁹ Especially relevant when dealing with painful emotions (TMS I.iii.1.4, p.44 and I.iii.2.1, pp.50-1).

⁴⁰ Before knowing what causes one’s anger it is impossible to truly judge one’s fury (TMS I.i.1.7, p.11).

⁴¹ TMS II.iii.2, pp.97-104.

⁴² “When these general rules, indeed, have been formed, when they are universally acknowledged and established, by the concurring sentiments of mankind, we frequently appeal to them as to the standards of judgment, in debating concerning the degree of praise or blame that is due to certain actions of a complicated and dubious nature” (TMS III.4.11, p.160). “Though in a particular instance, the circumstances which usually produce those natural affections, as they are called, may, by some accident, not have taken place, yet respect for the general rule will frequently, in some measure, supply their place, and produce something which, though not altogether the same, may bear, however, a very considerable resemblance to those affections” (TMS VI.ii.1.8, p.220).

⁴³ “The rules of justice may be compared to the rules of grammar; the rules of the other virtues, to the rules which critics lay down for the attainment of what is sublime and elegant in composition. The one, are precise, accurate, and indispensable. The other, are loose, vague, and indeterminate, and present us rather with a general idea of the perfection we ought to aim at, than afford us any certain and infallible directions for acquiring it” (TMS III.6.11, pp.175-6). On Smith’s jurisprudence, the most comprehensive work is still Haakonssen (1981).

Although not the foundation of society, the sense of duty's reverence for rules may be considered its fulcrum or mainstay once "upon the tolerable observance of these duties, depends the very existence of human society" (TMS III.3.6, p.138). It receives additional support from religion:

This reverence is still further enhanced by an opinion which is first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy, that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will finally reward the obedient, and punish the transgressors of their duty. (TMS III.5.3, p.163)

Here, it is not a question of Christian theology but of religion's social function, regardless of its historical and social form. Nature endows us with reverence for rules (any rules, regardless of their content) through social coexistence:

There is scarce any man, however, who by discipline, education, and example, may not be so impressed with a regard to general rules, as to act upon almost every occasion with tolerable decency, and through the whole of his life to avoid any considerable degree of blame. (TMS III.5.2, p.163)

Once it is virtually impossible to operate the judgments of propriety and merit in all situations, we form those rules to help us make better decisions (TMS III.4.7, p.159) and ascribe to them a sort of authority that forces us to follow them (TMS III.4.11, p.160); in Smith's words, we revere them. This reverence is enhanced by the opinion that they are "the commands and laws of the Deity," which, in turn, are "afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy" (TMS III.5.3, p.163); that is, the authority of these rules can be confirmed and further reaffirmed by either superstition or reason. Both reinforce this reverence, but in different ways. Superstition works through a sort of imaginary projection:

This opinion or apprehension, I say, seems first to be impressed by nature. Men are naturally led to ascribe to those mysterious beings, whatever they are, which happen, in any country, to be the objects of religious fear, all their own sentiments and passions. They have no other, they can conceive no other to ascribe to them. Those unknown intelligences which they imagine but see not, must necessarily be formed with some sort of resemblance to those intelligences of which they have experience. (TMS III.5.4, pp.163-4)

Imagination has a tendency to project emotions and passions onto everything surrounding us, including inanimate objects (TMS II.iii.1.1, p.94, see 4.3). Religion, at least in its first stages, is a deployment of this tendency: Pagans do not differentiate

between the human features projected onto their gods, ascribing to them even those “which do the least honour to our species, such as lust, hunger, avarice, envy, revenge” (ibidem). Hence:

The man who was injured, called upon Jupiter to be witness of the wrong that was done to him, and could not doubt, but that divine being would behold it with the same indignation which would animate the meanest of mankind, who looked on when injustice was committed. The man who did the injury, felt himself to be the proper object of the detestation and resentment of mankind; and his natural fears led him to impute the same sentiments to those awful beings, whose presence he could not avoid, and whose power he could not resist. (ibidem)

An offended Roman invoked the gods to avenge his injury, and the injurer accepted his/her punishment as a divine work. Therefore, pagan superstition confirmed the offended one’s resentment and ensured justice:

These natural hopes and fears, and suspicions, were propagated by sympathy, and confirmed by education; and the gods were universally represented and believed to be the rewarders of humanity and mercy, and the avengers of perfidy and injustice. And thus religion, even in its rudest form, gave a sanction to the rules of morality, long before the age of artificial reasoning and philosophy. (ibidem)

Resentment is for Smith the natural basis of justice—that is, the sentiment that naturally rises in the offended one’s heart⁴⁴ and, by sympathy, in the spectators’ hearts,

⁴⁴ “[T]hat action must appear to deserve punishment, which appears to be the proper and approved object of that sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish, or to inflict evil upon another. (...) [T]hat [sentiment] which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish, is resentment. To us, therefore, (...) that action must appear to deserve punishment, which appears to be the proper and approved object of resentment. (...) To punish, too, is to recompense, to remunerate, though in a different manner; it is to return evil for evil that has been done” (TMS II.i.1.1-4, p.68). Smith draws from Joseph Butler’s Sermon VIII, entitled *Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of Injuries*: “The natural object or occasion of settled resentment, then, being injury, as distinct from pain or loss, it is easy to see, that to prevent and to remedy such injury, and the miseries arising from it, is the end for which this passion was implanted in man. It is to be considered as a weapon put into our hands by nature, against injury, injustice and cruelty” (1st ed., 1725; 2nd ed., 1729). In the twentieth century, Peter F. Strawson also made some inquiries about this topic (see his *Freedom and Resentment*, 2008).

establishing the intersubjective foundations for justice.⁴⁵ Simply put,⁴⁶ the basic system dynamics are the following: Resentment is the natural reaction to an injury and works as the sense of justice or, more correctly, as the sense of the suffered injury (it is also a spontaneous judgment of demerit). Once resented, the offended one starts to seek punishment for the injurer.⁴⁷ Here is the moment when the juridical institutions might enter the scene: If they do not exist, the resented one seeks revenge in any way possible; if these institutions exist, they enter in action, punishing the injurer according to their proceedings. There are at least three elements here: resentment, justice, and punishment. Resentment is both the natural foundation of justice⁴⁸ and the anticipation of punishment.⁴⁹ Lastly, if the institutional frame does not work properly, resentment appears as the last resource for a punishment, through vengeance. The problem is that

⁴⁵ “In the same manner, as we sympathize with the sorrow of our fellow creature whenever we see his distress, so we likewise enter into his abhorrence and aversion for whatever has given occasion to it” (TMS II.i.2.4, p.70). However, this sympathy has another necessary condition: “Before we can adopt the resentment of the sufferer, we must disapprove of the motives of the agent, and feel that our heart renounces all sympathy with the affections which influenced his conduct. (...) [W]hen to the hurtfulness of the action is joined the impropriety of the affection from whence it proceeds, when our heart rejects with abhorrence all fellow-feeling with the motives of the agent, we then heartily and entirely sympathize with the resentment of the sufferer” (TMS II.i.4.3-4, p.74).

⁴⁶ In this model I abstract the different kinds of injury and its correlated rights (LJB 6-11, pp.399-401) and the role of public utility (TMS II.ii.3, pp.85-91). Lastly, I am not entirely abstracting but simplifying the operations of sympathy. In the last section I will resume its function vis-à-vis the senses as a whole.

⁴⁷ “And with regard, at least, to this most dreadful of all crimes [i.e., murder], Nature, antecedent to all reflections upon the utility of punishment, has in this manner stamped upon the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, an immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation” (TMS II.i.2.5, p.71). In addition to this natural reaction, we might also state resentment’s utility: “the utility of those passions [i.e., the unsocial passions, such as resentment] to the individual, by rendering it dangerous to insult or injure him, be acknowledged; and though their utility to the public, as the guardians of justice, and of the equality of its administration, be not less considerable (...)” (TMS I.ii.3.4, p.35; cf., II.ii.1.4, p.79). Again, Smith is following Butler: “Men are plainly restrained from injuring their fellow-creatures by fear of their resentment; and it is very happy that they are so, when they would not be restrained by a principle of virtue. And after an injury is done and there is a necessity that the offender should be brought to justice; the cool consideration of reason, that the security and peace of society requires examples of justice should be made, might indeed be sufficient to procure laws to be enacted, and sentence passed: but is it that cool reflection in the injured person, which, for the most part, brings the offender to justice? Or is it not resentment and indignation against the injury and the author of it? I am afraid there is no doubt which is commonly the case” (1st ed., 1725; 2nd ed., 1729, Sermon VIII).

⁴⁸ “Society, however, cannot subsist among those who are at all times ready to hurt and injure one another. (...) In order to enforce the observation of justice, therefore, Nature has implanted in the human breast that consciousness of ill desert, those terrors of merited punishment which attend upon its violation, as the great safe-guards of the association of mankind, to protect the weak, to curb the violent, and to chastise the guilty” (TMS II.ii.3.3-4, p.86). “The very existence of society requires that unmerited and unprovoked malice should be restrained by proper punishments; and consequently, that to inflict those punishments should be regarded as a proper and laudable action. Though man, therefore, be naturally endowed with a desire of the welfare and preservation of society, yet the Author of nature has not entrusted it to his reason to find out that a certain application of punishments is the proper means of attaining this end; but has endowed him with an immediate and instinctive approbation of that very application which is most proper to attain it” (TMS II.i.5.10, p.77). “(...) [H]uman laws, the consequences of human sentiments, (...)” (TMS III.5.9, p.168).

⁴⁹ See quotations in the notes for items (2.a) and (2.b) below.

revenge is also an injury, restarting the whole mechanism of resentment (the injurer becomes the injured through the first act of revenge).⁵⁰ Justice is progressively institutionalized precisely to restrain an endless cycle of revenge (resentment appears, then, as not only the logical but also the historical foundation of justice for Smith).⁵¹ Once these juridical institutions are established, resentment becomes a corrective instance of justice (perhaps not the best one).⁵²

Thus, some characteristics of resentment are as follows:

- 1.a. it is a natural reaction to injury⁵³;
- 1.b. it does not depend on rules or any other juridical institution to be felt⁵⁴;
- 1.c. it is antecedent (logically and historically) to the institutionalization of justice⁵⁵;

⁵⁰ “And this too violent resentment, instead of carrying us along with it, becomes itself the object of our resentment and indignation. We enter into the opposite resentment of the person who is the object of this unjust emotion, and who is in danger of suffering from it. Revenge, therefore, the excess of resentment, appears to be the most detestable of all the passions, and is the object of the horror and indignation of every body” (TMS II.i.5.8, p.77).

⁵¹ “The first and the most atrocious of these [crimes which are an attack upon the person] is willfull murder. For this, to be sure, the only proper punishment is the death of the offender. The resentment of the injured persons can not be satisfied by a mere simple punishment, unless there be an equality at least betwixt the sufferings of the injur'd person and the offender, (that is) unless the injury be in some measure retaliated. We find accordingly that in all civilized nations the punishment has been the death of the murderer. But amongst barbarous nations the punishment has generally been much slighter, as a pecuniary fine. – The reason of this was the weakness of government in those early periods of society, which made it very delicate of intermeddling with the affairs of individualls. The government therefore at first interposed only in the way of mediator, *to prevent the ill consequences which might arise from those crimes in the resentment of the friends of the slain.* For what is the end of punishing crimes, in the eyes of people in this state? The very same as now of punishing civil injuries, viz the preserving of the publick peace. The crimes themselves were already committed, there was no help for that; *the main thing therefore the society would have in view would be to prevent the bad consequences of it.* This therefore they would not attempt by a punishment, which might interrupt it. For it was not till a society was far advanced that the government took upon them to cite criminalls and pass judgement upon them” (LJA, p.106—italics mine). See also a manuscript passage: “The violation of Justice is what Mankind will never submit to from their Equals. It provokes the Resentment of the injured and incites $h[i]$ to take vengeance upon the Offender. They feel that Mankind applaud and go along with them when they punish him, and they imagine that they become contemptible when they do not. That civil Society may not be a Scene of Bloodshed $confusion$ and disorder every man revenging himself at his own hand whenever he fancies himself injured, the Magistrates in all Governments that have acquired considerable Authority employs the power of the commonwealth to enforce the practice of Justice, and to give Satisfaction to the injured either by punishing the offender or by obliging him to compensate the wrong that has been done” (TMS Appendix II, p.389).

⁵² “Criminal causes have always a more speedy determination. One would indeed think that when a person's life is at stake, the debate should be longer than in any other case. But resentment is roused in these cases and precipitates to punish” (LJB 65, p.422; cf., Malloch's case, LJA, p.109).

⁵³ “(...) [T]he violation of justice is injury: it does real and positive hurt to some particular persons, from motives which are naturally disapproved of. It is, therefore, the proper object of resentment, and of punishment, which is the natural consequence of resentment” (TMS II.ii.1.5, p.79). “Injury naturally excites the resentment (...)” (LJB 181, p.475). That is why they also fall on inanimate objects as well: “Our resentment naturally falls upon inanimate as well as animate objects, and in many places the sword or instrument that had killed any person was considered as execrable, and accordingly was destroyed, particularly among the Athenians” (LJB 188, p.478, cf. LJB 201, p.485). For more about this, see 4.4.

⁵⁴ “[T]hat [sentiment] which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish, is resentment” (TMS II.i.1.2, p.68).

⁵⁵ See notes 49 and 52 above.

- 2.a. it anticipates punishment⁵⁶;
- 2.b. either because it urges the offended one (or his/her closest ones) to search for it⁵⁷;
- 2.c. or because it appears as the logical ground for constitution and modifications in legislation and other juridical institutions⁵⁸;
- 3.a. thence, in a way, legislation and other institutions are confirmations of resentment⁵⁹;
- 3.b. as punishment also is⁶⁰;
- 3.c. and, once this is thoroughly consumed, resentment is also punishment's confirmation.⁶¹

Sense of duty may be understood in a similar way: once there is a legislation (or at least some organized rules), the sense of duty naturally impels us to follow it, but this natural reverence is enhanced both by some particular rules (disobeying these rules may result in punishment; following these rules, therefore, is also a question of personal interest, of prudence, and not only of duty) and by religion and philosophy.

That the terrors of religion should thus enforce the natural sense of duty, was of too much importance to the happiness of mankind, for nature to leave it dependent upon the slowness and uncertainty of philosophical researches. (ibidem)

In this paragraph Smith speaks of a superstitious confirmation (that of pagan religions) but it can also be a rational confirmation, either by rational religion, or through philosophy. This is the precise context of the passage with which this section started:

These researches, however, when they came to take place, confirmed those original anticipations of nature. Upon whatever we suppose that our moral faculties are founded, whether upon a certain modification of reason, upon an original instinct, called a moral sense, or upon some other principle

⁵⁶ "(...) [P]unishment, which is the natural consequence of resentment" (TMS II.ii.1.5, p.79). "Resentment not only prompts to punishment but points out the manner of it. Our resentment is not gratified unless the offender be punished for the particular offence done ourselves, and unless he be made sensible that it is for that action" (LJB 182, p.476).

⁵⁷ "Resentment would prompt us to desire, not only that he should be punished, but that he should be punished by our means, and upon account of that particular injury which he had done to us" (TMS II.i.6, p.69).

⁵⁸ "As mankind go along with, and approve of the violence employed to avenge the hurt which is done by injustice, so they much more go along with, and approve of, that which is employed to prevent and beat off the injury, and to restrain the offender from hurting his neighbours" (TMS II.ii.1.5, p.79).

⁵⁹ "The natural gratification of this passion tends, of its own accord, to produce all the political ends of punishment; the correction of the criminal, and the example to the public" (TMS II.i.6, p.69).

⁶⁰ Resentment cannot be fully gratified, unless the offender is not only made to grieve in his turn, but to grieve for that particular wrong which we have suffered from him" (TMS II.i.6, p.69).

⁶¹ "It is to be observed that our first approbation of punishment is not founded upon the regard to public utility which is commonly taken to be the foundation of it. It is our sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer which is the real principle" (LJB 181-2, p.475).

of our nature, it cannot be doubted, that they were given us for the direction of our conduct in this life.⁶² (TMS III.5.5, pp.164-5)

Reason confirms the sense of duty's anticipations (that is, reverence to general rules) in several ways⁶³:

- i. reaffirming the legal character of the moral rules (TMS III.5.6, pp.165-6);
- ii. remembering the utility of an orderly society (TMS III.5.7, p.166);
- iii. showing the earthly rewards that may be obtained through their compliance (TMS III.5.8, pp.166-7);
- iv. pointing to the heavenly rewards that might also be thus obtained (TMS III.5.12, p.170).

When associated with god, these laws acquire a sacred dimension restating the sense of propriety: The simple idea of not following them becomes improper. Interest (normally connected with the sense of merit, since, from a moral point of view, rewards and punishments are merit issues) also reinforces the sense of propriety: God, who sees everything, rewards and punishes according to the compliance with those rules. Pagan superstition worked upon the invocation of divine wrath to punish the offender.

⁶² If the analysis proposed in this text is correct, there is no inconsistency between these passages (TMS III.5.5-6) and the criticism of Hutcheson's moral sense, as noted by the editors of the Glasgow edition (TMS, p.164, footnote 1). D. D. Raphael (one of the editors of the Glasgow critical edition of TMS) goes even further, suggesting them to precede the development of Smith's full theory of consciousness (2007, pp.49-50). An obvious problem then is to explain why these passages survived five revisions. Indeed, at least one suppressed passage in the sixth edition dealt explicitly with these issues (TMS II.ii.3.12c, pp.91-2 – quoted in the next note), but it is not evidence enough to say that Smith forgot to suppress or alter any other passage of TMS. Raphael's mistake is in taking Butler's definition of moral faculties (as "conscience, moral sense, moral reason, or divine reason") and not Smith's own (moral faculties as "our natural sense of merit and propriety"; cf. TMS III.4.8, p.159). Smith is crystal-clear about this: "The word conscience does not immediately denote any moral faculty by which we approve or disapprove. Conscience supposes, indeed, the existence of some such faculty, and properly signifies our consciousness of having acted agreeably or contrary to its directions" (TMS VII.3.15, p.326). Nevertheless, the supposition of these principles is not incompatible with any of the four kinds of moral judgment (or even with them taken as a whole) or with Smith's criticism of Hutcheson's moral sense as a peculiar faculty or power of perception— unless we take this as the only way moral principles could be natural.

⁶³ In a suppressed paragraph for the sixth edition, Smith insists that philosophy may lead us astray: "That the Deity loves virtue and hates vice, as a voluptuous man loves riches and hates poverty, not for their own sakes, but for the effects which they tend to produce; that he loves the one, only because it promotes the happiness of society, which his benevolence prompts him to desire; and that he hates the other, only because it occasions the misery of mankind, which the same divine quality renders the object of his aversion; is not the doctrine of nature, but of an artificial, though ingenious, refinement of philosophy" (TMS II.ii.3.12, p.91—the emphasis on the means is one characteristic of the appearance of utility; see TMS IV.1.3, pp.179-80). Ancient philosophy was also wrong in supposing that "the gods neither resent nor hurt." Revealed religion is the only religion to thoroughly confirm our "untaught, natural sentiments": "The doctrines of revelation coincide, in every respect, with those original anticipations of nature; and, as they teach us how little we can depend upon the imperfection of our own virtue, so they show us, at the same time, that the most powerful intercession has been made, and that the most dreadful atonement has been paid for our manifold transgressions and iniquities" (TMS II.ii.3.12, pp.91-2). In the end, the distress caused by the suspicion of not being fit for god's forgiveness is enough.

Philosophical religion works upon the internalization of this divine point of view, tying propriety and merit in the strict compliance with duty rules. Nevertheless, this is nothing more than an imagined “additional tie” to morality:

The regard to the propriety of action, as well as to reputation, the regard to the applause of his own breast, as well as to that of others, are motives which they suppose have the same influence over the religious man, as over the man of the world. But the former lies under another restraint, and never acts deliberately but as in the presence of that Great Superior who is finally to recompense him according to his deeds. (TMS III.5.13, p.170)

The religious man takes duty as the core of his behavior through the idea that god rewards and punishes (i.e., merit judgments) the propriety or impropriety of his actions. Here is one way of conjoining, in the practical field, the four kinds of judgments: The strict compliance with those rules is a propriety issue and ensures rewards (even if not on an earthly plane), and it also begets an orderly society according to providential plans (item ii. above; that is, an aesthetical judgment, based on utility beauty). However, this is not the only possible conjunction of these judgments. Indeed, these rewards (approval of impartial spectators and eternal joy) are much less effective than the wealth and glory that go along with other kinds of behavior, both virtuous (prudence) and corrupted (vanity and ambition). Lastly, interaction between natural sentiments and actual rewards also shows the corrective functions of sensitive anticipations:

The industrious knave cultivates the soil; the indolent good man leaves it uncultivated. Who ought to reap the harvest? Who starve, and who live in plenty? The natural course of things decides it in favour of the knave: the natural sentiments of mankind in favour of the man of virtue. (...) Thus man is by Nature directed to correct, in some measure, that distribution of things which she herself would otherwise have made. (TMS III.5.9, p.168)

The three roles of natural sentiments can be thus summed up: First, they anticipate reasoning justifying themselves and appear as the foundation of behaviors and even some institutions that unfold and channel them; second, they appear as criteria for eventual corrections in these behaviors and institutions; and third, by them we not only correct but also govern our conduct. Each internal sense provokes a specific and particular reaction, implying an equally specific and particular deployment of these roles. And thus, the

general scheme subsists, where the triple role of Stoic *prolepses* (criteria of truth, starting point of deployments, and governing principle) is played by these natural sentiments.⁶⁴

9. Sentiments

In the previous two sections, I tried to deal with one of the most complex topics of Smith's moral philosophy: the role of individual emotional reactions, either primary or secondary (reactions of approval or disapproval). On one hand, they anticipate practical (behaviors, rules, and institutions) and theoretical (moral judgments and knowledge) deployments; on the other, they reaffirm (for instance, when justice realizes the resentment felt by someone injured) or correct (when justice does not alleviate the injured one's suffering) these same deployments. Yet, how do we know when these individual reactions must be taken to these extreme lengths? Instead of evaluating justice by individual resentment, for instance, would it not be more proper to do the reverse: to evaluate individual resentment by justice? In this case, absence of actual relief would be more index of individual excess than institutional lack.

Indeed, I simplified the argument: It is not any sort of emotional reaction that anticipates and corrects its deployments, but only emotional reactions socially validated.⁶⁵ They are what Smith properly calls *sentiments*. The social validation process of individual emotional reactions happens in two different yet inseparable stages: justification and communication.⁶⁶ "But our passions, as Father Malebranche observes, all justify

⁶⁴ There is a fourth role with which I will not directly deal, namely, the *prolepsis* of god and its providential character (see 6.4).

⁶⁵ Take resentment, for instance: "The insolence and brutality of anger, in the same manner, when we indulge its fury without check or restraint, is, of all objects, the most detestable. But we admire that noble and generous resentment which governs its pursuit, of the greatest injuries, not by the rage which they are apt to excite in the breast of the sufferer, but *by the indignation which they naturally call forth in that of the impartial spectator*; which allows no word, no gesture, to escape it *beyond what this more equitable sentiment would dictate*; which never, even in thought, attempts any greater vengeance, nor desires to inflict any greater punishment, than what every indifferent person would rejoice to see executed" (TMS I.i.5.4, p.24—italics mine; cf., TMS II.i.5.8, pp.76-7). Moreover, resentment is difficult to sympathize with because its external signs dispose us to disapprove of it (TMS I.i.1.7, p.11). In order to sympathize with resentment, we must know its cause (i.e., another man's bad action) and disapprove of it (TMS II.i.4.3-4, pp.73-4). That is why "We should resent more from a sense of the propriety of resentment, from a sense that mankind expect and require it of us, than because we feel in ourselves the furies of that disagreeable passion. There is no passion, of which the human mind is capable, concerning whose justness we ought to be so doubtful, concerning whose indulgence we ought so carefully to consult our natural sense of propriety, or so diligently to consider what will be the sentiments of the cool and impartial spectator" (TMS I.ii.3.8, p.38).

⁶⁶ "Sentiments were feelings of which one is conscious, and on which one reflects. They were also events that connected the individual to the larger relationships in which he or she lived (the society, or the family, or the state)" (Rothschild, 2001, p.9). "Sociability depends upon the traffic not only of opinions, but of

themselves; that is, suggest to us opinions which justify them” (EPS, p.48). Obviously, each kind of passion must find its proper justification, but they all have the same goal: being shared.⁶⁷ A passion or emotion⁶⁸ that justifies itself is an excellent first definition of sentiment if this justification process contains its communication:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. (TMS III.1.3, p.110)

This passage explicitly associates society, communication, and moral (self-) evaluation: Someone who grows up in complete isolation would be incapable of morally judging his/her own acts (with the exception of their beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility⁶⁹). Smith’s name for the process of emotional communication is *sympathy*. Communicating a passion or affection can mean only one thing: emotional sharing. The fundamental task of sympathy is to share individual emotional reactions to a particular situation (i.e., someone’s ‘case’) with a larger number of possible spectators. A particular

harmoniously organized feelings. Thus the particular importance of the term ‘sentiment’, a word which can stand for both, judgment and affection” (Mullan, 1988, pp.7-8). For more about eighteenth-century sentimental tradition in general, see also Bressenden (1974) and Barker-Banfield (1992). About Hume’s concept of sentiment: “Quelle que soit la solution retenue, el demeure impossible de confondre feeling et sentiment. Hume emploie ce dernier terme en trois occasions: à propos du sens moral, du sens esthétique ou de la croyance, pour signifier toujours une même operation de l’esprit. Si le sentiment a toujours sa racine dans le feeling et de ce fait précède l’entendement, s’il n’est pas une operation de la pensée, néanmoins il est d’essence judiciaire: le sens moral nous détermine préréflexivement quant au bien et au mal, le sens esthétique quant au beau et au laid, et la croyance quant au vrai et au faux” (Malherbe, 2001, pp.112-3, note 3).

⁶⁷ Smith reprises this Malebranche quotation in TMS: “The passions, upon this account [of their high intensity when we are about to act], as father Malebranche says, all justify themselves, and seem reasonable and proportioned to their objects, as long as we continue to feel them” (TMS III.4.3, p.157). The context of the passage (presentation of self-deceit) clearly shows that this passion-justification process can be easily distorted by self-love (see 5.1).

⁶⁸ The terms *emotion* and *passion* are used rather indistinctly in Smith’s *Theory*: “When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator” (TMS I.i.3.1, p.16). In another passage he speaks of “sympathetic passions” (TMS I.ii.3.1, p.34). He does not speak of an original emotion but presents the agent’s reaction to a situation as an emotion (TMS I.i.1.6, p.11). He also presents the same scheme, both “the original and sympathetic feelings” (TMS III.3.35, p.152) and as “the original sensations (...) the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations” (TMS VI.ii.1.1, p.219), although, in this last passage, the context clearly speaks of pleasure and pain. Another way of seeing this indistinctly used is the following: Grief and resentment are presented both as emotions (TMS I.i.2.5, p.15) and as passions (TMS I.ii.3, pp.34-8). Resentment is also presented as a sentiment (TMS II.i.1.2, p.68). Affection, on the other hand, has the specific meaning of “habitual sympathy” (TMS VI.ii.1.7, p.220), in which it confounds itself with sentiment (TMS III.6.2, p.171).

⁶⁹ “It is to be observed, that so far as the sentiment of approbation arises from the perception of this beauty of utility, it has no reference of any kind to the sentiments of others. If it was possible, therefore, that a person should grow up to manhood without any communication with society, his own actions might, notwithstanding, be agreeable or disagreeable to him on account of their tendency to his happiness or disadvantage” (TMS IV.2.12, p.192).

internal sense creates an emotional reaction that longs to be shared, in a process where both agent and spectator have to deal with a number of obstacles, demanding emotional modulation on both sides in order to achieve its goal.

The first definition of sentiment given above (a justified passion) must be completed by a second part: Sentiment is a communicable passion. As there is no justification without communication (in the double sense that it is communication that provides a goal to justification—if it is not to share it, why justify it?—and the criteria for this justification—what kind of spectator I want to convince), there is no possible communication without emotional justification. Qualitatively, the expression of a primary emotion acquires sense only by being placed in a particular context (a tear, for instance, may mean either sadness or happiness), especially through its articulation in a narrative⁷⁰ (the tear falls from the eye of a little girl whose ice cream has just fallen on the ground). Quantitatively, any primary emotional reaction must be modulated in order to be shared (in order to reach its proper ‘pitch,’ its mediocrity).⁷¹ Sentiments are, thus, justified and communicable passions—justified because they are communicable and communicable because they are justified.

All such sentiments [i.e., the notion of deserving reward or the suspicion of meriting punishment] suppose the idea of some other being, who is the natural judge of the person that feels them; and it is only by sympathy with the decisions of this arbiter of his conduct, that he can conceive, either the triumph of self-applause, or the shame of self-condemnation. (TMS IV.2.12, p.193)

Finally, sentiments may also be presented in their interactive dynamics with internal senses. The senses were presented above as the conjoint operation of sensibility, imagination, and understanding (or reason) involved in the process of feeling something

⁷⁰ The narrative dimension of Smithian sympathy is particularly emphasized when a painful emotion must be shared, perhaps precisely because of this additional difficulty (TMS I.iii.1.4, p.44). See, for instance, TMS I.i.2.4, p.15; I.iii.1.12, p.47 and VI.concl.3, p.263). More recently, Martha Nussbaum also insists on this dimension: “Emotions, we can now see, have a narrative structure. The understanding of any single emotion is incomplete unless its narrative story is grasped and studied for the light it sheds on the present response” (2001, p.236). See also the pioneering article from Kenneth Maclean (1949), David Marshall’s work on the importance of theatrical structures for Smith (1986), and Rae Greiner’s recent work on Smith’s influence in nineteenth-century British novels (2012).

⁷¹ This is explicit in the introduction to Smith’s typology of passions (see 2.6): “THE propriety of every passion excited by objects peculiarly related to ourselves, the pitch which the spectator can go along with, must lie, it is evident, in a certain mediocrity” (TMS I.ii.intro.1, p.27). In order to be shared, the emotion or passion must find its proper pitch, its medium level; in a word, it must be justified. However, this passion mediocrity depends on communication: “This mediocrity, however, in which the point of propriety consists, is different in different passions. (...) And if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent, or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them” (TMS I.ii.intro.2, p.27).

in a particular situation, as origin of the emotional reaction to a specific and concrete context (someone's case). In the terms of this section, "sense" designates the emergence and (first) justification processes of this primary reaction, this last one presupposing its communication (even if as nothing more than virtual communication). This implies, in a sense, that internal senses and sentiments are simply two sides of the same coin.⁷² Focusing on internal senses is to insist in the individual dimension, focusing on sentiments means throwing light in the social dimension (which is the main reason why sympathy gathers so much importance for Smith). Nevertheless, they are simply different possible cuts of the same whole.⁷³ A true internal sense makes itself felt socially⁷⁴; in turn, a true sentiment is internally justified when felt.⁷⁵ In other words, internal senses are sentiments acting in the individual; sentiments are internal senses acting in society.

Their concurrence allows Smith to assert that sociability is a natural predicate of humanity, that society is inscribed in our nature (Section V of TMS as a whole), or inversely, presupposing natural sociability has as consequence this concurrence between internal senses and sentiments. Moreover, to focus on this interaction allows Adam Smith's science of human nature' to deal with the particularization of general principles⁷⁶

⁷² As the definition of the senses of merit and demerit makes it clear: "the sense of merit seems to be a compounded sentiment, and to be made up of two distinct emotions; a direct sympathy with the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions" (TMS II.i.5.2, p.74 and II.i.5, p.75). Jean Mathiot sees a practical difference among them: "Le sentiment n'est pas une pure réceptivité : il est affection du moi, certes, mais à travers un rapport à l'objet qui met en œuvre une activité du moi. Dans le sentiment, l'affection est une auto-affection, et par là est aussi une action de moi-même sur moi-même. La notion de sentiment réserve donc la signification pratique de la sympathie, ce que ne ferait pas la notion du 'sense'." (Mathiot, 1990, pp.16-7). Since I'm not dealing with the practical part of Smith's moral philosophy, this question is beyond the boundaries of this text.

⁷³ "The primary ambiguity in 'sentire' and 'sensus' [i.e., the Latin etymological origin of the English terms *sentiment* and *sense*] is that they can be used to refer either to simple physical awareness, to simple mental awareness (if either of these 'pure' states can ever be said to exist), or to an awareness in which elements of both are present. They can refer either to feeling (in the emotional rather than sensory meaning of the word), or to thinking or to states of consciousness which both partake. They can refer to the process or power of thinking and feeling, and also to its result – to activities and also to states" (Mullan, 1988, p.15).

⁷⁴ Louis XIV's sense of superiority, for instance.

⁷⁵ The most compelling example is remorse (see 5.2). Even if the actual communication does not take place, justification lies entirely in a virtual communication: "The man who has broke through all those measures of conduct, which can alone render him agreeable to mankind, though he should have the most perfect assurance that what he had done was for ever to be concealed from every human eye, it is all to no purpose. When he looks back upon it, and views it in the light in which the impartial spectator would view it, he finds that he can enter into none of the motives which influenced it. He is abashed and confounded at the thoughts of it, and necessarily feels a very high degree of that shame which he would be exposed to, if his actions should ever come to be generally known. His imagination, in this case too, anticipates the contempt and derision from which nothing saves him but the ignorance of those he lives with" (TMS III.2.9, p.118). His guilt is based entirely on his own awareness that he would be disgraced if anyone knew what he did; that is, its justification is based on a mere possibility of communication.

⁷⁶ For more about Smith's 'science of human nature,' see Christopher Berry (2012).

by showing how ‘general subjects’ act in ‘particular circumstances’⁷⁷ To Smith, sentiments only exist for social individuals exerting their natural capacities (sensibility, imagination, understanding), or, more precisely, individuals produce sentiments in social interaction in order to be felt, challenged, justified, refined, and, sometimes, even admired.

⁷⁷ As Didier Deleule once put it (1978, Chapter 2). From a scientific point of view, the interaction between generality and particularity is in charge of two notions, species and character (see 6.6).

Chapter 2 – Sympathy and imagination

’Tis sweet to feel by what fine-spun threads our affections are drawn together.

Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*

“Imagination is often truer than fact”, said Gwendolen, decisively, though she could not more have explained these glib words than if they had been Coptic or Etruscan.

George Eliot (Marie Ann Evans), *Daniel Deronda*

1. The term *sympathy*

The term *sympathy* comes from the Greek *συμπαθεια* (*sumpatheia*), composed of the parts *sum* (with, together) and *pathos* (what is felt or experienced, in the sense of emotion/passion/feeling). Therefore, to sympathize means “to feel together.” Smith points out that, in eighteenth-century Britain, this term was used in cases where the shared emotion was a painful or sorrowful one.¹ I sympathize with a colleague who recently lost his mother, sharing his pain. However, Smith wants to expand its meaning:

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever. (TMS I.i.1.5, p.10)

The common use (limited to painful or sorrowful emotions) hides the broader meaning, which is the one Smith wants to bring to light from the very beginning of his *Theory*:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. (TMS I.i.1.1, p.9)

Pity and compassion are proof of these natural principles; even “The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without [them]” (*ibidem*). Even this type of person, while observing or watching someone in a

¹ Samuel Johnson’s dictionary shows brings the broader definition Smith wants to highlight: “Fellowfeeling, mutual sensibility; the quality of being affected by the affection of another”. The same with the verb To sympathize: “To feel with another; to feel in consequence of what another feels, to feel mutually” (1755, p.2009)

sorrowful situation, will sympathize with the one whom Smith calls the “person principally concerned” (TMS I.i.1.4, p.10), the “agent” (TMS II.i.3.1, p.71), or even the “actor” (TMS VI.concl.6, p.264)—that is, the person who is actually living or experiencing the particular situation. On the other side, those who observe him/her are named “spectators” (TMS I.i.1.4, p.10) or “observers” (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62), and, in some situations, could be called listeners (TMS I.iii.1.12, p.47).

For Smith (see 1.2b-c), in addition to properly visual data (bi-dimensional colorful panels), vision furnishes us with preconceptions about externality and external objects—things that, strictly speaking, it does not have access to (only the sense of touch provides the resistant data necessary for the inference of externality and external objects). Therefore, the first question is how we can see someone else’s happiness—an emotional state, something invisible.² This opening problem of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* can also be (re)formulated in more general terms: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (TMS I.i.1.2, p.9). Smith’s solution consists of the good operations of what he calls the “sense of propriety.” Perhaps this is only another form of the same question: Under what conditions does this internal sense work—that is, how can we feel the propriety or impropriety of someone else’s action?

2. Imagination and sympathy

Others’ emotions (joy or sorrow) are not visible to us, but they have external signs (laughter or tears) that are. Indeed, it is not uncommon to feel those emotions while we observe their physical manifestations:

Upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned. (TMS I.i.1.6, p.11)

² The pronoun it, which finishes the first sentence, most likely refers to happiness (the closest term), although it could also refer to fortune. If this is the case, then the question remains, as the term *fortune* has an incredibly large semantic field in Smith’s philosophy, covering from *destiny* to *wealth*, passing through *chance*. Excepting wealth, which can be literally seen, all other meanings are also invisible, so to speak. For more about fortune, see Chapter 4.

Merely observing joy or sorrow “strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one” can induce the same emotion in the observer, the same way a smile is a “cheerful object” and a “sorrowful countenance” is a “melancholy one” (ibidem). The problem with this kind of sympathy is that it lacks generality, since “This, however, does not hold universally, or with regard to every passion.” For instance, “The furious behavior of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against himself than against his enemies”—that is, to provoke fear more than an analogous emotion in the bosom of those who see him. Smith points out that, even worse, his observers will probably sympathize with “fear or resentment” of those who are this angry man’s target, as they don’t know its cause (TMS I.i.1.7, p.11; cf. LJB, p.527). From the simple observation of someone else’s behavior or the external signs of his/her feelings or emotions, it is not possible to infer any kind of knowledge about his/her motivation (the why of his anger, in Smith’s example), and therefore it is impossible to truly sympathize immediately with anyone.

Smith points out two extra problems. First, if the observation is limited to external signs of what is internally happening, it is impossible to know what is causing the action (the observer doesn’t know the agent’s motives). Second, when he mentions that the spectator might sympathize with the fear or resentment of those who are targeted by the agent’s anger, Smith is implicitly saying this is unjust. Sympathy should not work solely from the reading of an emotion’s external signs because this can induce us to not only make mistakes but also enact injustice: Without knowing the angry man’s motives (the why of his behavior), spectators cannot form a proper judgment about his behavior and therefore will harshly judge his conduct. The sole solution is to resort to imagination:

Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. (TMS I.i.1.2, p.9)

Our senses (external and internal) cannot, by themselves only, take us beyond ourselves. This is an extremely important point that will be addressed many times in the present work.³ For the time being, the most important aspect to highlight is that Smith’s

³ As Leonidas Montes explains, this point is present in the etymology of the term *propriety*: “Propriety has its etymological roots in the Latin *proprius*, which entails the idea of something not common when compared with other things, something peculiar, or of something belonging to one only. In relation to this last definition it also refers to one’s own, to a possession, and therefore its obvious link to ‘property’. In fact, the word *proprietas* is the Latin word for the Greek *idiotes*, which derives from *idios* (the Latin equivalent of *proprius*), one’s own, pertaining to oneself. *Idios* also relates to private interests in opposition

theory of moral sentiments has as its logical starting point the individual, and to overcome his/her narrow individual emotional reaction, imagination must come forth, projecting itself beyond the boundaries of an individual empirical situation. How is that possible?

Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (ibidem)

Imagination or fancy is the human faculty (TMS i.i.1.2, p.9; I.ii.3.4, p.35) able to put us in someone else's shoes.⁴ Human beings are capable of imagining themselves in a wide variety of situations, assuming many different roles (we can become any person, including historical or fictitious characters, an animal, a plant, or even an inanimate object), and experience them in a representative manner. However, this experience of impersonation has results similar to those of an immediate and real experience:

His [i.e., the person principally concerned] agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. (ibidem)

If everything works as expected, this imaginary mechanism will bring forth a "fellow-feeling" in the spectator's breast, analogous to the emotion felt by the person principally concerned. In this first moment, this fellow-feeling is a particular affection, "an analogous emotion [that] springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator" (TMS I.i.1.4, p.10). However, as Smith also speaks of a "general fellow-feeling" (TMS II.ii.3.11, p.90; see section 6), it is not anodyne to distinguish between this first, simpler level of sympathetic operation and more developed,

to the public, implying also the notion of private property for the Greeks. (...) In the English, the word 'propriety', breaking away from the word 'property', acquired a moral connotation, suggesting correct behavior, that is, what the proper thing to do is" (2004, pp.98-9).

⁴ Smith is not far from Fernando Pessoa's reprise of Condillac: "Condillac começa seu livro celebre, "Por mais alto que subamos e mais baixo que desçamos, nunca saímos das nossas sensações". Nunca desembarcamos de nós. Nunca chegamos a outrem, senão outrando-nos pela imaginação sensível de nós mesmos" (Livro do desassossego, 307, p.367). The correct quotation from Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* is the following: "Soit que nous nous élevions, pour parler métaphoriquement, jusques dans les cieux; soit que nous descendions dans les abîmes, nous ne sortons point des nous-mêmes; et ce n'est jamais que notre propre pensée que nous apercevons" (1746).

refined ones (which demand a higher level of moral education, capable of overcoming egoistical and partial claims of importance; see next chapter).

Smith insists that, even in those cases where an immediate emotional “transfusion” takes place (such as instantly responding to a smile with another), the fellow-feeling relies on imagining concrete situations that could possibly have caused this emotion. A smile or frown suggests “the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person in whom we observe them” but that “we” as spectators do not know yet. This prevents sympathy from becoming complete, since only a “general idea” is transmitted: “Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect.” Cases like this more often excite curiosity than bring forth the correct fellow-feeling; they provoke “some disposition to sympathize” rather than actual sympathy⁵ (TMS I.i.1.8-9, p.11).

Smith’s first conclusion is that “Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (TMS I.i.1.12, p.12). To prove it, he presents four examples, or, in his terminology, four “cases,” which grow progressively in depth and complexity regarding the operation of this imaginary mechanism of sympathy.

The first is what contemporarily would be called ‘vicarious’ or ‘empathetic embarrassment’: a situation in which the spectators feel something the person principally concerned does not actually feel (by either shamelessness or rudeness), “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, had we behaved in so absurd a manner”⁶ (TMS I.i.1.10, p.12).

⁵ This curiosity and disposition to sympathize can easily degenerate into intrusiveness: “This passion to discover the real sentiments of others is naturally so strong, that it often degenerates into a troublesome and impertinent curiosity to pry into those secrets of our neighbours which they have very justifiable reasons for concealing; and, upon many occasions, it requires prudence and a strong sense of propriety to govern this, as well as all the other passions of human nature, and to reduce it to that pitch which any impartial spectator can approve of” (TMS VII.iv.28, pp.337-8).

⁶ A comparison with Hume illustrates the differences between their moral theories. To Hume, it is a “pretty remarkable phaenomenon of this passion; which is, that the communicated passion of sympathy sometimes acquires strength from the weakness of its original, and even arises by a transition from affections, which have no existence. (...) We find from experience, that such a degree of passion is usually connected with such a misfortune; and tho' there be an exception in the present case, yet the imagination is affected by the general rule, and makes us conceive a lively idea of the passion, or rather feel the passion itself, in the same manner, as if the person were really actuated by it. From the same principles we blush for the conduct of those, who behave themselves foolishly before us; and that tho' they shew no sense of shame, nor seem in the least conscious of their folly. All this proceeds from sympathy; but `tis of a partial kind, and views its objects only on one side, without considering the other, which has a contrary effect, and wou'd entirely destroy that emotion, which arises from the first appearance” (THN 2.2.6). What is only a “partial kind” of

The second case, madness understood as loss of reason, deepens the idea that sympathy is not the reflex of an emotion felt by the agent:

The anguish which humanity feels, therefore, at the sight of such an object, cannot be the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer. The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment. (TMS I.i.1.11, p.12)

The third example is of a mother agonized by her baby's illness, even though the little one can neither properly express his/her suffering nor anticipate future similar suffering or even entertain the possibility of dying:

In her idea of what it suffers, she joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. The infant, however, feels only the uneasiness of the present instant, which can never be great. With regard to the future, it is perfectly secure, and in its thoughtlessness and want of foresight, possesses an antidote against fear and anxiety, the great tormentors of the human breast (...). (TMS I.i.1.12, p.12)

In a way, only imagination can cause lasting suffering and torment: As soon as it is healed, a toothache is quickly forgotten. Envy and anguish, on the other hand, are life companions⁷ (TMS I.ii.1.8, p.29; cf., Smith's criticism to Epicurus in general VII.ii.2, but especially VII.ii.2.12, pp.297-8).

This ability to imagine ourselves in varied situations is so powerful, and here is Smith's fourth and final case: We can sympathize even with dead people, although we know it is impossible for them to feel anything at all:

It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections, and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relations. (...) The idea of that dreary and endless

sympathy in Hume becomes a prime example to Smith, one providing a full display of sympathy's imaginary mechanism.

⁷ One exception may be chronic bodily pains. Though they can be temporarily relieved through medication, this relief does not mean they were truly healed. The sufferer knows this, and anticipates the pain's return, which causes a sort of imaginary suffering. Here is a first question: Can the bodily pain be truly separated from the anguish of knowing oneself to be chronically affected by it? If yes (second question), it is possible to determine if bodily pains are transitory. If not, the interaction between sensibility and imagination is deeper, and the distinction between bodily and imaginary pain loses relevance. This last way appears to occur in some extreme cases, as will be seen below.

melancholy, which the fancy naturally ascribes to their condition, arises altogether from our joining to the change which has been produced upon them, our own consciousness of that change, from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies, and thence conceiving what would be our emotions in this case. (TMS I.i.13, pp.12-3)

Smith names this contradictory conjunction of soul and inanimate body an “illusion of imagination,” responsible for our fear of death (*ibidem*). All these cases require concrete (but not necessarily conscious) involvement from the spectator, clearly showing that, for Smith, sympathy is less a question of involuntary or passive emotional contagion than of imaginary effort.⁸ Concerning this aspect, I do not think it is an overstatement to say that Smith’s morality is grounded in a sympathetic imagination, or, inverting the terms, an “imaginative sympathy,” even if these terms are not Smith’s own, but George Eliot’s.⁹

These extreme examples show that sympathy works even in the absence of an original feeling, either because the agent does not correctly employ his faculties (first case), lacks them (second case), has not yet developed them (third case), or has ceased to be able to employ them (fourth case). They also demonstrate that sympathy, in the context of a fellow-feeling for someone else’s emotions, is a result of imagination’s projective capacity, of sympathy in a broader sense—namely, this mechanism of sympathetic imagination. Even if it is important, from an analytical point of view, to differentiate between these two levels, to keep it under all circumstances would be just another “superstitious attachment to certain forms of expression” that would impoverish the moral

⁸ Smith appears to have in mind Hume’s first characterization of sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature*: “No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (...) A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me” (THN 2.1.11.2, p.316). In a general way, “The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts” (THN 3.3.3.5, p.605). Smith’s problem is the reverse: Passions do not easily and effortlessly flow from one to another.

⁹ In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), she mentions a “sympathetic imagination” (Chapter 8), and in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), she speaks of an “imaginative sympathy.” Oscar Wilde also uses this last expression in his letter *De profundis* (1897) to characterize Christ’s actions: “He realized in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation.” Walter Bate uses the first expression in a paper about eighteenth-century British literature (1945), and Kenneth Maclean also resorts to it in a paper relating Smith’s and Laurence Sterne’s imagination and sympathy theories (1949). More recently, Sotirios Paraschas recovered it in his work about nineteenth-century realist authors (Balzac, Baudelaire, and Eliot are his main authors), where Smith’s moral theory plays an important role (2013). Charles Griswold, in turn, resorts to the more restricted expression “spectatorial imagination” (1999). For reasons that will become clear in this and the next chapters, I prefer Eliot’s more comprehensive expressions.

language (TMS VII.iii.2.9, p.320). Sympathy is both our capacity of emotional sharing and its result; it is at the same time the means and the ends of this communication. It is the goal to be achieved (the good communication) and the mechanism to reach it (emotional communication in itself). To bypass this double dimension of Smith's moral theory (at once normative and descriptive) means to lose much of its core and many of its insights.¹⁰

4. Boundaries of sympathy

Although grounded in our natural faculties, the imaginary mechanism of sympathy does not always work the same way and with the same intensity. There are cases in which it does not operate at all (more common than an isolated reading of the first part of *Theory* might suggest). Even though spectators exert themselves to the maximum trying to sympathize, searching out all available information and taking all the time needed to reflect upon every minute circumstance (TMS I.i.4.6), sympathy always falls short due to its main limitation—its imaginary nature:

After all this, however, the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned. That imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary. The thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferers, continually intrudes itself upon them; and though it does not hinder them from conceiving a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer, hinders them from conceiving any thing that approaches to the same degree of violence. (TMS I.i.4.7, pp.21-2)

This intensity difference prevents a complete identification between original and sympathetic emotions, keeping them in an analogical relationship. Both the person

¹⁰ An early example of a reading that ignores the normative dimension is Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1^a impression, 1780; 1^a publication, 1789). It presents the principle of utility as morality and legislation's source, discarding some opposing principles, among them what he calls the "principle of sympathy and antipathy" (chap. II, §12). By combining antipathy and sympathy, he reduces sympathy to a mere descriptive operator of emotional communication, omitting its entire valorizing power: Systems that have the principle of sympathy and antipathy "consist all of them in so many contrivances for avoiding the obligation of appealing to any external standard, and for prevailing upon the reader to accept of the author's sentiment or opinion as a reason, and that a sufficient one, for itself" (chap. I, §14). Bentham completely ignores the need, and even more, the demand for communication in determining, or perhaps constructing, moral sentiments. It is quite easy for him to dismiss these systems as being, at best, too subjective or, at worst, despotic (chap. I, §14, footnote). See Haakonssen's commentary on Smith's answers to Hume (1981, p.51).

principally concerned and the spectator feel and try to overcome this difference. Their goal is to achieve an accord provided by a “more complete sympathy,” reached through the “entire concord of the affections,” with their hearts beating at the same pace.¹¹ On one hand, the person principally concerned must lower “his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him”; on the other, spectators must make an effort in the opposite direction, trying to increase their sympathetic response, in order to achieve the aforementioned harmony. However, what the spectator feels will “always be, in some respect, different of what the sufferer feels.” Even if the intensity difference can be completely overcome,

compassion can never be exactly the same with original sorrow; because the secret consciousness that the change of situations, from which the sympathetic sentiment arises, is but imaginary, not only lowers it in degree, but, in some measure, varies it in kind, and gives it a quite different modification. (ibidem, p.22)

What appears as a simple intensity or degree difference (in other words, a purely quantitative difference) unfolds into a difference of kind (in a sort of qualitative difference). This, nevertheless, does not preclude the emotional modulation to achieve “such a correspondence with one another, as is sufficient for the harmony of the society. Though they will never be unisons, they may be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required” (ibidem). This accord is made easier by the constant change of position between agent and spectators, in that the first can imagine himself/herself as the spectator and thus conceive an imaginary and sympathetic emotion regarding his/her own situation.

[The] reflected passion, which he thus conceives, is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light. (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22)

This reflected passion will be discussed below (Sections 6 and 8). For the time being, it should be noted that as the affective distance between agent and spectator increases, the expected sympathy decreases. From a friend we (i.e., the person principally

¹¹ Hume also uses this musical metaphor when dealing with sympathy: “The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (THN 3.3.1.7, pp.575-6). Once again we see how Smith invokes a Humean metaphor, highlighting the effort involved.

concerned) expect comprehension, so we do not need to act cool; with a mere acquaintance we cannot be so open, and “we assume, therefore, more tranquility.” In front of a group of unknown people we must assume “still more tranquility,” seeking to lower our passion’s intensity even more.¹² Although it is a sort of acting, this feigned tranquility is an essential part of virtue:

Nor is this only an assumed appearance: for if we are at all masters of ourselves, the presence of a mere acquaintance will really compose us, still more than that of a friend; and that of an assembly of strangers still more than that of an acquaintance. (TMS I.i.4.9, pp.22-3)

The two most important consequences of this variation in “kind” are the following¹³: first, a duplication of the primary emotional reaction in a reflected passion formed from the internalization of an external point of view, and second, the need for a sort of acting, as if social life demanded all of us to become, in some measure, actors.

There is a second difficulty to overcome with regard to sympathy—namely, the nature of the emotion to be shared:

Pain besides, whether of mind or body, is a more pungent sensation than pleasure, and our sympathy with pain, though it falls greatly short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer, is generally a more lively and distinct perception than our sympathy with pleasure, though this last often approaches more nearly, as I shall shew immediately, to the natural vivacity of the original passion. (TMS I.iii.1.3, p.44)

The initial problem of intensity difference is resumed, but in a qualified manner. If it is true that any sympathetic feeling is always weaker than the original one, this is a more acute issue in cases of unpleasant feelings. The greater pungency of pain provides a stronger and livelier perception for the person principally concerned, making it even more difficult for spectators to sympathize. However, though less sharp, sympathetic

¹² Tranquility will be presented at length in Chapter 4, Sections 10 and 11.

¹³ Smith’s target here appears to be Hume’s mechanical theory of how sympathy works, employing terms borrowed from this epistemology: “When any affection is infus’d by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection” (THN 2.1.11.3, p.317). Indeed, Hume makes an analogy between sympathy and causality (THN 2.1.11.8, pp.319-20), resuming the core of his philosophy in the moral field: “All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity. Our ideas are copy’d from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. When you wou’d any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. (...) An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin’d, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION” (THN 1.3.7.5, p.67; capital letters in the original).

pains are also unpleasant feelings, and therefore spectators will try to avoid sympathizing with anyone suffering:

Over and above all this, we often struggle to keep down our sympathy with the sorrow of others. Whenever we are not under the observation of the sufferer, we endeavour, for our own sake, to suppress it as much as we can, and we are not always successful. The opposition which we make to it, and the reluctance with which we yield to it, necessarily oblige us to take more particular notice of it. (TMS I.iii.1.4, p.44)

Could this be the cause of the restriction concerning the meaning of the term *sympathy*? The greater pungency of unpleasant feelings (including sympathetic ones) forces us to pay more attention to them. Mandeville used a similar linguistic device to cover his egoistical theory: Only extreme or unpleasant cases of several passions draw our attention to the point of being named (TMS VII.ii.4.11, pp.311-2). This does not happen when pleasant feelings or emotions are being shared; here “we never have occasion to make this opposition to our sympathy with joy” (TMS I.iii.1.4, p.44). Because of this absence of opposition, Smith concludes that

our propensity to sympathize with joy is much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow; and that our fellow-feeling for the agreeable emotion approaches much more nearly to the vivacity of what is naturally felt by the persons principally concerned, than that which we conceive for the painful one. (TMS I.iii.1.5, p.45)

The sole exception would be the previous existence of envy against the person principally concerned (see next section). The asymmetry between pleasant and painful feelings, however, is not the only set of qualities affecting the way sympathy works.

4. Types of passions

True sympathy requires each emotion or passion to be in “a certain mediocrity,” neither too low (so it will not even be heard) nor too high (so it would make everyone around it deaf, at least temporarily). Extreme insensibility in situations where some reaction is expected puzzles spectators, while uncontrollable fury or despair triggers a different reaction (fear instead of resentment, for instance). In both cases, sympathy does not work properly because of the extreme emotional pitch of the agent’s reactions.

Instead, there is a medium level, allowing every emotion to be properly shared¹⁴ (TMS I.ii.intro.1, p.27). Evidently, each passion will have a particular “point of propriety”:

It is high in some, and low in others. There are some passions which it is indecent to express very strongly, even upon those occasions, in which it is acknowledged that we cannot avoid feeling them in the highest degree. And there are others of which the strongest expressions are upon many occasions extremely graceful, even though the passions themselves do not, perhaps, arise so necessarily. (TMS I.ii.Introd.2, p.27)

Smith establishes a general rule (of decency or indecency) here, saying every passion varies “just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them” (*ibidem*).

(a) Passions originating in the body

The first kind is those “passions which take their origin in the body.” Any sort of excessive manifestation of these passions—hunger and sexual desire are Smith’s examples (TMS I.ii.1-2)—is indecorous and censurable because sympathy cannot properly work (TMS I.ii.1.3). For instance, if spectators do not share the extreme hunger of a voracious glutton, they cannot approve his conduct. Nevertheless, even in cases of extreme hunger there can be “some degree of sympathy” that can be felt while reading accounts of it, “but as we do not grow hungry by reading the description, we cannot properly, even in this case, be said to sympathize with their hunger” (TMS I.ii.1.1, pp.27-8). The only spectator who can actually sympathize with someone in situations like these (someone extremely hungry or sexually desiring a particular person) will probably be more interested in satisfying his own passion (getting food or the desired person before the rival does) than in sympathizing. Because of this difficulty in finding someone able to sympathize with passions originating in the body, the agent must try to diminish these passions’ intensity through self-command, in an effort that can follow rules of prudence (“regard to health and fortune”) or temperance (“to confine them within those limits, which grace, which propriety, which delicacy, and modesty”) (TMS I.ii.1.4, p.28).

(b) Love

¹⁴ Some commentators point to the Aristotelian theory of *μεσότης* (*mesotes*) as one of the sources for Smith’s theory of mediocrity and, therefore, of propriety (Waszek, 1984; Vivenza, 2000).

The picture changes when the passions to be shared have their origin in the imagination. Some of them are closer to those originating in the body, especially those that “take their origin from a peculiar turn or habit”; being entirely individual or belonging to a small group, these are “but little sympathized with” (TMS I.ii.2.1, p.31). The most relevant of these passions is love:

Our imagination not having run in the same channel with that of the lover, we cannot enter into the eagerness of his emotions. (...) [I]f he is in love, though we may think his passion just as reasonable as any of the kind, yet we never think ourselves bound to conceive a passion of the same kind, and for the same person for whom he has conceived it. (ibidem)

Although highly idiosyncratic, passions such as love have general features allowing room for sympathy, since spectators can easily imagine themselves in similar situations and end up sharing passions engendered by such situations:

It interests us not as a passion, but as a situation that gives occasion to other passions which interest us; to hope, to fear, and to distress of every kind: in the same manner as in a description of a sea voyage, it is not the hunger which interests us, but the distress which that hunger occasions. (TMS I.ii.2.2)

Love makes it clear that what interest humans in social life are “secondary passions”—that is, second-order emotions arising from a first-order emotional reaction. All interest in novels, theater, and even love scenes comes from them, as “it is with these secondary passions only that we can properly be said to sympathize” (TMS I.ii.2.4, p.33). Indeed, because of the secondary passions usually mixed with love (humanity, generosity, kindness, friendship, esteem), spectators are able to diminish the unpleasant feeling felt while watching excessive public manifestations of love, and even to “support it in our imagination,” allowing sympathy to take place (TMS I.ii.2.5, p.33).

This incapacity to sympathize with love is one of those moments when a quantitative excess (or lack) becomes a qualitative difference: The lover’s judgment of his/her beloved object and the reality of this object are “extravagantly disproportioned” (TMS I.ii.2.5, p.33). An extravagant disproportion is something more than a mere difference in degree or intensity, something that here is the object of laughter:

The passion appears to every body, but the man who feels it, entirely disproportioned to the value of the object; and love, though it is pardoned in a certain age because we know it is natural, is always laughed at, because we cannot enter into it. All serious and strong expressions of it appear ridiculous

to a third person; and though a lover may be good company to his mistress, he is so to nobody else.
(TMS I.ii.2.1, p.31)

Whenever the lover becomes conscious of his/her passionate extravagance the only solution is to play with or even ridicule it. The prudential rule of thumb would be to keep some reservation “when we talk of our own friends, our own studies, our own professions.” Here lies a danger for philosophers and scientists who are passionate about their jobs (TMS I.ii.2.6, p.33).

(c) Unsocial passions

The common aspect between passions that take their origin in the body and love is the need to diminish their intensity so spectators can sympathize with them. The same thing happens with the unsocial passions, such as anger and resentment. These passions play an essential role in organizing social life, particularly in the development of juridical institutions (see 1.6; 3.5 and 5.5-6). Here, two aspects will be emphasized: the division they provoke in sympathy and their utilitarian nature. First, the division in a spectator’s sympathy:

With regard to all such passions, our sympathy is divided between the person who feels them, and the person who is the object of them. The interests of these two are directly opposite. What our sympathy with the person who feels them would prompt us to wish for, our fellow-feeling with the other would lead us to fear. (TMS I.ii.3.1, p.34)

The opposition between offender and offended interests¹⁵ is at the core of justice and structures a spectator’s judgments in cases such as these.¹⁶ On one side, humanity has “a very strong sense of the injuries that are done to another,” which is a strong tendency in favor of sympathizing with the offended one’s resentment (TMS I.ii.3.2, p.34). On the other, “there is still something disagreeable in the passions themselves, which makes the appearance of them in other men the natural object of our aversion” (TMS I.ii.3.4, p.35). To solve this dilemma, utilitarian considerations must be brought to light.

Resentment is useful to the individual because it makes it “dangerous to insult or injure him.” It is also useful to the public because it turns offended persons into “the

¹⁵ For more about the relationship between interest, utility, and knowledge, see 6.4.

¹⁶ The interactive dynamics of this opposition may be formalized in what game theory calls a competitive zero-sum game.

guardians of justice, and of the equality of its administration.”¹⁷ Oftentimes, however, utility (especially public utility, but also individual utility) is only a remote effect, the immediate effects being a “mischief to the person against whom they are directed.” It is undeniable that a prison is useful for the maintenance of public order, but this end is achieved through punishment, such as incarceration and a privation of liberty. Since “it is the immediate, and not the remote effects of objects which render them agreeable or disagreeable to the imagination,” every prison will be seen as an evil—a necessary one, but nevertheless an evil (TMS I.ii.3.4, p.34). Moreover, unsocial passions are unpleasant to spectators who watch a scene of vengeance: “Their disagreeable and boisterous appearance never excites, never prepares, and often disturbs our sympathy” (TMS I.ii.3.5, p.37). They are also unpleasant to the person who feels them: “There is, in the very feeling of those passions, something harsh, jarring, and convulsive, something that tears and distracts the breast, and is altogether destructive of that composure and tranquility of mind” (TMS I.ii.3.7, p.37). From this threefold unpleasantness (immediate effects of punishment, repulsive aspects of revenge, and the nature of the feeling itself) comes the need to reduce these passions’ intensity so spectators can sympathize with them (TMS I.ii.3.1; II.i.5.8). Indeed, due to the unsociable passions’ nature, “We should resent more from a sense of the propriety of resentment, from a sense that mankind expect and require it of us, than because we feel in ourselves the furies of that disagreeable passion” (TMS I.ii.3.8, p.38).

(d) Social passions

If in the unsocial passions opposition organizes the division of sympathy, superposition organizes it in the social ones. The result is a “redoubled sympathy”:

Generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship and esteem, all the social and benevolent affections, when expressed in the countenance or behaviour, even towards those who are not peculiarly connected with ourselves please the indifferent spectator upon almost every occasion. His sympathy with the person who feels those passions, exactly coincides with his concern for the person who is the object of them. (TMS I.ii.4.1, pp.38-9)

The social passions “appear in every respect agreeable to us,” regardless of how, where, or when they are analyzed. Spectators sympathize with both agents (the one who

¹⁷ As discussed in the last chapter, Smith follows here Joseph Butler’s analysis, especially in his Sermon VIII, *Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of Injuries*.

acts and the one acted upon) and with both of their pleasant feelings. These two joyful emotions are added up¹⁸ and show that “there is a satisfaction in the consciousness of being beloved, which, to a person of delicacy and sensibility, is of more importance to happiness, than all the advantage which he can expect to derive from it” (ibidem). This sentiment is even capable of altering the physiological body functions, making it healthier,¹⁹ especially when it is doubled by the consciousness of being the cause of someone else’s gratitude. This is the only sentiment that can be profusely and excessively demonstrated without ever being censured: “We only regret that it is unfit for the world, because the world is unworthy of it” (TMS I.ii.4.3, p.40).

(e) Selfish passions

Between the unsocial and social passions, occupying “a sort of middle place between them,” there are the selfish passions, neither heinous as the first nor graceful as the last.²⁰ These are self-centered passions, composed of “Grief and joy, when conceived upon account of our own private good or bad fortune” (TMS I.ii.5.1, p.40).

The notion of fortune plays an essential role in Smith’s philosophy (see Chapter 4). Private fortune adds an important qualification to the rule that spectators sympathize more easily with joyful than with sorrowful feelings (because of the greater pungency of the last). Regarding private fortune, “There is, however, this difference between grief and joy, that we are generally most disposed to sympathize with small joys and great sorrows” (TMS I.ii.5.1; pp.40-1).

¹⁸ The interactive dynamics of social passions may be formalized by what game theory calls a cooperative positive-sum game.

¹⁹ Here is the opposite case of the one presented above, dealing with the physiological effects of chronic pains: “The sentiment of love is, in itself, agreeable to the person who feels it. It soothes and composes the breast, seems to favour the vital motions, and to promote the healthful state of the human constitution; and it is rendered still more delightful by the consciousness of the gratitude and satisfaction which it must excite in him who is the object of it” (TMS I.ii.4.2). In the specific case of love, also at stake here are some male ideals from part of the eighteenth-century intelligentsia, in which virility must be tempered by a refined sensibility, especially through a version of love as a calm passion. Laurence Sterne offers an interesting example of the composing effects of this kind of love: “having been in love, with one princess or other, almost all my life, and I hope I shall go on so till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up—I can scarce find in it to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can, and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good will again; and would do anything in the world, either for or with any one, if they will but satisfy me there is no sin in it.—But in saying this—surely I am commending the passion—not myself” (Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, Montreuil). For more about the ideal of a sensible manhood, see Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992).

²⁰ These passions neither completely oppose nor superpose themselves, being always somewhere between. Their interactive dynamics might be formalized by what game theory calls a competitive non-zero sum game (either positive or negative, depending on the kind of interaction).

When there is no envy involved, spectators' sympathy with great grief or sorrow is so strikingly evident as to limit the meaning of the word *sympathy* to pity and compassion (TMS I.i.1.5), which demand no examples (TMS I.ii.5.4, p.43). The situation changes regarding small sufferings:

(...) grief is painful, and the mind, even when it is our own misfortune, naturally resists and recoils from it. We would endeavour either not to conceive it at all, or to shake it off as soon as we have conceived it. Our aversion to grief will not, indeed, always hinder us from conceiving it in our own case upon very trifling occasions, but it constantly prevents us from sympathizing with it in others when excited by the like frivolous causes: for our sympathetic passions are always less irresistible than our original ones. (TMS I.ii.5.3, p.42)

Above all, someone who constantly pities himself/herself and nags everyone around, ends up repelling them: "such a person, I say, though he should have some reason, will seldom meet with much sympathy" (ibidem).

Regarding happiness and joyful feelings, the opposite takes place: Spectators sympathize more easily with small joys than greater ones. Sympathizing with small joys is as evident as sympathizing with deep afflictions. Young people are particularly prone to this sort of affection, frequently forgetting their pain when watching a pleasant scene and "abandon[ing] themselves to those agreeable ideas and emotions" (TMS I.ii.5.2, pp.41-2). Great happiness, however, is likely to generate more envy and jealousy than sympathy. Although different, envy and jealousy share a common ground that makes it difficult to deal with them separately. They are both grounded in a feeling of entitlement to more than what one deserves. This is why envious and jealous people are so concerned about what they believe is owed to them (TMS VII.ii.4.9) and violently attack those they see as equals: Romans, acquainted with inequality, rarely envied their aristocracy, whereas Athenians, having a strong sense of equality, more frequently than not cast a "jealous eye" upon their great citizens (LRBL ii.161-2, Lecture 26, p.157-8). Upstarts are frequently the targets of those passions for the same reason: By acquiring wealth, power, and success (in a word, fortune), the upstart leaves behind those who used to see him as an equal. On one hand, those left behind, accustomed to seeing him as an equal, do not accept his new station in life. On the other, the ancient bearers of fortune become jealous of the newcomer, recently arrived and already demanding what was due only to them, having their sense of equality likewise disturbed (TMS I.ii.5.1, p.41; cf. III.3.36; cf. LJA v.129, p.321).

Envy and jealousy are closely connected with the overvaluation of individual qualities or the qualities of those to whom we are partial (see 3.3 and 4.10), being thus linked to love (TMS VI.ii.1.18; VI.ii.2.3; cf. LJB 104, p.439), including national love (TMS VI.ii.2.3). They bring deleterious effects to social life (TMS I.ii.4.2) and to commerce (WN IV.iii.a.1; IV.iii.c.9; IV.iii.c.12; IV.iii.c.13; IV.iv.7; cf. LJB 266, p.512), except when their object is freedom (LJA ii.51, p.90; ii.144, p.126) or when in a competitive environment²¹: Under these conditions, envy and jealousy become emulation (WN, V.i.f.45, p.780). This desire to achieve excellence (TMS III.2.3; I.iii.3.2) implies an individual search for wealth and power (TMS VI.ii.2.3) but also for moral development—a man’s aim of becoming what he thinks of himself, and thus becoming a man of honor (TMS III.2.8, p.117).

5. The perception of fellow-feeling

David Hume was one of the first to insist on some difficulties in Smith’s account of the asymmetry between pleasant and painful feelings and their effects on how sympathy operates. In a letter signed on July 27, 1759, Hume writes:

I am told that you are preparing a new Edition, and propose to make some Additions and Alterations, in order to obviate Objections. I shall use the Freedom to propose one, which, if it appears to be of any Weight, you may have in your Eye. I wish you had more particularly and fully prov'd, that all kinds of Sympathy are necessarily Agreeable. This is the Hinge of your System, and yet you only mention the Matter cursorily in p. 20 [TMS i.i.2.6]. Now it woud appear that there is a disagreeable Sympathy, as well as an agreeable: And indeed, as the Sympathetic Passion is a reflex Image of the principal, it must partake of its Qualities, and be painful where that is so. Indeed, when we converse with a man with whom we can entirely sympathize, that is, where there is a warm and intimate Friendship, the cordial openness of such a Commerce overpowers the Pain of a disagreeable Sympathy, and renders the whole Movement agreeable. But in ordinary Cases, this cannot have place. An ill-humord Fellow; a man tir'd and disgusted with every thing, always *ennuié*; sickly, complaining, embarass'd; such a one throws an evident Damp on Company, which I suppose wou'd be accounted for by Sympathy; and yet is disagreeable.

It is always thought a difficult Problem to account for the Pleasure, receivd from the Tears and Grief and Sympathy of Tragedy; which woud not be the Case, if all Sympathy was agreeable. An Hospital

²¹ The king’s jealousy regarding nobility’s power plays a major role in the origin of modern European commercial societies. Searching to weaken nobility, the king allowed decisive steps toward strengthening the bourgeoisie (LJA iv.143-4, p.256), in the implementation of the division of powers (LJA v.20, p.278 and iv.151-2, p.259) and, together with the clergy’s wish to increase its own power, in the generalization of free labor in Western Europe (LJA iii.117-22, pp.187-9).

would be a more entertaining Place than a Ball. I am afraid that in p. 99 and 111 [TMS I.ii.5.4 and I.iii.1.9] this Proposition has escapd you, or rather is interwove with your Reasonings in that place. You say expressly, it is painful to go along with Grief and we always enter into it with Reluctance. It will probably be requisite for you to modify or explain this Sentiment, and reconcile it to your System. (Letter 36 in Correspondence, p.43)

Hume insists on considering the fellow-feeling as a “reflex-image” of the original emotion, therefore retaining its pleasant or unpleasant nature. Smith’s answer comes in a footnote to the second edition:

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. The other may either be agreeable or disagreeable, according to the nature of the original passion, whose features it must always, in some measure, retain. (TMS I.iii.1.9.nota, p.46)

Smith proposes a two-part scheme. First, the spectator imagines himself/herself in the situation of the person principally concerned, which prompts a sympathetic emotion, or fellow-feeling, of same nature as the original (the agent’s joy or sorrow is shared by the spectator). Second, the original emotion is judged based on this sympathetic emotion: If there is an accord, both qualitatively (they are the same emotion) and quantitatively (they are of the same, or at least a similar, pitch), the original emotion is praised; if not, it is blamed. Approbation generates a second-level emotional response, a second pleasant feeling. Disapprobation, on the other hand, generates an unpleasant feeling from the disaccord between original and sympathetic emotions. This is how the sense of propriety works, this second-level feeling arising from the accord or disaccord between original and sympathetic. The person principally concerned can share the spectator’s emotional reaction, generating a second fellow-feeling (especially when it is a pleasant feeling resulting from a sentimental accord).²² This second-level emotion explains why both agent and spectator are eager for company in both joyful and sorrowful cases:

²² Even here, in the simplest case, the fellow-feeling already starts to detach itself from the particular shared emotion. Its complete abstraction and isolation in a feeling of belonging to a particular group or community, or even mankind in general, demands the recurrence of sympathy in a variety of situations, with a myriad of emotions in the greatest intensity spectrum possible. Haakonssen sees a four-level operation here: (1)

The sympathy, which my friends express with my joy, might, indeed, give me pleasure by enlivening that joy: but that which they express with my grief could give me none, if it served only to enliven that grief. Sympathy, however, enlivens joy and alleviates grief. It enlivens joy by presenting another source of satisfaction; and it alleviates grief by insinuating into the heart almost the only agreeable sensation which it is at that time capable of receiving. (TMS I.i.2.2, p.14)

Sharing my joy with my friend reaffirms and reanimates my previous joy. I also obtain pleasure from observing and sharing my friend's approval, a second level joy. In the case of a sorrowful emotion, sharing my friend's approval of my emotion is "the only agreeable sensation" capable of soothing my affliction.²³ It is, evidently, an ambiguous situation, as while sharing my grief I also reanimate it:

How are the unfortunate relieved when they have found out a person to whom they can communicate the cause of their sorrow? Upon his sympathy they seem to disburthen themselves of a part of their distress: he is not improperly said to share it with them. He not only feels a sorrow of the same kind with that which they feel, but as if he had derived a part of it to himself, what he feels seems to alleviate the weight of what they feel. Yet by relating their misfortunes they in some measure renew their grief. They awaken in their memory the remembrance of those circumstances which occasioned their affliction. Their tears accordingly flow faster than before, and they are apt to abandon themselves to all the weakness of sorrow. They take pleasure, however, in all this, and, it is evident, are sensibly relieved by it; because the sweetness of his sympathy more than compensates the bitterness of that sorrow, which, in order to excite this sympathy, they had thus enlivened and renewed. (TMS I.i.2.4, p.15)

The analogy with taste must be understood in a precise sense: The same way strong coffee is sweetened with sugar, the sweetness of sympathy opposes and actually diminishes the bitterness of grief. Due to the greater pungency of pain vis-à-vis pleasure, "we are not half so anxious that our friends should adopt our friendships, as that they should enter into our resentments." As it is the sole source of relief, we demand sympathy even more in sorrowful cases, or, inversely, once pleasure is agreeable in itself, there is no need for any sort of compensation, and sympathy can only be a surplus. That is why our friends "can easily avoid being friends to our friends, but can hardly avoid being enemies to those with whom we are at variance." Indeed, "The agreeable passions of love and joy can satisfy and support the heart without any auxiliary pleasure." On the other

imaginary change of place, (2) sympathetic emotion, (3) comparison, and (4) pleasant or unpleasant emotion generated by the comparison (1981, p.51).

²³ Sympathizing with a spectator's approval (that is, sympathizing with his sympathy) is to acquire, on an emotional level, a sort of knowledge or consciousness of having felt the correct emotion or of having behaved properly. According to Smith, this feeling is always pleasant.

hand, “The bitter and painful emotions of grief and resentment more strongly require the healing consolation of sympathy” (TMS I.i.2.5, p.15).

6. Sympathy and language

Smith’s two-part scheme (imagining what the person principally concerned feels, and then comparing this sympathetic emotion with the original) introduces a problem: How is it possible for spectators to grasp the agent’s original emotion? In other words, how can spectators have access to the original emotion in order to compare it with their sympathetic response? Is this not evidence of serious inconsistencies in *Theory*, since its opening problem revolves around the difficulties of truly sympathizing with the person principally concerned, and Smith’s solution consists of relying on imagination? Here, in his response to Hume, he proposes a scheme wherein this imaginary emotion is to be compared with the original emotion, as if there were other (or at least one other) possible ways of accessing the person principally concerned’s primary emotional reaction.

Before outlining his solution (or rather, solutions), it is important to note that Smith was fully aware of those difficulties and the possibilities of overcoming them. When dealing with the differences between passions originating in the body and imaginary ones, he points out that:

The frame of my body can be but little affected by the alterations which are brought about upon that of my companion: but my imagination is more ductile, and more readily assumes, if I may say so, the shape and configuration of the imaginations of those with whom I am familiar. A disappointment in love, or ambition, will, upon this account, call forth more sympathy than the greatest bodily evil. Those passions arise altogether from the imagination. (TMS I.ii.1.6, p.29)

Imagination’s ductile capacity allows its passions to be fully shared, whereas passions originating in the body must be restrained. A hierarchy of passions, from the easiest to the most difficult to sympathize with, could be established, but the question about spectators’ access to the original passion remains open.

Smith’s most explicit solution consists of the constant exchange of position (one is now agent, now spectator). This interchangeability is the foundation of self-judgment. As the person principally concerned (or agent), one has access to one’s primary and original emotions. Only the agent can fully judge an emotion’s or action’s propriety, as he is the only one who has full access to the original emotion. As spectators’ sympathetic

emotions are always imaginary, they can be freely shared, including by the person principally concerned. Agents can use spectators' sympathetic emotions as criteria to judge their own emotions. In the next two chapters, Smith's theory of moral consciousness will be presented in a systematic fashion.

Good moral judgments are difficult to achieve, as they demand sensibility, imagination, and reflection, as well as time and concern. They also demand experience, for both the person principally concerned and the spectator, the agent and the judge. The person principally concerned experiences emotional reactions to particular situations, in all their violence and intensity; these situations require quick decisions, and do not allow for analysis of objective and subjective data. The spectator does not have access to subjective data but has the time needed to collect and analyze objective data. Self-judgment is the apex of Smith's moral philosophy because the person principally concerned is the only one who has access to all data. She also has the greatest interest in her own motives and in the consequences of her actions; what she does not usually have is the time to fully operate the required judgments, and she may also lack sensibility or capacity in addition to non-partial criteria. However, Smith demands more of his theory. The constant change of position is at the root not only of self-judgment but also of the emotional modulation necessary for society to work. This implies that his moral theory must also deal with intersubjective questions (and not only work as a subjective theory of moral consciousness).

The intersubjective solution of sympathy comprises two complementary moments: first, the transformation of a primary emotional reaction into an imaginary emotion, and second, its verbal communication (TMS I.i.2.4, p.15). Smith's paradigm of sympathy operation is when the person principally concerned tells her case to a concerned listener, a listener who at the same time imagines himself as the agent of the case. Smithian sympathy demands *case narrative* to fully operate: While describing her case, the person principally concerned relives it, but now in an imaginary fashion. Through this imaginary reliving, the primary emotional reaction acquires a fully imaginary form, allowing it to be shared. In a way, the person principally concerned fictionalizes²⁴ or aestheticizes her primary emotional reaction, thus allowing its communication. By transforming the original emotion into a "reflected passion" (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22)—a fully

²⁴ In the sense of providing it with an imaginary form, not of making it unreal.

imaginary emotion²⁵—this reanimation through memory potentially overcomes both (the kind and intensity) differences between the original and sympathetic emotions. Qualitatively, the related experience has the same imaginary nature as the sympathetic one. Quantitatively, the relived emotional reaction's vivacity is less intense than the original's, facilitating the sympathetic spectator's imaginary work²⁶, even if the external signs of this relived experience appear to be more intense than the original's (while living the situation, the person principally concerned cannot know if he/she will find a spectator willing to sympathize with what happens during the narrative; hence the stronger emotions' manifestation²⁷). The second moment is the verbal communication, through ordinary language:

Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect. General lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to inquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible. The first question which we ask is, What has befallen you? Till this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-feeling is not very considerable. (TMS I.i.1.9, pp.11-2)

The biggest difficulty here is the suggestive nature of words:

When a philosopher goes to examine why humanity is approved of, or cruelty condemned, he does not always form to himself, in a very clear and distinct manner, the conception of any one particular action either of cruelty or of humanity, but is commonly contented with the vague and indeterminate idea which the general names of those qualities suggest to him. But it is in particular instances only that the propriety or impropriety, the merit or demerit of actions is very obvious and discernible. It is only when particular examples are given that we perceive distinctly either the concord or disagreement between our own affections and those of the agent, or feel a social gratitude arise towards him in the one case, or a sympathetic resentment in the other. When we consider virtue and

²⁵ As far as I can state, the first commentator to explicitly affirm this was Kenneth Maclean: "I think then we may see that Sterne, writing close to the time of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, understood sympathy as did the philosopher as an experience of the imagination" (1949, p.409).

²⁶ Potentially attaining this way the expected results: "the man who, in relating to some other person the injury which has been done to him, feels at once the fury of his passion cooled and becalmed by sympathy with the more moderate sentiments of his companion, who at once adopts those more moderate sentiments, and comes to view that injury, not in the black and atrocious colours in which he had originally beheld it, but in the much milder and fairer light in which his companion naturally views it; not only restrains, but in some measure subdues, his anger. The passion becomes really less than it was before, and less capable of exciting him to the violent and bloody revenge which at first, perhaps, he might have thought of inflicting" (TMS VI.concl.3, p.263).

²⁷ "But while their narration is every moment interrupted by those natural bursts of passion which often seem almost to choak them in the midst of it (...)" (TMS I.iii.1.12, p.47).

vice in an abstract and general manner, the qualities by which they excite these several sentiments seem in a great measure to disappear, and the sentiments themselves become less obvious and discernible. (TMS IV.2.2, pp.187-8)

This is what a *case narration* provides: a specific context allowing the spectator/listener to particularize the general and vague idea communicated through words, determining the emotions' precise meaning.²⁸ The main issue here lies in determining how emotions can be transmitted through ordinary language—that is, through an artificial language based in conventional signs. The names of emotions, passions, and sentiments designate what Smith calls the “general idea,” which, at best, can only be suggested by gestures and bodily expressions (TMS I.i.1.8, p.11) or the “general features” of them:

To distinguish these, requires no nice observation: a very delicate attention, on the contrary, is necessary to discover their variations: every body takes notice of the former; scarce any body observes the latter. (TMS VII.iii.3.13, p.324)

Despite its variations, a general emotional feature is easily grasped and correctly designated by its name. All the difficulty lies, therefore, in the apprehension and transmission of its variations. To communicate them requires “both a delicate and an accurate pencil” (TMS VII.iv.4, p.328) capable of transmitting even the invisible:

It is impossible by language to express, if I may say so, the invisible features of all the different modifications of passion as they show themselves within. There is no other way of marking and distinguishing them from one another, but by describing the effects which they produce without, the alterations which they occasion in the countenance, in the air and external behaviour, the resolutions they suggest, the actions they prompt to. (TMS VII.iv.5, pp.328-9)

In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Smith labels this strategy an “indirect method” of description (LRBL p.68 and ss.; p.75 and ss.), used mainly by ancient moralists in their ethics treatises (TMS VII.iv.3 and 8, pp.328-9). Success depends on the states of mind of both narrator and listener (ideally, they both should be tranquil) and the type of passion to be communicated. Passions comes in endless forms,²⁹ but the

²⁸ Smith's epistemology operates in a similar fashion. In his *History of Astronomy* he presents three sentiments: surprise, wonder, and admiration. He states their general idea in the first paragraph (EPS, p.33), but the particular admiration and wonder commanded by the several astronomical systems, lastly and especially those commanded by the Newtonian system, demand that one properly grasp the narrative of the entire history of astronomy.

²⁹ “The different passions all proceed in like manner from different states of mind and outward circumstances. But it would be both endless and useless to go thro' all these different affections and passions

general picture of emotional communication can be drawn from the interaction between situation (external fortuitous cause), emotional reaction (internal effects), the agent's countenance and action (immediate external effects), and spectators' judgments (mediate external effects). This is a two-way interaction (from the external to the internal and vice versa), unfolding in a self-referential way (former interactions determine subsequent interactions).

Smith's properly moral writings are grounded in these comings and goings between external and internal. A particularly good example can be found in the first paragraph of the chapter "Of the origin of ambition, and of the distinction of ranks." There, Smith describes the effects of poverty and wealth in a chain starting with the external, continuing with the internal, and returning to the external. He starts by pointing out that the difference between poverty and wealth (external cause) is not access to useful objects capable of satisfying human needs (first external effect), as even "The wages of the meanest labourer can supply them." But the effects upon spectators, "To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation," are the true external effects that those searching for wealth seek:

The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world (...). At the thought of this, his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him, and he is fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for all the other advantages it procures him. The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. . (TMS I.iii.2.1, pp.50-1)

The external effects quickly resume their place in the foreground, qualified:

The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. (...) [Spectators] turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them. (...) The man of rank and distinction, on the contrary, is observed by all the world. Every body is eager to look at him, and to conceive, at least by sympathy, that joy and exultation with which his circumstances naturally inspire him. His actions are the objects of the public care. (ibidem, p.51)

in this manner. It would be endless, because tho the simple passions are of no great number, yet these are so compounded in different manners as to make a number of mixt ones almost infinite" (LRBL, p.69).

The description of cases such as this one can be achieved through this indirect method only if it is followed by the spectator's imaginary effort of "bringing the case home to himself" or of "put[ting himself] (...) in his case"³⁰ (TMS I.i.1.10, p.12). This is how ordinary language can help sympathetic imagination represent "to us what would be our own, if we were in his case" (TMS I.i.1.2, p.9). Evidently, this applies only to the paradigmatic situation where the person principally concerned and the spectator want to sympathize.

However, there are situations when the emotional communication can happen through language without the conscientious intention of those involved:

An unguarded word from a friend will occasion a more durable uneasiness. The agony which this creates is by no means over with the word. What at first disturbs us is not the object of the senses, but the idea of the imagination. As it is an idea, therefore, which occasions our uneasiness, till time and other accidents have in some measure effaced it from our memory, the imagination continues to fret and rankle within, from the thought of it. (TMS I.ii.1.8, p.29)

In situations like these, words act as a spark generating a huge fire due to the listener's uncontrolled imaginary activity. The double role of language in sympathy operations is clearly stated here, both where it works (the suggestive capacity of words: a general emotional idea is transmitted) and where it does not work (the context capable of particularizing this general idea is not transmitted, leaving space that the listener's imagination will fill up in its own way). The danger is particularly relevant when the receptive imagination is an idle one (see 4.11).

A last important aspect of Smith's concerns while dealing with the language role in sympathy's operation consists of a search for the adequate style of moral writing. Some commentators and critics have even considered *Theory* more a work of literature than philosophy.³¹ Indeed, the indirect style is used likewise in literature (Homer, Virgil,

³⁰ Variations of these expressions can easily be found in *Theory*. I took as examples those of the first chapter.

³¹ Thomas Brown's opinion is paradigmatic: "Profound in thought, it exhibits, even when it is most profound, an example of the graces with which a sage imagination knows how to adorn the simple and majestic form of science, that is severe and cold, only to those who are themselves cold and severe, – as in those very graces, it exhibits, in like manner, an example of the reciprocal embellishment which imagination receives from the sober dignity of truth. In its minor details and illustrations, indeed, it may be considered as presenting a model of philosophical beauty, (...). It is chiefly in its minor analyses, however, that I conceive the excellence of this admirable work to consist. Its leading doctrine I am far from admitting" (Lectures on the Philosophy of Mind, LXXX, in Mizuta, 2002, p.245). See also Daniel Dewar's comment: "The last system of morals to which I shall allude is that of Dr. Smith, as expounded in his theory of Moral Sentiments, – a work, the fascinating eloquence of which is far above any eulogium of mine. In its minor details and illustrations, it is, perhaps, unrivalled in the depth of thought and philosophical beauty which are exhibited" (in Mizuta, 2002, p.269). James Bonar may have had them in mind when writing his *Adam Smith Among His Books*, a continuation of *The Tables Turned*—where Smith is questioned by a series of

Shakespeare, and Milton are some of the authors mentioned in Smith's rhetorical lectures), making it an instrument more appropriate to moral learning than dense, stoic treatises, especially for youngsters beginning in philosophy³² (TMS III.3.14, p.143).

7. Imagination's moral theater

Smith's moral theory is grounded in the agent-spectator relation. This relation structures morality as a theater³³, bringing to it a series of important consequences. First, due to the difference in kind between original and sympathetic emotions, the spectator will never feel the same as the agent. The insidious "secret consciousness" (TMS I.i.4.7, p.22) that, as spectators, we will never truly experience what the person principally concerned actually lives is always present and, together with the lesser intensity of the sympathetic response, reminds us how evanescent and fragile every attempt at sympathy is:

But, on the contrary, when we condole with our friends in their afflictions, how little do we feel, in comparison of what they feel? We sit down by them, we look at them, and while they relate to us

economists, including Malthus, Ricardo, Mill, and Marx. There, a character called the Victorian addresses Smith: "The carping critics do not blame your book on morals so much for its debt to others as for its pleasing style; they say it is rather literature than philosophy" (1931, p.34). Clyde Dankert also wrote on this topic: "*The Wealth of Nations* has also been regarded as a notable literary achievement, and over the years glowing tribute have often been paid to it on that score. (...) Smith's other book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, has likewise been acclaimed for its literary style. Shortly after the publication of the book, Edmund Burke declared that Smith's language 'is easy and spirited, and puts things before you in the fullest light; it is rather painting than writing.' Lord Brougham (...) speaks of 'The admirable felicity, and the inexhaustible variety of illustrations' in the book, and of 'The beauty of the illustrations, and the eloquence of the diction' found in it". Smith's style, he further states, is 'peculiarly good' and 'his diction is always appropriate and expressive'. Professor James McCosh also spoke of the eloquence of the book's language (which explains why it 'has commonly been a favorite with students')" (1974, pp.57-8). It is not hard to see how this kind of opinion (especially Brown and Dewar's) may have helped to build the view of Smith as a conservative economist: although (or even worse, because) beautifully written, Smith's moral book lack density, so we can set it aside and focus on what really matters, his economics. As Emma Rothschild showed, this myth started to take shape in the early 1800's, a side effect of British highly developed sensitivity against anything that resembled revolutionary ideas (2001, Chapter 2).

³² According to John Millar, one of Adam Smith's students at the University of Glasgow, Smith not only used literature in his classes but he defended it as the best way of introducing his students to moral philosophy: "The best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human mind, the most useful part of metaphysics, arises from an examination of the several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech, and from an attention to the principles of those literary compositions which contribute to persuasion or entertainment. By these arts [i.e., literature and rhetoric], every thing that we perceive or feel, every operation of our minds, is expressed and delineated in such a manner, that it may be clearly distinguished and remembered. There is, at the same time, no branch of literature more suited to youth at their first entrance upon philosophy than this, which lays hold of their taste and their feelings" (EPS, p.274).

³³ For more about the theatrical aspects, see Marshall (1986) and Griswold (1999, pp.63-70). For more about the rhetorical dimension of Smith's moral philosophy, see McKenna (2001), Griswold (1999, pp.59-63), and Fleischaker (2002, pp.12-5).

the circumstances of their misfortune, we listen to them with gravity and attention. But while their narration is every moment interrupted by those natural bursts of passion which often seem almost to choke them in the midst of it; how far are the languid emotions of our hearts from keeping time to the transports of theirs? We may be sensible, at the same time, that their passion is natural, and no greater than what we ourselves might feel upon the like occasion. We may even inwardly reproach ourselves with our own want of sensibility, and perhaps, on that account, work ourselves up into an artificial sympathy, which, however, when it is raised, is always the slightest and most transitory imaginable; and generally, as soon as we have left the room, vanishes, and is gone for ever. (TMS I.iii.1.12, p.47)

Even if Smith points out that society demands only original and sympathetic emotion to harmonize, not to be unisons (TMS I.i.4.7, p.22), this gap can only be surmounted if the spectator recreates the personality of the agent. A comparison with Hume more easily illustrates this:

It is but a weak subterfuge, when pressed by these facts and arguments, to say that we transport ourselves, by the force of imagination, into distant ages and countries, and consider the advantage which we should have reaped from these characters, had we been contemporaries, and had any commerce with the persons. It is not conceivable how a *real* sentiment or passion can ever arise from a known *imaginary* interest, especially when our *real* interest is still kept in view, and is often acknowledged to be entirely distinct from the imaginary, and even sometimes opposite to it. (EPM V.i.13, p.36—italics by the author)

For Smith, on the other hand, when we read about the deeds and actions of great men:

In imagination we become the very person whose actions are represented to us: we transport ourselves in fancy to the scenes of those distant and forgotten adventures, and imagine ourselves acting the part of a Scipio or a Camillus, a Timoleon or an Aristides. (TMS II.i.5.3, p.75)

One of the biggest differences between Humean and Smithian sympathy is this requirement for personalization: Smith's sympathy demands the creation of an imaginary character or the imaginary duplication of the person principally concerned (with whom the spectator may identify). According to Smith, even if the person principally concerned is present right in front of them, spectators do not have direct access to that person's emotions; they can only represent them through imagination. Representation is necessary even when its object (the agent's emotion) is present. Morality exists only through spectators' effort to place themselves in the action, imagining themselves as actors in the scene they watch; hence the centrality of the notion of *character* (not only to the practical

part of Smith's moral philosophy³⁴ but also to the speculative one): Morality depends on the (imaginary) construction of characters that subjects try to represent (see 3.6). Immediate sensory experience is not able to "carry us beyond our own person"; imagination, on the contrary, can:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (TMS I.i.1.2, p.9)

Smith's answer to Hume's question (How is it possible for a real emotion to arise from an imaginary interest?) is the following: As the spectator forms an imaginary identification with the person principally concerned, the first can grasp what the latter feels.³⁵

But though sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize. When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession, should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change person and characters.³⁶ (TMS VII.iii.1.4, p.317)

Just as an actor becomes the character she plays (but without ever losing consciousness of herself), the Smithian spectator must renounce her personality (at least momentarily), be curious and concerned (to gather the relevant subjective and objective data), and take the time needed (to assume the agent's character and analyze what comes from there). This is the only way to achieve this identification.³⁷ As the natural and 'normal' operation of our external senses hides an enormous metaphysical apparatus of

³⁴ See Hanley (2009).

³⁵ The footnote answering Hume's remarks in the second edition of *Theory* appears just before a phrase about how difficult it is to control our sympathy while watching a tragedy: "When we attend to the representation of a tragedy, we struggle against that sympathetic sorrow which the entertainment inspires as long as we can, and we give way to it at last only when we can no longer avoid it: we even then endeavour to cover our concern from the company" (TMS I.iii.1.9, p.46).

³⁶ This passage concludes the argumentation against the idea that sympathy could be seen as some sort of byproduct of egoism and stresses (perhaps in an excessive manner) the point. It is the description of the extreme case of complete sympathy. The radicalism of the example (an only son's death) also points in that direction. In 'normal' cases of sympathy, what can be seen is a weaker identification, or a quasi-identification.

³⁷ In the next chapter, the conditions for this identification will be analyzed and it will be seen why it is an almost impossible task.

idea association (see 1.2), the natural mechanism of sympathy also hides complex imaginary operations involving the reading of a situation and the person principally concerned's emotional response by the spectator (and vice versa). The comparison with Hume is once again illuminating:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd. (THN 1.4.6.4, p.253)

Hume employs the metaphor of the theater apropos the operations of the mind, but it can be extended to the moral field through the analogy he establishes between sympathy and understanding:

What is principally remarkable in this whole affair is the strong confirmation these phaenomena give to the foregoing system concerning the understanding, and consequently to the present one concerning the passions; since these are analogous to each other. 'Tis indeed evident, that when we sympathize with the passions and sentiments of others, these movements appear at first in our mind as mere ideas, and are conceiv'd to belong to another person, as we conceive any other matter of fact. 'Tis also evident, that the ideas of the affections of others are converted into the very impressions they represent, and that the passions arise in conformity to the images we form of them. (...) In sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression. (THN 2.1.11.8, pp.319-20)

For Hume, affections are in constant motion, traveling from one person to another, in a flux gradually losing strength, each sympathetic duplication being fainter than the preceding. Smith's problem is the opposite: Emotions and passions do not immediately flow from person to person. On the contrary, sympathy demands effort—in most cases, conscious and from both involved. Furthermore, Smith does not question bodily data (above all tactile data) the same way Hume does; at the same time, he is more incisive about the difficulties involved in the emotional sharing process. In a sense, Smith questions the idea of emotional contagion:

That imaginary change of situation, upon which their [i.e., spectators'] sympathy is founded, is but momentary. The thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferers, continually intrudes itself upon them; and though it does not hinder them from conceiving

a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer, hinders them from conceiving any thing that approaches the same degree of violence. The person principally concerned is sensible of this, and at the same time passionately desires a more complete sympathy. (TMS I.i.4.7, pp.21-2)

If, on the one hand, society demands little more than the “concord” between original and sympathetic passions, and not perfect “unison” (ibidem), and on the other, nature offers a possible solution,³⁸ this does not diminish the problem set up by Smith. It only shows how robust human nature is, being able to find more than one solution to this kind of problem (see 5.1-2), and even prescinding of the ideal solution to develop into society. Only the person principally concerned can fully solve this problem by sympathizing with the spectator because there the gap is surmountable, as the sympathetic emotion is thoroughly imaginary. This does not make the process simpler, because, besides the theoretical skills describe above, the agent must command himself/herself to act according to spectators’ judgments. A central aspect of this solution is the awareness of the spectator’s eye (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22). In a way, the vector spectator → agent implies the dynamics of surveillance.³⁹ As seen above, the expectation of sympathy differs according to the affective proximity of the spectators present (from the friendliest to the furthest), and therefore the moral evaluation process is the characteristic unifying them. Sentiments also differ in the degree of self-command demanded from the agent in her emotional display (more free when facing family and friends, more cool when facing strangers) (TMS I.i.4.10, p.23). The moral theater demands specific acting techniques from those willing to become a part of the show.

Likewise, every theater demands a degree of fiction. The fictional character of moral sentiments is clearly described in two complementary moments. First, our sympathy with the dead is an extreme case that Smith calls an “illusion of the imagination” (TMS I.i.1.13, p.13). Spectators display an “illusory sympathy” with the resentment this dead person would feel if he had survived his own murder and sought justice or even revenge (TMS II.i.2.5, pp.70-1). Second, some wise and virtuous men, capable of “anticipat[ing] the applause and admiration” due to their good conduct, even

³⁸ “In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectator to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators. As they are continually placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it” (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22).

³⁹ See, for instance, Bender (1987). For an interpretation based on Michel Foucault, see Forman-Barzilai (2010, pp.75-105). In a somewhat confused paper, Khalil tries to deduce Smith’s self-command from his criticism of Hume’s theory of sympathy (2010).

if there is no real spectator to do so, are capable, therefore, of overcoming the fear of death (TMS III.2.5, p.116). The extreme case here is the Stoic (TMS VII.ii.1.27), capable of justifying suicide through a “refinement of philosophy” (TMS VII.ii.1.34). If the case of sympathy with the dead implies spectators’ imaginative powers of resurrecting a person principally concerned, the Stoic wisdom implies the person principally concerned’s power of imagining an audience for herself—there is an excess point here, of the Stoic “coxcomb” (TMS III.3.14) that achieves the “complete enjoyment of his own self-applause” (TMS III.3.27, p.148). This is sympathetic imagination at the height of its powers: animating an imaginary agent or creating an equally imaginary audience. The audience must also be suited according to this requirement: Moral subjects must create not a diffuse audience but *an* impartial spectator.⁴⁰

My hypothesis is that this requirement accrues from the difference between impression and ideas (Hume) or between original and sympathetic emotions (Smith).⁴¹
To Hume:

All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call Impressions and Ideas. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only, those which arise from the

⁴⁰ Smith demands precisely what scares Theophrastus Such: “My illusion is of a more liberal kind, and I imagine a far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage, as in a picture of Paradise, making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which I myself particularly enjoy the writing. The haze is a necessary condition. If any physiognomy becomes distinct in the foreground, it is fatal. The countenance is sure to be one bent on discountenancing my innocent intentions: it is pale-eyed, incapable of being amused when I am amused or indignant at what makes me indignant; it stares at my presumption, pities my ignorance, or is manifestly preparing to expose the various instances in which I unconsciously disgrace myself. I shudder at this too corporeal auditor, and turn towards another point of the compass where the haze is unbroken” (Eliot, 2007, pp.12-3).

⁴¹ In my opinion the best, although too synthetic, interpretation of the differences between Hume’s and Smith’s theories of sympathy is Haakonssen (1981, pp.45-9). Fleischaker resumed this question in a recent paper: “To use shorthand, Hume has a ‘contagion’ account of sympathy, while Smith has a ‘projection’ account of it” (2012, p.276). The problem with this characterization is that it ignores some passages where Hume clearly presents sympathy as the result of imaginary projection: “’Tis certain, that sympathy is not always limited to the present moment, but that we often feel by communication the pains and pleasures of others, which are not in being, and which we only anticipate by the force of imagination. (...) Sympathy being nothing but a lively idea converted into an impression, ’tis evident, that, in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern; and by that means be sensible of pains and pleasures, which neither belong to ourselves, nor at the present instant have any real existence” (THN 2.2.9.13, p.385-6).

sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion. (THN 1.1.1.1, p.1)

Hume uses his epistemological terminology in the moral field because of an economy of principles.⁴² For instance, take his first explanation of how sympathy works:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection. (THN 2.1.11.3, p.317)

By performing a role analogous to understanding, begetting a belief similar to that of causality, sympathy acts as a mechanism differentiating between reality and fiction on the moral field.⁴³ It would suffice to see the little esteem Smith had for the term *belief* to suspect that his theory of sympathy works in entirely different ways.⁴⁴ “The quite different modification” yielded by this variation “in kind” is grounded in that “secret consciousness that the change of situations, from which the sympathetic sentiment arises, is but imaginary” (TMS I.i.4.7, p.22). If, from the affective intensity point of view, the result appears to be the same (sympathetic emotions are less vivid and intense than the original ones, as ideas are feebler and duller than impressions), this does not mean that Smith agrees with Hume but quite the opposite: He offers a different explanation for this fact, an explanation that, as was seen, he intends to be more comprehensive, so that it does not get carried away by the first impression.

In order to achieve this original emotional reaction, spectators must recreate not only the situation but also the personality of the person principally concerned.⁴⁵ The comparison with Hume again clarifies this demand of personalization: If for the historian-philosopher sympathy is the soul of passions (THN 2.2.5.14, p.363), for the economist-

⁴² For more about this, see Suzuki (1999).

⁴³ “Quer dizer, esse ato, em que a realidade se apresenta mais sólida, firme e estável, constante do que qualquer produto arbitrário ou imaginativo é um ato ligado ao sentimento; ou, inversamente, o sentimento é o índice de estabilização, de firmeza e constância do real. É nele, e não em algum raciocínio, que se conhece o nexos mental, a sucessão dos pensamentos, exprime a coerência própria das coisas” (Suzuki, 2014, p.207).

⁴⁴ “That, notwithstanding this reduction, the value of silver has, during the course of the present century, begun to rise somewhat in the European market, the facts and arguments which have been alleged above, dispose me to believe, or more properly to suspect and conjecture; for the best opinion which I can form upon this subject scarce, perhaps, deserves the name of belief” (WN I.xi.h.11, p.233).

⁴⁵ Which, strictly speaking, only God is able to do: “Sentiments, designs, affections, though it is from these that according to cool reason human actions derive their whole merit or demerit, are placed by the great Judge of hearts beyond the limits of every human jurisdiction, and are reserved for the cognizance of his own unerring tribunal” (TMS II.iii.3.2, p.104). This passage will be revisited and commented on in the last sections of Chapter 4.

philosopher the soul must be lodged in a person's dead body—that is, a full character must be imaginarily created in order to be resurrected (TMS I.i.2.13, p.13). It is not enough, therefore, to say what is felt; one must also narrate the experience, relieving it whilst communicating, in order to be able to properly communicate it.⁴⁶

To Smith, if we want to truly sympathize, we must, in Fernando Pessoa's terms, transform our affections into a sort of literature, as “São intransmissíveis todas as impressões salvo se as tornamos literárias.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “The novel element in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Sentimental Journey*, considered together, was not the subject-matter of sympathy. Nor was their exhibition of the mechanical and egoistic character of sympathy altogether new, as reference to Mr. Crane's study of the Latitudinarians would demonstrate. What does seem remarkable in this work of Adam Smith and Sterne is their consideration of morality in the language of the imagination. Theirs was an image approach to behaviour, an approach which generally seems to point not backwards but forwards, towards the romantic and the modern periods” (Maclean, 1949, p.410).

⁴⁷ *Livro do desassossego*, 266 (p.329). A translation would sound something like this: “Impressions cannot be transmitted/communicated unless we make them literary/transform them in literature.” Fernando Pessoa took seriously certain themes and aspects of eighteenth-century medicine and philosophy (see Suzuki, 2015).

Chapter 3 – Partiality and impartiality

No man can know his brother simply as a spectator.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*

There is no action possible without a little acting.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), *Daniel Deronda*

1. The problem of partiality

Smith's moral theater demands an imaginary duplication of primary emotions and passions, allowing the affective commerce¹ to take place, and yet this primary and spontaneous emotional reaction, deeply rooted in the body and highly individual, appears as a parameter to determine the propriety or impropriety of these socialized sentiments. Perhaps this is what Smith had in mind when making metaphorical yet still resonant use of the term *substance* in the moral field:

EVERY man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations; the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance; the latter the shadow. (TMS VI.ii.1.1, p.219)

This passage is central to understanding Smith's individualism. The text on the external senses shows that data gathered by the sense of touch (the sole external sense providing imagination and understanding with perceptions, and not only preconceptions, of externality and external objects) correct data gathered by the other senses (regarding externality and external objects). Thus, Smith's comparison suggests that the primary emotional reaction of the person principally concerned must play the same role regarding the internal senses, correcting, or perhaps regulating, moral judgments (especially those pertaining to propriety).

¹ Yorick, the "sentimental traveler," speaks even of a "balance of sentimental commerce," always unfavorable to the traveler of foreign lands because of the difficulties with language, education, habits, and customs: "he must buy what he has little occasion for, at their own price; his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large discount, and this, by the by, eternally driving him into the hands of more equitable brokers, for such conversation as he can find, it requires no great spirit of divination to guess at his party" (Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, Preface – In the Desobligeant).

Grounding moral speculations in the individual begets two peculiar and intermingled problems that moral judgments must overcome: egoism and partiality. Hume furnishes a good starting point:

Now it appears, that in the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confin'd to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintance; and 'tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons. This partiality, then, and unequal affection, must not only have an influence on our behaviour and conduct in society, but even on our ideas of vice and virtue; so as to make us regard any remarkable transgression of such a degree of partiality, either by too great an enlargement, or contraction of the affections, as vicious and immoral. (THN 3.2.2.8, p.488)

Hume is clear: My attention and regard do not apply the same degree of intensity to all their objects. There are privileged objects, one of which stands out: myself. The attention I give myself provides a good first approach to egoism. Next, there are some objects (family and friends, but also objects I possess or want) demanding almost as much attention as myself. This is partiality, or, more correctly, these are the objects to which I am most partial, one of the extreme points in the scale of partiality. On the other extreme, there are objects to which I am entirely indifferent and, between them, a possibly infinite set of degrees, approaching a continuum as more cases are included. The first important conclusion: both partiality and egoism are opposed to indifference.²

The relation between egoism and partiality is a little more complicated. In Hume's passage, he seems to take egoism as a particular case of partiality. Egoism is partiality concerning myself, the apex of partiality: I am the object demanding the most attention, being the object closely related to myself. Since partiality is an unavoidable trait of human nature, I must become conscious of it and search for a less restrictive perspective, considering points of view other than my own, in order to correct it. In a word, I must search for impartiality, as, solving this last problem, egoism would also be correct (to aim solely for this last one would be to deal with only a part of the problem). Here is a second important conclusion: Regarding the correcting moral judgments, impartiality is the true solution.³

² There is a third possibility: objects toward which I show hostility or antipathy. Antipathy will be discussed in relation to resentment (see 4.1).

³ This is not the only possible scheme. It is possible to establish an inverse relation: partiality as a kind of byproduct of egoism. Locke offers a good example of this possibility. In his *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, he points out that "self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends" (1690, §13). Mandeville's "ingenious sophistry" also reduces everything to egoism through vanity, including partial reasoning (TMS VII.ii.4.7, p.308). In both these formulations, egoism is a more general problem than partiality.

Smith agrees with Hume on this topic, and partiality is one of the main issues around which his theory of moral sentiments turns:

We may judge of the propriety or impropriety of the sentiments of another person by their correspondence or disagreement with our own, upon two different occasions; either, first, when the objects which excite them are considered without any peculiar relation, either to ourselves or to the person whose sentiments we judge of; or, secondly, when they are considered as peculiarly affecting one or other of us. (TMS I.i.4.1, p.19)

Perhaps the main reason for this is that they both formulate a theory of moral judgments based on the character of the spectator and not of the agent or person principally concerned. Egoism acquires full force when agents' motives are analyzed. Involved in a situation demanding a prompt answer, the individual's emotional reaction appears as the most important (if not the sole) parameter, overshadowing other possible criteria or points of view, because of the violence of its emergence. The greater vivacity of the agent's emotional reaction is, perhaps, the most important reason for the theoretical shift toward the spectator: The spectator (by definition) is not involved in the situation (or case) and thus not overwhelmed by the arising of emotions or passions like the person principally concerned.

This is why the biggest problem a moral theory based on spectators' judgments has to deal with is partiality and not egoism. If the spectator has an immediate or direct interest in the case, she stops being a spectator and becomes an agent. By definition, a spectator is not involved in the situation and cannot be an egoist; she can only be partial to someone (or some of those) involved in it. Kinship or friendship ties have a direct influence over spectators' judgments whenever family or friends are involved. Regarding their moral judgments, partiality becomes the main issue.

2. Habit: Partiality and precision

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, partiality presents the same characteristics, designating proximity and attention of spectators concerning family and friends. *Concern* and *regard* are the two terms Smith employs when dealing with these aspects. They

circumscribe this preference toward others in the affective dimension⁴ and are the result of the habitual exercise of sympathy:

What is called affection, is in reality nothing but habitual sympathy. Our concern in the happiness or misery of those who are the objects of what we call our affections; our desire to promote the one, and to prevent the other; are either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy, or the necessary consequences of that feeling. Relations being usually placed in situations which naturally create this habitual sympathy, it is expected that a suitable degree of affection should take place among them.⁵ (TMS VI.ii.1.7, p.220; TSM, p.276)

The recurrence of situations centered on a small group of people where the sympathetic imagination currently operates is the origin of affective relationships among family and friends. To work properly, sympathy demands proximity between agent and spectator (in the simplest cases, the situation must occur in the visual field of the spectator or in the space of a conversation⁶). The reiteration of physical or spatial proximity begets affective proximity. This constant sympathetic exercise in a limited environment acquires the character of habit.

If this were the only difficulty to be overcome regarding partiality, the solution would be easy: In order to achieve a correct judgment, it would be enough to search for the greatest affective distance possible.⁷ A stranger, without any affective connection to the person(s) principally concerned would always be the better judge.⁸ However,

⁴ The main difference between these two terms and the term *interest* is that the last is cognitive, based on knowledge, and the first are affective, based on sentiments. I like the term *preference* in dealing with partiality, especially if we qualify it as an affective preference.

⁵ This passage comes after the one that initiated this chapter—demonstrating that, to Smith, egoism and partiality are closely connected—and refers to the Stoics (TMS VI.ii.1.1). In discussing this topic, Forman-Barzilai goes as far as the *oikeiōsis* (οἰκείωσις) from Heracles and Cicero: “The word *oikeiōsis* derives from the Greek root *oikos*, which referred in ancient democratic life to the private realm of the household as opposed to the public realm of the polis. *Oikeiōsis* was a Stoic extrapolation from the familiarity one develops over time with those who inhabit the *oikos*, with those who share one’s physical space. When offered as a more general account of the nature of human affection, *oikeiōsis* described a phenomenon of fading or weakening sentiment that corresponds to an increase in physical distance and a corresponding lack of familiarity. Thus, the Stoics mapped our affections concentrically, claiming that the circles of affection weaken as our object radiates further from the self” (2005, p.200).

⁶ Smith’s theory also aims to deal with our sympathy for historical and fictitious characters, who cannot be observed firsthand.

⁷ Someone born and educated in a pre-civilized society would always be a good choice for a judge: “The spectators express the same insensibility; the sight of so horrible an object [i.e., torture and death of an enemy tribe’s warrior made prisoner] seems to make no impression upon them” (TMS V.2.9, p.206).

⁸ This appears to be the most important criterion retained by Amartya Sen: “No caso da ‘imparcialidade fechada, o processo de fazer juízos imparciais invoca apenas os membros de dada sociedade ou nação (...), para quem os juízos estão sendo feitos. (...) Em contrapartida, no caso da imparcialidade aberta, o processo de fazer avaliações imparciais pode (e em alguns casos deve) invocar juízos, entre outros, de fora do grupo focal, para evitar o viés paroquial. No famoso uso de Adam Smith do dispositivo do ‘espectador imparcial’, a exigência de imparcialidade requer, como ele explica em *Teoria dos sentimentos morais*, que sejam

partiality is one of those equivocal notions: As seen in the last chapter, sympathizing with someone demands knowledge about the situation (this becomes even more important when emotions such as anger or resentment are at stake). It is highly unlikely that a total stranger would trouble himself with the effort needed to gather all the evidence and data necessary to formulate proper propriety judgments (or, more generally, well-weighted judgments). Besides, spectators must take into account the agent's emotional response, which demands knowledge about his individual, subjective characteristics. Here, there is nothing like longtime familiarity: A mother, for instance, might correctly predict her child's feelings about certain situations⁹; the same thing happens with sibling relationships and longstanding friendships. Due to repeated sympathetic exercise regarding family and friends, it is possible to have a fairly accurate grasp of their character, as well as to quite clearly 'read' their reactions to the most varied situations:

After himself, the members of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affections. They are naturally and usually the persons upon whose happiness or misery his conduct must have the greatest influence. He is more habituated to sympathize with them. He knows better how every thing is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. (TMS VI.ii.1.2, p.219)

The closer spectators are to the person principally concerned, the more accurate and precise their judgments will be. This proximity might be understood in at least three different senses.¹⁰ The first is physical proximity (in both spatial and temporal dimensions),¹¹ allowing spectators to actually watch a situation, carefully grasping the circumstances and regarding the external manifestation of the agent's emotional reaction to them—in a word, allowing them to see the particularities of the 'case.' Second is the affective proximity of the spectator to the person principally concerned, providing the interest and time necessary for the spectator to gather all (objective and subjective) data and sympathetically reflect upon them. However, this affective proximity begets a

invocados juízos desinteressados de 'qualquer espectador justo e imparcial', não necessariamente (na verdade, por vezes idealmente não) pertencentes ao grupo focal" (2011, p.153).

⁹ At the height of her powers, a mother might become like Augusta Willemsens, countess of Brandon, regarding her daughters: "Leur mère avait comme une prévoyance électrique de leurs désirs, de leurs douleurs, les prévenant, les calmant sans cesse" (Balzac, *La Grenadière*).

¹⁰ See Forman-Barzilai (2005, 2011).

¹¹ Unlike the agent, overvaluing the present over the future, "The spectator does not feel the solicitations of our present appetites. To him the pleasure which we are to enjoy a week hence, or a year hence, is just as interesting as that which we are to enjoy this moment" (TMS IV.2.8, p.189). This is an important issue in Smith's discussions of the virtue of prudence.

sympathetic emotion that “approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself” (ibidem)—that is, an intense and vivacious sympathetic emotion, the closest any spectator can get to the original one. This is an equivocal result: On the one hand, this vivacity allows for a smother operation of sympathy; on the other, it brings the spectator too close to the agent, clouding her reasoning as if she were the agent. Third, affective proximity crystallizes in a historical or cultural proximity, supporting all sorts of communitarian engagement. The equivocality of its basis persists: Community ties are essential to human beings, providing society with an emotional groundwork; however, they can easily slide in all sorts of factions and sects (TMS III.3.42-3), in a strange sort of social group that mimics solitude¹²:

In solitude, we are apt to feel too strongly whatever relates to ourselves: we are apt to over-rate the good offices we may have done, and the injuries we may have suffered: we are apt to be too much elated by our own good, and too much dejected by our own bad fortune. (TMS III.3.38, p.153)

This self-overestimation (because of the high intensity and vivacity level of one’s own emotions) may easily be extended to those close by (in the three meanings described above), and it normally results from the habit of sympathizing with those near us. This is reminiscent of the fable attributed to Aesop in which a mother owl’s opinion that her offspring are the cutest in the forest is not shared by the eagle who eats them. The model to correct this self-overestimation is, once again, visual, and it is where Smith develops his analogy between external and internal senses through the metaphorical notion of an eye of the mind:

As to the eye of the body, objects appear great or small, not so much according to their real dimensions, as according to the nearness or distance of their situation; so do they likewise to what may be called the natural eye of the mind: and we remedy the defects of both these organs pretty much in the same manner. (TMS III.iii.2, pp.134-5)

Unlike the model proposed in *Of the External Senses*, here Smith does not appeal to a corrective criterion external to vision (tactile data) but instead seeks to establish a purely visual model. This implicitly means that, in the moral field, there is no perception playing the same role the resistant ones play in the physical world: perceptions allowing (or perhaps even inducing) imagination to conceive of externality and external solid

¹² Smith opposes solitude and society (TMS III.3.25 and 29). The first can bring one both to a state of tranquility (TMS III.3.30) and to the edge of madness (TMS II.ii.2.3, p.84).

objects (another motive to be careful about Smith's metaphorical use of the notion of substance in the moral field, as seen in the beginning of the chapter; see next section). Here, on the other hand, the corrective process of visual distances appears as a search for exact proportion between objects of different visual sizes:

In my present situation an immense landscape of lawns, and woods, and distant mountains, seems to do no more than cover the little window which I write by, and to be out of all proportion less than the chamber in which I am sitting. I can form a just comparison between those great objects and the little objects around me, in no other way, than by transporting myself, at least in fancy, to a different station, from whence I can survey both at nearly equal distances, and thereby form some judgment of their real proportions. (ibidem)

If one cannot physically go to this vantage point to search for the object's real dimensions, one must do it imaginarily. Smith asserts that we do it almost effortlessly: "Habit and experience have taught me to do this so easily and so readily, that I am scarce sensible that I do it." It is only by studying the philosophy of vision that one becomes conscious of this process, with all the effort and metaphysics involved in these apparently simple visual operations (ibidem). In the next paragraph, the analogy is explicitly stated:

His interests, as long as they are surveyed from this station, can never be put into the balance with our own, can never restrain us from doing whatever may tend to promote our own, how ruinous soever to him. Before we can make any proper comparison of those opposite interests, we must change our position. We must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us. (TMS III.3.3, p.135)

Again, habit and experience have effaced this complex imaginary exercise, demanding "some degree of reflection, and even of philosophy, to convince us" of the operation of such a compensatory mechanism even in the simplest cases (ibidem).

3. Moral 'substance' and antinomical frame

Smith understands the notion of substance as an imaginary device created to organize the sensory field, by furnishing a frame capable of sustaining the amalgam of data provided by the five external senses. Thus, it allows for the distinction between external and internal worlds, and also allows for the inference of the existence of solid, independent, and finite objects, all from the resistance characteristics of tactile data (see

1.2). But what can the use of substance mean in the moral field? According to Smith, there is no moral sense, understood as a peculiar power of perception able to give us moral data. There is also no internal sense capable of providing immediate perceptions of someone else's feelings, emotions, or passions. The difference between original and sympathetic emotions, between feeling and fellow-feeling, is twofold, of kind and of intensity, and even the greatest conceivable partiality—that of parents toward their child (TMS VI.ii.1.3)—is not able to overcome this double gap:

Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations; the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance; the latter the shadow. (TMS VI.ii.1.1, p.219)

The imaginary quality and the lower degree of intensity of every sympathetic emotion render every moral judgment formulated by the spectator incomplete, falling behind what would be the desirable goal. On the other hand, the person principally concerned has access to his own emotional or moral “substance”—that is, his own primary emotional reactions. Thus, only the person principally concerned would be able to formulate a definitive (if not an absolute) moral judgment. The most important difficulty when judging oneself is partiality (TMS III.4.5, p.158). The immediacy and higher pitch of our own feelings and emotional reactions appear to be the physiological root of partiality as well as our tendency to overestimate ourselves. This problem is more explicit

When we are about to act (...). The violent emotions which at that time agitate us, discolour our views of things; even when we are endeavouring to place ourselves in the situation of another, and to regard the objects that interest us in the light in which they will naturally appear to him, the fury of our own passions constantly calls us back to our own place, where every thing appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love. (TMS III.4.3, p.157)

Taken by a whirl of feelings and emotions, the person principally concerned is unable to imaginarily exchange places with the spectator. The fury of her emotional reaction roots her in herself, drawing all her attention to it and changing her perception, magnifying and discoloring things. Smith calls this extreme scenario a “paroxysm of distress” (TMS III.4.3, p.157-8). He uses this term to describe the overwhelming force with which our sensibilities overtake us from time to time, as well as to draw the general antinomical framework for the speculative part of his moral theory.

(a.1) On the one hand, the person principally concerned is unable to objectively judge herself because of the immediacy and high pitch of her individual feelings and emotions.

(a.2) At the same time, she is the only one who has full access to this primary emotional reaction (her own moral ‘substance’) in its entirety.

(b.1) On the other hand, there is a spectator with the time and indifference necessary to collect and process all data available in order to achieve an impartial judgment.

(b.2) But without full access to the original feelings and emotions of the person principally concerned, the spectator must try to imagine himself in the agent’s place in order to achieve a sympathetic reaction. The more partial he is to the agent, the better his reaction will be; however, this proximity impairs his ability to judge impartially.

This is the antinomy Smith’s moral philosophy proposes. The solution presented in the last chapter (the person principally concerned telling her case to an interested listener) demands that the original emotion is subdued by the appearance of a second “reflected passion” that can be actually shared (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22). Nevertheless, Smith does propose a second solution, in which both poles are simultaneously affirmed: The person principally concerned internalizes the character of an impartial spectator. This way, Smith grounds both his consciousness and virtue theories.

4. Conscience as a tribunal

Spectators’ sympathetic experience (imagining themselves as agents) is doubled by the agent’s sympathetic experience (imagining herself as spectator of herself as agent).¹³ This double sympathetic experience allows the person principally concerned to internalize the spectator’s moral judgment dynamics in order to (well) judge herself. The agent must internalize not a partial spectator but an impartial one—that is, a spectator who has no particular relationship with anyone involved in the situation at hand. In a first approach, this means an indifferent spectator:

But we admire that noble and generous resentment which governs its pursuit, of the greatest injuries, not by the rage which they are apt to excite in the breast of the sufferer, but by the indignation which they naturally call forth in that of the impartial spectator; which allows no word, no gesture, to escape

¹³ “In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators. As they are continually placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it” (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22).

it beyond what this more equitable sentiment would dictate; which never, even in thought, attempts any greater vengeance, nor desires to inflict any greater punishment, than what every indifferent person would rejoice to see executed. (TMS I.i.5.4, p.24; cf. TMS II.i.2.1; II.ii.2.4; VI.ii.intro.2)

However, impartiality cannot be reduced to indifference in general; it must be equated only with the spectator's indifference. One of Smith's remarks is particularly clear about this. When presenting the unsociable passions (anger, resentment, etc.), Smith insists that, although they set people apart, they

are regarded as necessary parts of the character of human nature. A person becomes contemptible who tamely sits still, and submits to insults, without attempting either to repel or to revenge them. We cannot enter into his indifference and insensibility: we call his behaviour mean-spiritedness, and are as really provoked by it as by the insolence of his adversary. (TMS I.ii.3.3, pp.34-5)

There are situations where indifference toward oneself is a serious moral failure, making us aware of a possible confusion between the desirable spectator impartiality (to be internalized) and the blamable agent indifference toward his own emotions.¹⁴ An agent's indifference is too close to insensibility. It is praiseworthy whenever it is the expression of a high self-command (TMS I.ii.1.12), but only in situations where coolness and stolidity are indispensable to successfully completing an activity: For example, a surgeon, through experience, becomes insensible to the nausea caused by dissections or amputations (TMS I.ii.1.10). Spectators' insensibility, on the other hand, prevents the operations of sympathetic imagination, precluding all sorts of moral judgments.

Here, it is important to remember the distinction between theory and practice (see introduction). The spectator's indifference must be taken into account only insofar as the judgment process is at stake; it should never be taken as a role model or a desirable character trait. The character of an impartial spectator should be internalized so propriety judgments have a criterion, that is, a vantage point where the agent's emotions are put in their right proportion vis-à-vis other possible agents of the situation, from where they can be equalized. This is another way of stating the importance of our moral 'substance': Individuals must always take into account their own primary emotional reaction, either because we are entitled by nature to care for ourselves before everybody else (TMS

¹⁴ Indifference toward injuries committed against oneself is blamable not only from an individual point of view but also from a social one: As seen (1.7-8), resentment is the emotional basis of justice, and not to feel it (or not to act on it) brings detrimental effects not only to oneself but to the community in which one lives as a whole.

VI.ii.1.1) or because no one else is able to achieve it.¹⁵ The person principally concerned's original emotions should always be taken as a reference point, not a sole criterion, but whoever felt them initially must keep them in sight. At the same time, they should be relativized—that is, put in relation to other people's emotions in order to equalize them.

This may be achieved through the internalization of an impartial spectator, in a way that creates an imaginary “representative” (TMS VI.i.11, p.250) who is able to internally operate this equalization:

When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of: But that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible, as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect. (TMS III.1.6, p.113)

There are several important topics intermingled in this passage. First, the idea of two characters being represented (here, in the sense of an impersonation) by the person principally concerned directly refers to what can be called the theatrical nature of morality. The internalization of the character of a spectator yields a theatrical structure inside the subjectivity, where the self-judgment process has to be staged: The person principally concerned must appear in the character of an agent or actor, as if playing herself in a scene, in front of herself as the audience. Such an audience consists of only one character: the judge. A tribunal overlaps the moral theater.

Second, this implies a subjective division: In order to judge herself, the person principally concerned must divide herself (or even more emphatically, her self) into these two different characters of agent and judge. Thus, Smith presents the notion of a divided subjectivity, especially if the difficulties emphasized in the last sentence are taken seriously: From the spectator's side there is always the “secret consciousness” of not really being the agent, which prevents a complete identification between these characters

¹⁵ This may sound a little bit strange, but these purely individual emotions are the raw material upon which morality is built. They must be taken seriously and, perhaps (at least in some cases), even carefully nurtured.

(TMS I.i.4.7, p.22). It is important to highlight that this subjective division is between two “persons”. To Smith, it is not enough to internalize a point of view; it is necessary to imaginarily (re)create a full spectator/judge personality. It is not enough to imagine an impersonal vantage point, from which all emotions can be properly equalized; one must also imagine a full personality able to sustain this vantage point.¹⁶ Finally, that is also why the person principally concerned must “represent” these two characters, assuming these different personalities the same way an actor does when on stage, to impersonate them.

Third, this tribunal-theater sustaining a stage where ‘cases’ unfold—that is, where one of the characters performs an action while the other watches and judges—allows Smith to elaborate a moral theory capable of transcending a raw empiricism.¹⁷ By internalizing the character of an impartial spectator, the person principally concerned creates an “ideal man within the breast” (TMS III.3.26, p.147) or a “great demigod within the breast, the great judge and arbiter of conduct” (TMS VI.iii.25; VI.i.11; VI.ii.1.22) who provides him with a reference point allowing morality to transcend the empirical or “real” spectators’ judgments (TMS III.3.26, p.147):

MAN naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love. He naturally dreads, not only to be hated, but to be hateful; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of hatred. He desires, not only praise, but praise worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of praise. He dreads, not only blame, but blame-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be blamed by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of blame.
(TMS III.2.1, pp.113-4)

Smith is clear: “The love of praise-worthiness is by no means derived altogether from the love of praise” (TMS III.2.2, p.114). The difference between having your

¹⁶ This is one of the problems with Sen's reading of Smith (2011). Impartiality might even be understood as a sort of “view from nowhere” à la Thomas Nagel (1986, see also 1991), but Smith demands more—namely, the incarnation of this vision in a person. This is precisely what characterizes the morals of Jeanie Deans, the hero of Sir Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*: “But Jeannie, in the strict and severe tone of morality in which she was educated, had to consider not only the general aspect of a proposed action, but its justness and fitness in relation to the actor, before she could be, according to her own phrase, free to enter upon it” (chap. XXXIV). Smith demands this because a disembodied point of view is not able to take the particularities of the situation into account, simply because it does not have sensibility. The difference between an impartial point of view and an impartial spectator lies in the sensitive faculty of the spectator (this is the only way of guaranteeing “its justness and fitness in relation to the actor,” in the words of Scott). To internalize an impartial spectator implies internalizing the moral sensibility as well (which is possible solely because feeling what other people feel is a matter of imagination).

¹⁷ In the next chapter we will see that the staged scene seldom involves only one person; usually there are at least two principally concerned persons.

conduct approved and having your conduct liable to be (or worth being) approved is the internalization of the impartial spectator:

Emulation, the anxious desire that we ourselves should excel, is originally founded in our admiration of the excellence of others. Neither can we be satisfied with being merely admired for what other people are admired. We must at least believe ourselves to be admirable for what they are admirable. But, in order to attain this satisfaction, we must become the impartial spectators of our own character and conduct. We must endeavour to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. (TMS III.2.3, p.114)

From the representation (in the theatrical meaning discussed above) of the character of an imaginary spectator, the person principally concerned may be certain of the morality of her own conduct, even without any 'real spectator' around, thus obtaining satisfaction for her sense of propriety:

We are pleased, not only with praise, but with having done what is praise-worthy. We are pleased to think that we have rendered ourselves the natural objects of approbation, though no approbation should ever actually be bestowed upon us: and we are mortified to reflect that we have justly merited the blame of those we live with, though that sentiment should never actually be exerted against us. (TMS III.2.5, pp.115-6)

This is resumed and explained with this idea of the internalized impartial spectator as a judge and conscience as a tribunal:

But though man has, in this manner, been rendered the immediate judge of mankind, he has been rendered so only in the first instance; and an appeal lies from his sentence to a much higher tribunal, to the tribunal of their own consciences, to that of the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of the man within the breast, the great judge and arbiter of their conduct. (TMS III.2.32, p.130)

The principle of this second-instance tribunal is different from that of the first instance, formed by real spectators:

The jurisdiction of the man without, is founded altogether in the desire of actual praise, and in the aversion to actual blame. The jurisdiction of the man within, is founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness, and in the aversion to blame-worthiness; in the desire of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we love and admire in other people; and in the dread of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we hate and despise in other people. (ibidem, p.131)

Conscience is to be found halfway between the real spectators and that “still higher tribunal, to that of the all-seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived, and whose judgments can never be perverted” (TMS III.2.33, p.131). In fact, this happens because the internalized impartial spectator has a double nature, which appears more clearly in moments when his authority is shaken:

In such cases, this demigod within the breast appears, like the demigods of the poets, though partly of immortal, yet partly too of mortal extraction. When his judgments are steadily and firmly directed by the sense of praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness, he seems to act suitably to his divine extraction: But when he suffers himself to be astonished and confounded by the judgments of ignorant and weak man, he discovers his connexion with mortality, and appears to act suitably, rather to the human, than to the divine, part of his origin. (TMS III.2.32, p.131)

The internalization of an impartial spectator offers morality a non-empirical foundation only insofar as conscience is assured of itself.¹⁸ Obviously, the degree of self-assurance varies from person to person, but Smith insists on some external limitations, especially those set by the intensity of empirical approbation or disapprobation: “the man within seems sometimes, as it were, astonished and confounded by the vehemence and clamour of the man without” (ibidem). The truth is the man within is never perfectly insulated; his mortal half is always watching, ready to remember the subject of his own limits.

In any case, conscience’s judgments, this second-instance tribunal’s decision, this internal satisfaction, is the foundation of Smith’s virtue theory:

The love of just fame, of true glory, even for its own sake, and independent of any advantage which he can derive from it, is not unworthy even of a wise man. He sometimes, however, neglects, and even despises it; and he is never more apt to do so than when he has the most perfect assurance of the perfect propriety of every part of his own conduct. His self-approbation, in this case, stands in need of no confirmation from the approbation of other men. It is alone sufficient, and he is contented with it. This self-approbation, if not the only, is at least the principal object, about which he can or ought to be anxious. The love of it, is the love of virtue. (TMS III.2.8, p.117)

¹⁸ “If the man without should applaud us, either for actions which we have not performed, or for motives which had no influence upon us; the man within can immediately humble that pride and elevation of mind which such groundless acclamations might otherwise occasion, by telling us, that as we know that we do not deserve them, we render ourselves despicable by accepting them. If, on the contrary, the man without should reproach us, either for actions which we never performed, or for motives which had no influence upon those which we may have performed; the man within may immediately correct this false judgment, and assure us, that we are by no means the proper objects of that censure which has so unjustly been bestowed upon us” (TMS III.2.32, p.131).

In the happy case of accord between the internalized impartial spectator and the real/empirical spectators, the person principally concerned attains the greatest conceivable happiness by acquiring an external confirmation of an internal belief (or an intersubjective proof of a subjective belief): “Their approbation necessarily confirms our own self-approbation. Their praise necessarily strengthens our own sense of our own praiseworthiness” (TMS III.2.3, p.114). In some cases this external approbation brings fame and glory to its object, and often brings together their external fortuitous advantages of wealth and power (see next chapter). Again, the important theoretical aspect is the idea of a social interaction confirming the operations of an internal sense. Here, the sense of the propriety of our own conduct—that is, our sense of our own praiseworthiness—is confirmed by the approbation of a real spectator’s approbation of our conduct.

However, this happy case of agreement between these two levels of approbation, of these two tribunals, warns us of the four possible disagreements:

(1) The person principally concerned may deserve praise but not actually receive it from real spectators, a situation that may still give him some comfort because “he anticipates the applause and admiration” he would be entitled to if a real spectator had access to all the data necessary,

which he knows are the natural and ordinary effects of such conduct, which his imagination strongly connects with it, and which he has acquired a habit of conceiving as something that naturally and in propriety ought to follow from it. Men have voluntarily thrown away life to acquire after death a renown which they could no longer enjoy. Their imagination, in the mean time, anticipated that fame which was in future times to be bestowed upon them. Those applauses which they were never to hear rung in their ears; the thoughts of that admiration, whose effects they were never to feel, played about their hearts, banished from their breasts the strongest of all natural fears, and transported them to perform actions which seem almost beyond the reach of human nature. (TMS III.2.5, p.116)

Subjective certainty allows the agent to anticipate future sentiments—in this case, approbation. This is a particularly interesting case, as it shows the power of sympathetic imagination in all its ambiguity: On one side, it allows the person principally concerned to overcome the fear of death (because he is sure of the propriety of his behavior); on the other, it can bring him to death (including through suicide) instead of a virtuous life (his assurance may make him face things he wouldn’t without it).

(2) The person principally concerned may deserve blame but not actually receive it from the real spectators, a situation in which he is subject to the most dreadful of sentiments, remorse (TMS II.ii.2.3):

When he looks back upon [the crime he committed], and views it in the light in which the impartial spectator would view it, he finds that he can enter into none of the motives which influenced it. He is abashed and confounded at the thoughts of it, and necessarily feels a very high degree of that shame which he would be exposed to, if his actions should ever come to be generally known. His imagination, in this case too, anticipates the contempt and derision from which nothing saves him but the ignorance of those he lives with. (TMS III.2.9, p.118)

This case is the reverse of the first, sympathetic imagination operating the same way, anticipating either applause or contempt that does not reach him externally only because the real spectators are ignorant of some important fact. These two cases also show another important point, that sentiments do not need real communication to exist; they must only be communicable—that is, virtually shared with an imaginary spectator (see 1.7).

(3) The person principally concerned may be praised without deserving it. “To be pleased with such groundless applause is a proof of the most superficial levity and weakness. It is what is properly called vanity.” This peculiar (and extremely interesting) form of moral corruption “arises from so gross an illusion of the imagination, that it is difficult to conceive how any rational creature should be imposed upon by it.” In this case, the imagination operates in a slightly different way from the two above cases:

When they place themselves in the situation of those whom they fancy they have deceived, they are struck with the highest admiration for their own persons. They look upon themselves, not in that light in which, they know, they ought to appear to their companions, but in that in which they believe their companions actually look upon them. (TMS III.2.4, p.115)

Another Smithian metaphor related to (im)partiality is that of light (TMS III.2.3, p.114). Vain people avoid looking at themselves under a “candid and impartial light” (TMS I.i.4.8, p.22) because of a “superficial weakness and trivial folly” (TMS III.2.4, p.115).

(4) Lastly, the person principally concerned may be censored or blamed without deserving it. This is, perhaps, the worst situation someone may experience. It will thoroughly shake even someone “of more than ordinary constancy”:

Though perfectly conscious of his own innocence, the very imputation seems often, even in his own imagination, to throw a shadow of disgrace and dishonour upon his character. His just indignation, too, at so very gross an injury, which, however, it may frequently be improper, and sometimes even impossible to revenge, is itself a very painful sensation. (TMS III.2.11, p.119)

If taken together, these four cases of disagreement between internal (from the imaginary spectator) and external (from real spectators) judgments show the full reach of sympathetic imagination (cases 1 and 2) together with its deformations (cases 3 and 4). Vanity consists of a sort of hollow operation of sympathy: A vain person searches for applause from real spectators but not from the internal one. The last case involves the absence of sympathy: an innocent person who does not find any sympathetic spectator. Another case of the absence of sympathy can be seen here: “Profligate criminals, such as common thieves and highwaymen, have frequently little sense of the baseness of their own conduct, and consequently no remorse” (TMS III.2.11, p.120). The ‘solution’ is analogous to that of a surgeon who feels nauseated during surgery: They become insensible by cutting out all traces of an internal sense closely connected with remorse, which Smith calls the “sense of disgrace” (TMS III.2.13, p.121).

5. The “natural sense of equity”

Perhaps the most striking aspect of conscience and self-judgment in Smith’s philosophy is their social origin:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. (TMS III.1.3, p.110)

What is missing is the “moral looking-glass” (TMS III.1.5n, p.112; suppressed in the sixth edition) in which the person principally concerned can watch his own behavior and thereby judge himself: “Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before.” Without this social mirror, the only objects drawing a person’s attention are external objects, as “The passions themselves, the desires or aversions, the joys or sorrows, which those objects excited (...) could scarce ever be the objects of his thoughts.” A person in society sees his emotions, desires, and sentiments being constantly approved or disapproved of by everybody else, which causes other emotions, desires, and sentiments in an endless spiral:

Bring him into society, and all his own passions will immediately become the causes of new passions. He will observe that mankind approve of some of them, and are disgusted by others. He will be elevated in the one case, and cast down in the other; his desires and aversions, his joys and

sorrows, will now often become the causes of new desires and new aversions, new joys and new sorrows: they will now, therefore, interest him deeply, and often call upon his most attentive consideration. (ibidem)

These new desires and aversions, second-order passions and emotions (caused by spectators' approval or disapproval of the original emotion), are the raw material of sentiments and social life. The obvious conclusion is that there is no morality without society¹⁹:

We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. Whatever judgment we can form concerning them, accordingly, must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others. (TMS III.1.2, pp.109-10)

Without society, in full isolation and solitude, there would be no exchange of positions between agent and spectators, and anyone in this situation would be doomed to keep her "natural station," without any need to search for a different point of view. Without this search, emotional reactions are left in their raw state; they are not justified or communicated, nurtured or refined.

The most important result of this perspective shift promoted by the internalization of an impartial spectator is the affirmation of equality among human beings.²⁰ To Smith, the vantage point that corrects our natural partiality and egoism is the one insisting on the "real littleness of ourselves" (TMS III.3.4, p.137). He also employs the idea of a balance between two points of view, the second equalizing the first (selfish) one (TMS III.3.3, p.135). Impartiality requires the internalization of someone with the ability to objectively compare the person principally concerned's situation with everyone else's and thus oppose self-love's demands:

It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is

¹⁹ With one exception (see chapter 6): an isolated person can find beauty in the utility of his own actions.

²⁰ Samuel Fleischacker insists on this point in several works (1999, 2004).

reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. (TMS III.3.4, p.137)

The internalized imaginary and impartial spectator allows the person principally concerned to transcend her narrow “natural station” or egoistical point of view, allowing for what that Smith calls a “natural sense of equity.” It plays a central role in Smith’s moral theory as a whole, but its two functions of grounding and regulating sentiments is more easily seen in the case of justice (because resentment is an unsocial passion, carrying all its odious aspects). The impartial spectator both grounds individual resentment in something more than an idiosyncrasy and corrects its excesses. The second of these functions is easier to present:

Nothing, however, would appear more shocking to our natural sense of equity, than to bring a man to the scaffold merely for having thrown a stone carelessly into the street without hurting any body. (TMS II.iii.2.8, p.103)

Our natural sense of equity prevents us from approving a disproportionate punishment and acts in the same way as our sense of propriety applied to cases of justice. Here, it ensures a punishment proportional to the crime, preventing spectators from approving death sentences as punishment for relatively small offenses. If resentment is an emotional reaction to injury done to oneself, what in it precisely appears as its proper foundation?

What chiefly enrages us against the man who injures or insults us, is the little account which he seems to make of us, the unreasonable preference which he gives to himself above us, and that absurd self-love, by which he seems to imagine, that other people may be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency or his humour. The glaring impropriety of this conduct, the gross insolence and injustice which it seems to involve in it, often shock and exasperate us more than all the mischief which we have suffered. To bring him back to a more just sense of what is due to other people, to make him sensible of what he owes us, and of the wrong that he has done to us, is frequently the principal end proposed in our revenge, which is always imperfect when it cannot accomplish this. (TMS II.iii.1.5, p.96)

The offender’s disregard or disrespect for the person principally concerned’s own intrinsic ‘value’ (for lack of a better word) demands resentment as a proper answer.²¹ An impartial spectator knows how to overcome the partiality bias of both the offender and

²¹ Fleischacker insists on the “symbolic harm” or “symbolic degradation” involved in this breach of someone’s “worth” (2004, pp.73-4).

the person principally concerned in order to achieve the proper level of resentment with which she can sympathize. Indeed, the need to restrain one's own partiality (or, in some cases, one's egoism) becomes the demand for respect for oneself and everybody else. This 'respect' is grounded in the double understanding that "we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it" (TMS III.3.4, p.137) and that "This man is to them, in every respect, as good as [anyone else]" (TMS II.ii.2.1, p.83). This is the proper content of the general fellow-feeling that is the basis of justice (see 5.1):

The concern which is requisite for this, is no more than the general fellow-feeling which we have with every man merely because he is our fellow-creature. We enter into the resentment even of an odious person, when he is injured by those to whom he has given no provocation. (TMS II.ii.3.10, p.90)

Our natural sense of equity forces us to respect even an odious person. A truly impartial spectator will sympathize with his resentment if he was properly injured.

6. The role of virtue

How can the internalization of the character of an impartial spectator determine the proper behavior in relation to a particular situation? In addition, how can it determine what the ideal (virtuous) behavior would be? In the paragraph following the one where he presents the analogy between the eye of the body and the eye of the mind, Smith states:

Here, too, habit and experience have taught us to do this [i.e., to see our interests from an impartial point of view] so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it; and it requires, in this case too, some degree of reflection, and even of philosophy, to convince us, how little interest we should take in the greatest concerns of our neighbour, how little we should be affected by whatever relates to him, if the sense of propriety and justice did not correct the otherwise natural inequality of our sentiments. (TMS III.3.3, pp.135-6)

Every time Smith calls forth habit and experience, it means there is a complex, delicate, and long process of learning that appears to be simple. What is at stake here is the development of moral judgments and the refinement of sympathetic imagination. It results in better self-judgments, capable of intervening in passions in order to transform them into sentiments. These proper sentiments will become proper actions only if the agent can command himself and fortune helps (see next chapter). Keeping the analysis solely on the theoretical question of how a moral subject can judge her own emotions and

actions, the straightforward (but still incomplete) answer is: by imagining herself as the agent of the situation she is in. In more technical terms, as the least partial spectator possible, she must imagine what she would (or ought to) do if she were in the situation she, as agent, is currently in. This involves her (as spectator) imaginarily duplicating herself (as agent) by inserting the current situation into a scene played out at the theater-tribunal of conscience. The following case (as Smith's methodology suggests) might help us here:

Imagine a little girl who has a test in school the next day for which she has not studied. During the night, her grandmother is taken to the hospital in a hurry and her parents, having nowhere to leave her, take her with them. She will miss school, and the test, the next day, which makes her happy—so happy that she is unable to feel sadness for her grandmother. Even though she is a discerning observer, who sees that everybody in her family is uneasy and sad, she cannot restrain her euphoria about missing the test, and her parents reproach her for it. The fact is this little girl is not able to sympathize (in the meaning of sharing an emotion) with her grandmother's suffering or with her family's grief. What should have she done? She should have sympathized by imagining herself in the place of someone whose relative is in the hospital, which, in this case, means she should have imagined herself in her own situation. By doing so, she would have realized that, instead of being happy about missing her test, she should have been sad about her grandmother's illness.

But what if she had done all that and still her happiness about missing the test hindered her (sympathetic) grief for her grandmother? The question then becomes less about the speculative (or theoretical) abilities of this girl and more about her (practical) behavior: how good she is at repressing her happiness and assuming the appearance or feigning the sympathetic sadness she should be feeling for her grandmother and family—or, in the terms of Smith's moral theater-tribunal, how good an actor our little hero is and how well she represents what she thinks is the proper sentiment.²² This immediately brings up the question of what sort of audience she wants to please.

In an already quoted paragraph (TMS III.2.8, p.117; see Section 4) Smith presents a scheme with three kinds of possible behavior, according to a peculiar kind of audience: (a) the vain man's search for the applause of real and external spectators, for glory and

²² In some aspects, the central question of Smith's practical philosophy is the classical problem of *akrasia* or incontinence, also known as weakness of will (see 5.1).

fame, which Smith calls the “love of praise”²³; (b) the search for well-grounded praise, for the concord between the judgments of the external and the internal spectators, which he calls the “love of just fame, of true glory”; and (c) the search for self-approval, for the applause of the inner and impartial imaginary spectator, which he calls the “love of virtue.”²⁴ From a practical point of view, the distinction between levels (b) and (c) is less important (since they both lead to virtuous behavior) than the difference between those two and (a).²⁵ The introduction of a theatrical model (spectator → actor) brings the question of representation to the center of Smith’s moral philosophy in both dimensions: From a theoretical point of view, the sympathetic duplication of emotions and the imaginary nature of sentiments are essential aspects; from a practical point of view, virtue depends on the acting abilities of the agent, of his representation as an actor²⁶ (TMS Vi.concl.6, p.264).

Smith’s mirror metaphor can be resumed here. For him, there is only one mirror, offered by conscience (and not by every one of its members)²⁷ through the internalization

²³ Smith’s vain man would agree with the lyrics of Lady Gaga’s song *Applause*: “I live for the applause, applause, applause / I live for the applause-please / Live for the applause-please / Live for the way that you cheer and scream for me / The applause, applause, applause.”

²⁴ A good discussion about these three levels can be found in Hanley (2009).

²⁵ “The jurisdiction of the man without, is founded altogether in the desire of actual praise, and in the aversion to actual blame. The jurisdiction of the man within, is founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness, and in the aversion to blame-worthiness; in the desire of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we love and admire in other people; and in the dread of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we hate and despise in other people” (TMS III.2.32, pp.130-1).

²⁶ This is another Stoic aspect of Smith’s philosophy: the emphasis on self-command. As Smith points out, the Stoics saw human life as a game demanding a certain amount of skills: “Human life, with all the advantages which can possibly attend it, ought, according to the Stoics, to be regarded but as a mere two-penny stake; a matter by far too insignificant to merit any anxious concern. Our only anxious concern ought to be, not about the stake, but about the proper method of playing” (TMS VII.ii.1.24, pp.278-9). For more about eighteenth-century British philosophy of the art of living, see Suzuki (2014).

²⁷ Once more Smith invokes a Humean metaphor with the alterations his theory demands: “In general we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each others emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees. Thus the pleasure, which a rich man receives from his possessions, being thrown upon the beholder, causes a pleasure and esteem; which sentiments again, being perceiv’d and sympathiz’d with, encrease the pleasure of the possessor; and being once more reflected, become a new foundation for pleasure and esteem in the beholder. There is certainly an original satisfaction in riches deriv’d from that power, which they bestow, of enjoying all the pleasures of life; and as this is their very nature and essence, it must be the first source of all the passions, which arise from them. One of the most considerable of these passions is that of love or esteem in others, which therefore proceeds from a sympathy with the pleasure of the possessor. But the possessor has also a secondary satisfaction in riches arising from the love and esteem he acquires by them, and this satisfaction is nothing but a second reflexion of that original pleasure, which proceeded from himself. This secondary satisfaction or vanity becomes one of the principal recommendations of riches, and is the chief reason, why we either desire them for ourselves, or esteem them in others. Here then is a third rebound of the original pleasure; after which ’tis difficult to distinguish the images and reflexions, by reason of their faintness and confusion” (THN 2.2.5.21, p.365). For Hume, the process of passions’ refinement (at least on this level of vanity) depends on the actual sympathy of other people. It has three remarkable features: (1) a reflexive nature: a whole set of duplication

of the character of an impartial spectator (simply because there is no other way of gaining access to what other people feel):

We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct. (TMS III.1.5, p.112)

Any sentiment carries something general and something particular. Its generality is easily shared by language; its particularities, and even idiosyncrasies, demand an extra effort from both the agent and the spectator so sympathy can take place (see 2.7). Smith makes this clear when he discusses the correct style of moral writing:

They [i.e., ancient moralists] have only endeavoured to ascertain, as far as language is capable of ascertaining, first, wherein consists the sentiment of the heart, upon which each particular virtue is founded, what sort of internal feeling or emotion it is which constitutes the essence of friendship, of humanity, of generosity, of justice, of magnanimity, and of all the other virtues, as well as of the vices which are opposed to them: and, secondly, what is the general way of acting, the ordinary tone and tenor of conduct to which each of those sentiments would direct us, or how it is that a friendly, a generous, a brave, a just, and a humane man, would, upon ordinary occasions, chuse to act. (TMS VII.iv.3, p.328)

Only moral philosophers perform a systematic and scientific ‘characterization of sentiments,’ but it is undeniable that a (less conscious and systematic) process such as this is at work for society as a whole. It would be impossible to differentiate between the words employed to designate sentiments without such a characterization. Language supports this sentimental generality. In our story, when the girl’s parents tell her she should be sad, the term *sad* conveys precisely this “essence,” the “general sentiment” of sadness (TMS VII.iv.4, p.328). The nature of her specific situation determines the particularities (her age, the kind of relationship she had with her grandmother, the grade she needed on the missed test, etc.). If after her parents’ censure she still cannot feel sad,

(of the original emotion by the sympathetic one, of the original satisfaction by the secondary vain satisfaction of being conscious of being esteemed) following each other; (2) an open-ended structure: the reflections (both of sympathetic emotional sharing and of individual “rebounds” of satisfaction) will succeed each other with any boundaries except for the vivacity of the original emotion, because of (3) its fading-out feature: the emotion gradually weakens through each reflection, eventually vanishing completely. There is a tension between two elements: on one side, the particular and fleeting nature of this communication (as it depends on a particular emotion and on its actual sharing); on the other, the transcendence of particularity and fleetingness whenever someone starts searching for this secondary satisfaction.

all there is for her to do is to fake it—to represent the external signs of sadness, which are more easily characterized than sadness itself (TMS VII.iv.5, p.328).

Strictly speaking, sentiments only exist if they are actually felt by someone. Nevertheless, Smith's theory allows us to think of them as largely grounded in sentiments whose existence is purely virtual. All it takes is someone to believe that the sentiment is actually felt by someone else (this someone else being herself or another person). Both vanity and virtue are built upon this basis, but in entirely different ways. Vanity lies in the external signs that mimic the expression of sentiments, the vain person appearing to feel something spectators take as real and therefore approve. The result is the circulation of highly stereotyped sentiments, leaving little room for the tiny variations and nuances that are part of every individual and situation (i.e., particularity). Stereotyping should not be mistaken for generality. The first objection Smith says every theory of moral sentiments must answer concerns the way of dealing with these general features, with the different species of sentiments. He has something similar in mind when he presents the "general style of character and behaviour" (TMS V.2.12, p.209), formed in the individuals by the concurrence of personal characteristics and social conditions (TMS V.2.3-4, p.201). Every sentiment likewise has some features distinguishing it from all the others, a "species" or "character". Only a composed sense, such as the sense of propriety, can grasp this generality, this "common feature" shared by all the members of the same species²⁸ (TMS VII.iii.3.13, pp.324-5). Vanity has a peculiar way of dealing with these sentiments' characters, isolating the predominant expression and magnifying it: The vain person "seems to be fonder of their noisy expressions and acclamations than of the sentiments themselves" (TMS VII.ii.4.8, p.310). Thus, at the core of vanity lie two mistakes: first, it confuses the sign with the thing (the laughter for the joy),²⁹ and second,

²⁸ "If approbation and disapprobation, therefore, were, like gratitude and resentment, emotions of a particular kind, distinct from every other, we should expect that in all the variations which either of them might undergo, it would still retain the general features which mark it to be an emotion of such a particular kind, dear, plain, and easily distinguishable. But in fact it happens quite otherwise. If we attend to what we really feel when upon different occasions we either approve or disapprove, we shall find that our emotion in one case is often totally different from that in another, and that no common features can possibly be discovered between them. Thus the approbation with which we view a tender, delicate, and humane sentiment, is quite different from that with which we are struck by one that appears great, daring, and magnanimous. Our approbation of both may, upon different occasions, be perfect and entire; but we are softened by the one, and we are elevated by the other, and there is no sort of resemblance between the emotions which they excite in us" (TMS VII.iii.3.13, pp.324-5).

²⁹ One of Mandeville's mistakes consists in taking the word for the feeling "There are some of our passions which have no other names except those which mark the disagreeable and offensive degree. (...) Thus the common names of the love of pleasure, and of the love of sex, denote a vicious and offensive degree of those passions. The words temperance and chastity, on the other hand, seem to mark rather the restraint and subjection which they are kept under, than the degree which they are still allowed to subsist in. When he

it abstracts in a rough manner the general feature from its context (bluntly denying the particular features of each emotion). The result is a stereotyped affection that, as a cliché, can be endlessly reproduced without bigger difficulties.

Virtue, however, presupposes the right way of dealing with this generality (see 6.6). The virtuous person does not mistake the external expression for the sentiment, neither from the passion nor the approbation. She neither confuses “luxury and lust” with “love of pleasure” and “love of sex” (TMS VII.ii.4.11, p.312) nor accepts unjustified applause as approbation (TMS III.2.8, p.117). In this case, the person of honor is not confused, and only accepts applause that is truly due:

It is only the weakest and most superficial of mankind who can be much delighted with that praise which they themselves know to be altogether unmerited. A weak man may sometimes be pleased with it, but a wise man rejects it upon all occasions. But, though a wise man feels little pleasure from praise where he knows there is no praise-worthiness, he often feels the highest in doing what he knows to be praise-worthy, though he knows equally well that no praise is ever to be bestowed upon it. To obtain the approbation of mankind, where no approbation is due, can never be an object of any importance to him. To obtain that approbation where it is really due, may sometimes be an object of no great importance to him. But to be that thing which deserves approbation, must always be an object of the highest. (TMS III.2.7, p.117)

Both, honored and virtuous, know how to weight properly each element of the situation. Resuming the case of the girl who missed the test because her grandmother had to be taken to the hospital, let us assume that the grandmother is still in the hospital but the girl’s parents forbid her to visit because of her bad behavior on the first day. She then decides she will visit her grandmother anyway, against her parents’ orders. There are plenty of good reasons: Once the test is over, she is truly sad about her grandmother’s illness, she feels remorse for her previous behavior, and she resents her parents for not letting her go to the hospital. She decides to go anyway, neither to confront her parents nor to redeem herself but simply because she wants to see her grandmother. She does not confuse these three different sentiments (of three different species); instead, she chooses the right one.³⁰ The difference between someone honored and someone virtuous lies in

can show, therefore, that they still subsist in some degree, he imagines, he has entirely demolished the reality of the virtues of temperance and chastity, and shown them to be mere impositions upon the inattention and simplicity of mankind” (TMS VII.ii.4.11, p.312).

³⁰ Our case has reached its explanatory limits, as it cannot differentiate between honor and virtue. There are two reasons for this: (1) It is a benevolence action (where everything is pleasant), and (2) it takes place inside a family, where empirical judgment is the closest thing to self-judgment because of partiality. Her parents would disapprove of her visit, and even be mad at her for disobeying them (going against her duty) or for exposing herself to higher risks (being imprudent).

the ways each one views virtue: The first does what is right because he believes this is the only proper way of gaining applause; the second behaves correctly because she thinks this is how she should act. The honored person considers virtue a means; the virtuous person considers it an end. What distinguishes honor and virtue is the understanding of virtue as an efficient or final cause. To Smith, virtue is both the prudence of individual “comfort and happiness” (TMS VI.i.5, p.213) and the justice and beneficence of the “happiness of other people” (TMS VI.ii.intro.1, p.218). The problem is that they are not the only efficient causes at the individual’s disposal:

To deserve, to acquire, and to enjoy the respect and admiration of mankind, are the great objects of ambition and emulation. Two different roads are presented to us, equally leading to the attainment of this so much desired object; 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; the one more gaudy and glittering in its colouring; the other more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline: the one forcing itself upon the notice of every wandering eye; the other, attracting the attention of scarce any body but the most studious and careful observer. (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62)

Chapter 4 – Merit and fortune

Notre mérite nous attire l'estime des honnêtes gens, et notre étoile celle du public.

François de La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*

*Il vit le monde comme il est: les lois et la morale impuissantes chez les riches,
et vit dans la fortune l'ultime ratio mundi.*

Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

“What do you call a great success?” she asked.

“Never having occasion to be pitied.”

Henry James, *The Path of Duty*

1. Merit sentiments: Gratitude and resentment

Propriety judgments are not the only kind of judgment sympathy organizes and operates:

For though propriety is an essential ingredient in every virtuous action, it is not always the sole ingredient. Beneficent actions have in them another quality by which they appear not only to deserve approbation but recompense. (TMS VII.ii.1.50, p.294)

There are two ways in which an emotion can be judged: “first, in relation to the cause which excites it, or the motive which gives occasion to it; and secondly, in relation to the end which it proposes, or the effect which it tends to produce” (TMS I.i.3.5, p.18). In the first case, one judges the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness, of “the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it” (TMS I.i.3.6, p.18). In the second, one judges the merit or demerit of the “beneficial or hurtful nature of the effects which the affection aims at, or tends to produce,” and from whose qualities “it is entitled to reward, or is deserving of punishment” (TMS I.i.3.7, p.18). The first is the judgment of propriety of an emotion or action; the second is the judgment of merit of the same emotion or action. The emotion can be either appropriate or inappropriate to the situation that caused it, and it can deserve either reward or punishment based on its effects (TMS II.i.intro.2, p.67). Thus, enters the stage (at least) a second agent, one who suffers the action made by the first agent. The moral theater, whose plays the spectator must judge,

acquires a new dimension, that of merit, ruled by the sentiments of gratitude and resentment:

The sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to reward, is gratitude; that which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish, is resentment.

To us, therefore, that action must appear to deserve reward, which appears to be the proper and approved object of gratitude; as, on the other hand, that action must appear to deserve punishment, which appears to be the proper and approved object of resentment. (TMS II.i.1.2-3, p.68)

Smith understands these two sentiments as a sort of spontaneous judgment concerning the act: The person who suffers it will feel gratitude if he approves of it and resentment if he disapproves of it (how and when he might be mistaken will be seen below). In the first case, he will seek to reward the person who acted—“to recompense, to remunerate, to return good for good received”; in the second case, he will try to punish this person—“to recompense, to remunerate, though in a different manner; it is to return evil for evil that has been done” (TMS II.i.1.4, p.68).

Gratitude and resentment must be distinguished from other sentiments that impel one to become interested in someone else’s happiness or misery, such as “the love and esteem which grow upon acquaintance and habitual approbation” or “hatred and dislike (...) which grow upon habitual disapprobation.” Gratitude and resentment have a unique feature distinguishing them from these sentiments: the desire or impetus to make us the “direct instrument” of happiness or misery for those who did us either good or bad. Love and hate, on the contrary, usually are satisfied by someone else’s happiness or misery, regardless of who caused it:

If the person to whom we owe many obligations, is made happy without our assistance, though it pleases our love, it does not content our gratitude. Till we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with that debt which his past services have laid upon us. (TMS II.i.5, p.68)

Smith applies a similar reasoning to the relation between hatred and resentment. Habitual hatred may simply prevent us from feeling sympathy for someone else,

and sometimes dispose us even to rejoice at the distress of another, yet, if there is no resentment in the case, if neither we nor our friends have received any great personal provocation, these passions would not naturally lead us to wish to be instrumental in bringing it about. (TMS II.i.6, p.68)

Resentment is a sort of ill will plus the desire to be the instrument of someone's misery. At first sight, this supports Bentham: "resentment is but a modification of antipathy" (PML, chap.II, §XIX). But this is the case only if we focus on the question of instrumentality alone. As Smith insists¹, this active ill will is different from simple lack of sympathy (TMS II.i.5.4, p.75), and, even more importantly, it demands habit:

The hatred and dislike, in the same manner, which grow upon habitual disapprobation, would often lead us to take a malicious pleasure in the misfortune of the man whose conduct and character excite so painful a passion. (TMS II.i.6, p.68)

Antipathy is a kind of negative affection (in the technical meaning of "habitual sympathy"), and, in this sense, it is clearly different from resentment. It might be the result of both resentment (someone repeatedly offends me or someone I care about) and envy (the crystallization of this negative partiality). Resentment might be the immediate reaction to a unique action, while antipathy demands maturation.²

Antipathy, resentment, and anger all involve an ill will toward someone else and, therefore, unpleasant feelings, whereas affection, gratitude, and esteem all involve pleasant feelings. The asymmetry between pleasure and pain also leaves its mark here. Let us start with the relation between esteem and hatred. Excessive esteem does nothing more than proper esteem would, but excessive hatred reverses the situation:

To one under the dominion of violent hatred it would be agreeable, perhaps, to hear, that the person whom he abhorred and detested was killed by some accident. But if he had the least spark of justice, which, though this passion is not very favourable to virtue, he might still have, it would hurt him excessively to have been himself, even without design, the occasion of this misfortune. Much more would the very thought of voluntarily contributing to it shock him beyond all measure. He would reject with horror even the imagination of so execrable a design; and if he could imagine himself capable of such an enormity, he would begin to regard himself in the same odious light in which he had considered the person who was the object of his dislike. (TMS II.i.1.6, pp.68-9)

While esteem is never blamable—it might, at worst, be improper (due to the lack of a meritorious action in its origin)—hatred can be justified only in an extremely fragile way. If the person is driven by it, she becomes odious and liable to face resentment from anyone who suffers from it. This resentment is justified because of the injury or offense

¹ The term *antipathy* seldom appears in TMS. In my research I counted only five occurrences.

² This shows how Bentham's interpretation of the sentimentalist tradition is mistaken (at least concerning Smith): To Smith it is impossible to equalize sympathy and antipathy, as Bentham does (PML chap.II, §XI).

(both Smith's technical terms) and harm caused by this hatred, demanding more than a simple disapprobation:

if the person who had done us some great injury, who had murdered our father or our brother, for example, should soon afterwards die of a fever, or even be brought to the scaffold upon account of some other crime, though it might sooth our hatred, it would not fully gratify our resentment. (TMS II.i.1.6, p.69)

Resentment is the emotion urging us to punish injurious and offensive actions. It is called revenge whenever it is excessive (TMS II.i.5.8, p.77, footnote), but, in a proper degree, resentment is the natural basis of justice:

Resentment cannot be fully gratified, unless the offender is not only made to grieve in his turn, but to grieve for that particular wrong which we have suffered from him. He must be made to repent and be sorry for this very action, that others, through fear of the like punishment, may be terrified from being guilty of the like offence. The natural gratification of this passion tends, of its own accord, to produce all the political ends of punishment: the correction of the criminal, and the example to the public. (ibidem)

Between revenge and justice fall the many kinds of offense and injury that cause resentment; meanwhile, revenge is replaced by institutionalized forms of punishment, or what Smith calls government (see 1.6).

Lastly, since gratitude and resentment are built upon the presence of (at least) a second agent at the stage, they are the nuclear sentiments of social interaction. It is true that the judgment of propriety already implies a socialization of emotions, but this socialization takes place behind the scenes or, more specifically, through the agent-spectator relation that supports the moral theater (including whenever the spectator is entirely imaginary and the communication purely virtual). Gratitude and resentment, in turn, can only take place if there is an action directed toward a second person, impelling this second person to react toward the first agent. These are emotional reactions to an action, not only to a situation. They are, therefore, the two primordial emotions to govern social interactions, and through reward and punishment they are directed toward a particular individual and action (TMS II.i.1.7, p.69). A question remains: How do we determine who really deserves them?

2. The objects of gratitude and resentment I

Smith begins with two general qualifications in order to determine the proper objects of gratitude and resentment:

To be the proper and approved object either of gratitude or resentment, can mean nothing but to be the object of that gratitude, and of that resentment, which naturally seems proper, and is approved of.

But these, as well as all the other passions of human nature, seem proper and are approved of, when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with them, when every indifferent bystander entirely enters into, and goes along with them. (TMS II.i.2.1-2, p.69)

This simply indicates the social validation function of sympathy: To be considered proper, these sentiments need to be shared by an impartial spectator (just like propriety judgments). From a theoretical point of view, the only difference between propriety and merit judgments is the need for a second agent: one who feels gratitude or resentment toward the first agent. Spectators must simply duplicate the propriety judgment: one for the first agent (the actor) and the second for the second (the recipient of the action). This is how spectators can determine the propriety of the gratitude or resentment the second agent feels (a list of the eight possibilities will be presented in the next section). These sentiments show in a clearer manner the social nature of moral judgments:

To us, surely, that action must appear to deserve reward, which every body who knows of it would wish to reward, and therefore delights to see rewarded: and that action must as surely appear to deserve punishment, which every body who hears of it is angry with, and upon that account rejoices to see punished. (TMS II.i.2.3, pp.69-70)

The difference of pungency between pleasant and unpleasant feelings plays a major role here. The simplest case is of an action both proper and meritorious. There are at least two duplications here. First, the action is approved twice: by the second agent's gratitude (this sentiment is an approval judgment) and by the spectator's judgment (it is a proper action). Therefore, the first agent receives two positive responses for his action (one from the second agent, the other from the spectator). Second, the spectator also approves twice: the propriety of the first agent's action and the propriety of the second

agent's response—namely, his gratitude. This double approval grounds the merit judgment: If both cause and effect are proper, the cause is also meritorious.^{3,4}

Sympathy with the second agent is also doubled: There is the pleasant feeling that arises from the good deed received as well as gratitude. The sympathetic joy “animate[s] our fellow-feeling with his gratitude towards him who bestows it,” and the spectator approves every retributive action (TMS II.i.2.4, p.70). This retributive dynamic is even more important regarding improper and demeritorious actions. The greater the pungency of the unpleasant feelings, the more vivacious the sympathetic resentment:

When we see one man oppressed or injured by another, the sympathy which we feel with the distress of the sufferer seems to serve only to animate our fellow-feeling with his resentment against the offender. We are rejoiced to see him attack his adversary in his turn, and are eager and ready to assist him whenever he exerts himself for defence, or even for vengeance within a certain degree. (TMS II.i.2.5, pp.70-1)

The greater pungency of the unpleasant feelings, plus the “idea of the [offended's] distress” acts as additional fuel to sympathetic resentment, heightening its flames toward punishment. Moreover, it does not matter if the resentment is entirely imaginary:

If the injured should perish in the quarrel, we not only sympathize with the real resentment of his friends and relations, but with the imaginary resentment which in fancy we lend to the dead, who is no longer capable of feeling that or any other human sentiment. But as we put ourselves in his situation, as we enter, as it were, into his body, and in our imaginations, in some measure, animate anew the deformed and mangled carcass of the slain, when we bring home in this manner his case to our own bosoms, we feel upon this, as upon many other occasions, an emotion which the person

³ This is the complete scheme. In a footnote, Smith points out that a spectator may consider an action meritorious or demeritorious even if the second agent does not feel gratitude or resentment (which is, evidently, impossible in propriety judgments): “The approbation of propriety therefore requires, not only that we should entirely sympathize with the person who acts, but that we should perceive this perfect concord between his sentiments and our own. On the contrary, when I hear of a benefit that has been bestowed upon another person, let him who has received it be affected in what manner he pleases, if, by bringing his case home to myself, I feel gratitude arise in my own breast, I necessarily approve of the conduct of his benefactor, and regard it as meritorious, and the proper object of reward. Whether the person who has received the benefit conceives gratitude or not, cannot, it is evident, in any degree alter our sentiments with regard to the merit of him who has bestowed it. No actual correspondence of sentiments, therefore, is here required. It is sufficient that if he was grateful, they would correspond; and our sense of merit is often founded upon one of those illusive sympathies, by which, when we bring home to ourselves the case of another, we are often affected in a manner in which the person principally concerned is incapable of being affected” (TMS II.i.5.11, p.78, footnote).

⁴ There is also a possible third, practical duplication. Gratitude impels those who feel it to reciprocate the good deed received. Thus, the first action might be doubled by a second action in the opposite direction: a retribution (TMS II.i.2.4, p.70).

principally concerned is incapable of feeling, and which yet we feel by an illusive sympathy with him. (TMS II.i.5.6, p.76).

The most important effect of our ability to sympathize with the dead is the approval of justice-seeking processes. This approval has peculiar characteristics because resentment's greater pungency forces both sufferer and spectator to regard it carefully. Thus, they become 'naturally' conscious of crimes and their consequences:

And with regard, at least, to this most dreadful of all crimes, Nature, antecedent to all reflections upon the utility of punishment, has in this manner stamped upon the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, an immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation. (TMS II.i.2.5, p.71)

Once again, Smith tries to ground human society and its institutions in the spontaneous operations of a moral sensibility. Specifically, these passages show how the interaction between the sympathetic imagination (toward those who suffer an action) and the peculiar intensity of each emotional reaction (unpleasant feelings are more pungent than pleasant ones and therefore draw more attention) begets a tendency to search for justice in particular cases, and also to form and refine its rules, procedures, and institutions.⁵

Finally, merit judgments confirm the causal relation⁶: To judge an action as meritorious is to approve both the particular cause-effect relation (that is, the particular sentiment that begets the action and causes the gratitude toward it) and the general cause-effect relation (that is, the idea that a sentiment motivates an action and this action causes a second sentiment).⁷ As the following chapter of *Theory* (TMS II.i.3) highlights, without a truly proper action as cause, there is no real merit, and without a truly improper action, and there is no real demerit (TMS II.i.3.1, pp.71-2). The best one can hope for here is a partial approbation, qualified by the asymmetry between pleasure and pain: "Little gratitude seems due in the one case, and all sort of resentment seems unjust in the other.

⁵ This mechanism triggers a search for precise rules simply because excessive 'retribution' (i.e., revenge) is a second injury, and if we, as spectators, want to punish the first offender, we also want to avoid transforming this offender (and all those involved in this punishment) into offended parties (see.1-6 and 5.4-7).

⁶ What I am presenting here (the act as a link between two sentiments, one the effect of the other) must not be confused with practical reason (the act as the conclusion of reasons or opinions working as premises in a syllogism). Smith's take on practical reason will be briefly discussed in the next chapter (see 5.1).

⁷ For this reason, merit judgments are the proper place to determine the alterations caused by fortune: There is an expected effect, and fortune prevents its actualization. I believe this is one of the reasons why Smith chose to present the irregularity of sentiments when dealing with merit (and not propriety).

The one action seems to merit little reward, the other to deserve no punishment” (ibidem). If the absence of propriety in the first case diminishes sympathy with gratitude, the absence of impropriety extinguishes any possible approbation with whatever degree of resentment. In the first case, the first action does not deserve anything more than “a very small return” (TMS II.i.3.2, p.72), but in the second case there can be “no sort of sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer, how great soever the mischief which may have been done to him,” once spectators approve the first agent’s motives (TMS II.i.3.3, p.72). This last case is particularly interesting because it shows a situation where sympathy with one person precludes all sympathy with another:

Our sympathy with the person whose motives we go along with, and whom therefore we look upon as in the right, cannot but harden us against all fellow-feeling with the other, whom we necessarily regard as in the wrong. (ibidem)

The full exercise of sympathy with the first agent (approbation of his motives and action) “hardens” the spectators against the second agent’s emotional reaction and prevents sharing of his resentment. In short, sympathy (or its absence) with the first agent limits the field of possible sympathy with the second agent, separating the emotions that can be shared from those that cannot (qualitative dimension) and reducing the acceptable intensity spectrum of both (quantitative dimension).

The appearance of a second agent at the spectator stage makes the operations of sympathy more complex, bringing to the foreground the socialization of affections: There are emotions that reinforce each other; there are emotions that collide, demanding the modulation of one or both; and there are even more exacting emotions that cause all others to dissipate. The process of judging an action’s merit or demerit forces spectators to link several successive acts, forming causality chains, allowing for the introduction of fortune in sentiments’ analysis.⁸ This is what Smith has in mind when states that judging the first agent is based on “direct sympathy” and judging the second is based on “indirect sympathy”:

As we cannot indeed enter thoroughly into the gratitude of the person who receives the benefit, unless we beforehand approve of the motives of the benefactor, so, upon this account, the sense of merit seems to be a compounded sentiment, and to be made up of two distinct emotions; a direct

⁸ Merit judgments are the most suitable for historical understanding (TMS II.i.5.3, pp.74-5).

sympathy with the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions. (TMS II.i.5.2, p.74)

The sense of demerit is likewise compounded:

As we cannot indeed enter into the resentment of the sufferer, unless our heart beforehand disapproves the motives of the agent, and renounces all fellow-feeling with them; so upon this account the sense of demerit, as well as that of merit, seems to be a compounded sentiment, and to be made up of two distinct emotions; a direct antipathy to the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer. (TMS II.i.5.4, p.75)

Therefore, there are eight possibilities for the spectators. Spectators may approve of:

- (1.a) the approbation of the second agent (gratitude);
- (1.b) the absence of approbation of the second agent (ingratitude);
- (2.a) the disapprobation of the second agent (resentment); or
- (2.b) the absence of disapprobation of the second agent.

Inversely, spectators may disapprove of:

- (3.a) the approbation of the second agent (gratitude);
- (3.b) the absence of approbation of the second agent (ingratitude);
- (4.a) the disapprobation of the second agent (resentment); or
- (4.b) the absence of disapprobation of the second agent.

Each kind of propriety judgment creates the expectation of a suitable merit judgment, and each impropriety judgment creates the expectation of a suitable demerit judgment. Indirect sympathy depends on direct sympathy.⁹ This list of possibilities allows the quantitative dimension (intensity variations of the second agent's sentiments) to be likewise analyzed: Spectators may approve of this agent's gratitude but disapprove his weakness, or approve of his resentment but disapprove of its high pitch (for instance, in a case in which the second agent, properly resentful, goes too far in his search for justice). Nevertheless, to properly deal with this quantitative dimension it is necessary to discuss merit judgments from another point of view.

3. The objects of gratitude and resentment II

⁹ The senses of merit and demerit guarantee the intelligibility of a theme closely connected with Smith's name and work: the understanding of unintended consequences.

The question of the proper objects of gratitude and resentment may be analyzed from the point of view of the action. Every action may be judged in three elements:

first, to the intention or affection of the heart, from which it proceeds; or, secondly, to the external action or movement of the body, which this affection gives occasion to; or, lastly, to the good or bad consequences, which actually, and in fact, proceed from it. (TMS II.iii.intro.1, p.92)

Smith insists that it is only the first of these elements (agent's intention) that is truly laudable or blamable; the two other must be judged in relation to it:

To the intention or affection of the heart, therefore, to the propriety or impropriety, to the beneficence or hurtfulness of the design, all praise or blame, all approbation or disapprobation, of any kind, which can justly be bestowed upon any action, must ultimately belong. (TMS II.iii.intro.3, p.93)

Thus presented in such general and abstract manner, this maxim's "self-evident justice is acknowledged by all the world" (TMS II.iii.4, p.93). Everybody agrees that "unintended and unforeseen consequences" should not be considered, or should at least be somehow neutralized, in spectators' judgments. Nevertheless, as soon as we leave the plane of abstract maxims and enter the real world, with all its particularities,

the actual consequences which happen to proceed from any action, have a very great effect upon our sentiments concerning its merit or demerit, and almost always either enhance or diminish our sense of both. (TMS II.iii. 5, p.93)

This is what Smith calls "irregularity of sentiment," accruing from the (objective) influence of fortune upon moral judgments (TMS II.iii.6, p.93). To analyze it, he starts asking about "the causes of this influence of fortune" (TMS II.iii.1, title of the chapter), and his answer brings to the fore the imagination in one of its most interesting operations:

THE causes of pain and pleasure, whatever they are, or however they operate, seem to be the objects, which, in all animals, immediately excite those two passions of gratitude and resentment. They are excited by inanimated, as well as by animated objects. We are angry, for a moment, even at the stone that hurts us. A child beats it, a dog barks at it, a choleric man is apt to curse it. (TMS II.iii.1.1, p.94)

Whether it is gratitude or resentment, the spontaneous emotional reaction is directed at everything, not only the agent.¹⁰ As Smith (presumably) once said in class,

¹⁰ This mechanism does not depend on unpleasant feelings, nor it is circumscribed to resentment: "We conceive, in the same manner, a sort of gratitude for those inanimated objects, which have been the causes of great, or frequent pleasure to us. (...) A man grows fond of a snuff-box, of a pen-knife, of a staff which he has long made use of, and conceives something like a real love and affection for them. If he breaks or

“Resentment is on the whole a very indiscriminating principle”¹¹ (LJB 201, p.485). At first, even the stone that hit someone will become a target of the person’s resentment, but it takes only the “least reflection” to correct this mistake (TMS II.iii.1.1, p.94).

Projecting affections onto an object is less objectionable than the excesses that may follow.¹² Indeed, there is an evident similarity between this imaginary process and sympathy: The imaginary impartial spectator is based on the same projective mechanism of affections, sentiments, and judgments. What is the difference between the child who punishes the stone that hit her because she believes it is responsible for her pain and the man of sense who fears death because he lodges his “own living soul” in the “inanimated bodies” of dead people (TMS I.i.1.13, p.13)? Evidently, the difference lies in the object upon which this projection is made:

But, before any thing can be the proper object of gratitude or resentment, it must not only be the cause of pleasure or pain, it must likewise be capable of feeling them. Without this other quality, those passions cannot vent themselves with any sort of satisfaction upon it. As they are excited by the causes of pleasure and pain, so their gratification consists in retaliating those sensations upon what gave occasion to them; which it is to no purpose to attempt upon what has no sensibility. (TMS II.iii.1.3, p.94)

If this were the case, animals would be proper objects of gratitude and resentment. However:

though animals are not only the causes of pleasure and pain, but are also capable of feeling those sensations, they are still far from being complete and perfect objects, either of gratitude or resentment; and those passions still feel, that there is something wanting to their entire gratification.

loses them, he is vexed out of all proportion to the value of the damage. The house which we have long lived in, the tree, whose verdure and shade we have long enjoyed, are both looked upon with a sort of respect that seems due to such benefactors. The decay of the one, or the ruin of the other, affects us with a kind of melancholy, though we should sustain no loss by it. The Dryads and the Lares of the ancients, a sort of genii of trees and houses, were probably first suggested by this sort of affection, which the authors of those superstitions felt for such objects, and which seemed unreasonable, if there was nothing animated about them” (TMS II.iii.1.2, p.94).

¹¹ The whole paragraph is relevant: “A man meets with little resentment for riding an unruly horse in the market place, but if he kill any body resentment is very high. For the same reason deodands, tho' inanimate objects, are accounted execrable. In many cases the resentment falls upon the very member of the body which perpetrated the action. Resentment is on the whole a very indiscriminating principle and pays little attention to the disposition of the mind. Certain persons are not to be considered as objects of punishment, such as ideots, madmen, and children. We are not so much shocked by an action done by a madman as one done by another person. We think binding the only punishment adequate to their crimes” (LJB 201, p.485).

¹² The quest to punish an assassin is partially grounded in an illusion of this kind: “We feel that resentment which we imagine he [i.e., the dead person] ought to feel, and which he would feel, if in his cold and lifeless body there remained any consciousness of what passes upon earth. His blood, we think, calls aloud for vengeance. The very ashes of the dead seem to be disturbed at the thought that his injuries are to pass unrevenged” (TMS II.i.5.6, p.76). Smith calls this “illusive sympathy” (ibidem).

What gratitude chiefly desires, is not only to make the benefactor feel pleasure in his turn, but to make him conscious that he meets with this reward on account of his past conduct, to make him pleased with that conduct, and to satisfy him that the person upon whom he bestowed his good offices was not unworthy of them. (TMS II.iii.1.3-4, p.95)

The importance of the causal link is brought to the fore: The unfolding of the facts becomes the conscious object of the agents because of the action of the second agent; in a way, it is the causal structure that takes center stage, connecting past to present. However, this is merely a consequence of what truly guarantees the proper object of gratitude: the faculty of sympathy. The ability to imagine ourselves in someone else's place is what assures the regularity of our sentiments: I can imagine myself as the recipient of my action and determine (either before or after the action has taken place) what he should feel (or should have felt). This is what fortune endangers. The ultimate criterion to determine if an object is worthy of this imaginary projection is the ability to reciprocate this projection. This is more easily seen in the case of gratitude:

What most of all charms us in our benefactor, is the concord between his sentiments and our own, with regard to what interests us so nearly as the worth of our own character, and the esteem that is due to us. We are delighted to find a person who values us as we value ourselves, and distinguishes us from the rest of mankind, with an attention not unlike that with which we distinguish ourselves. (TMS II.iii.4, p.95)

A consequence of Smith's sympathy that at first seems paradoxical is that affective sharing is a necessary condition of individuality. The individualization process can properly begin only when I find someone who feels the same way I feel. The emotional sharing process allows someone else to see me the same way I see myself, to feel the same way I feel (especially concerning myself), and thus distinguishes me from others. What I feel in a subjective way attains a collective, intersubjective dimension. Gratitude thus acquires an extremely important function, perhaps the most important of morality, at least in a society where individuals seek moral approbation for their affection, sentiments, and acts.¹³ However, it is not any sort of individual demand that can be shared:

¹³ Which is to say any society formed by humans, at least according to Smith: "Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren. She taught him to feel pleasure in their favourable, and pain in their unfavourable regard. She rendered their approbation most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake; and their disapprobation most mortifying and most offensive" (TMS III.2.6, p.116).

The object, on the contrary, which resentment is chiefly intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel pain in his turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon account of his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, and to make him sensible, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner. What chiefly enrages us against the man who injures or insults us, is the little account which he seems to make of us, the unreasonable preference which he gives to himself above us, and that absurd self-love, by which he seems to imagine, that other people may be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency or his humour. (TMS II.iii.1.5, pp.95-6)

One of the social functions of resentment, therefore, is to curb absurd individual demands, or more specifically, non-justifiable sentiments of superiority. It is a spontaneous check mechanism inhibiting absurd individual aspirations: I will only accept being the target of someone's resentment if I admit that I have offended him. However, if this has not happened, then instead I feel resentment toward him for demanding of me more than I owe him. In order to properly work, this mechanism requires impartiality (see 5.2); otherwise we enter into a potentially endless spiral of more or less grounded accusations. Resentment is the most vehement and violent form of blame, proper only in cases of injury or offense:

To bring him back to a more just sense of what is due to other people, to make him sensible of what he owes us, and of the wrong that he has done to us, is frequently the principal end proposed in our revenge, which is always imperfect when it cannot accomplish this. (TMS II.iii.1.5, p.96)

Thus, gratitude and resentment can be properly felt, or, in other words, the sympathetic imagination may properly project itself onto objects containing the following properties:

First, it must be the cause of pleasure in the one case, and of pain in the other. Secondly, it must be capable of feeling those sensations. And, thirdly, it must not only have produced those sensations, but it must have produced them from design, and from a design that is approved of in the one case, and disapproved of in the other. It is by the first qualification, that any object is capable of exciting those passions: it is by the second, that it is in any respect capable of gratifying them: the third qualification is not only necessary for their complete satisfaction, but as it gives a pleasure or pain that is both exquisite and peculiar, it is likewise an additional exciting cause of those passions. (TMS II.iii.1.6, p.96)

Any object can provoke pleasure or pain, but only animated ones are capable of answering the affections directed toward them. However, it is only design, or in more general terms, intention, that truly ensures the propriety of gratitude and resentment

(besides human beings, only god is a proper object for these sentiments). Merit and demerit fall upon the intention—or they would if it were not for the influence of fortune.¹⁴

4. Fortune and its effects I: Merit and demerit¹⁵

The problem is that intention is seldom enough to achieve the proposed goal, and the actual results affect these sentiments:

if he has failed in producing either the good or the evil which he intended, as one of the exciting causes is wanting in both cases, less gratitude seems due to him in the one, and less resentment in the other. And, on the contrary, though in the intentions of any person, there was either no laudable degree of benevolence on the one hand, or no blameable degree of malice on the other; yet, if his actions should produce either great good or great evil, as one of the exciting causes takes place upon both these occasions, some gratitude is apt to arise towards him in the one, and some resentment in the other. (TMS II.iii.1.7, pp.96)

In cases such as these (of good effects without good intentions or of bad effects without bad intentions, or of effects in higher or lower degrees than those initially proposed), Smith speaks of a shadow of sentiment:

A shadow of merit seems to fall upon him in the first, a shadow of demerit in the second. And, as the consequences of actions are altogether under the empire of Fortune, hence arises her influence upon the sentiments of mankind with regard to merit and demerit. (ibidem)

We will deal with this notion of an “empire of fortune” later on (see 4.7-8). For the time being, to understand Smith’s metaphor of a shadow of sentiment it is important to resume the par of affective quality/kind-quantity/intensity. Here, once more, the quantitative dimension draws more attention:

¹⁴ Haakonssen is right when he points out that Smith offers “a most extraordinary combination of an ideal ethics of intentions with an actual ethics of consequences. Moreover, it serves Smith to good explanatory purpose, for it is precisely this combination which enables him to interpret morality as a guide to external action in a word of fortune and yet at the same time to see this morality as ultimately concerned with ideal and absolute propriety” (1981, p.65).

¹⁵ Only recently *moral luck* became a topic of analysis in Smith’s work (see Flanders, 2006), despite Nagel’s quotation of a passage of *Theory* (1979, see also Williams, 1981). During my research, I did not find any systematic attempt of reading Smith philosophy (or, at least *Theory*) from this point of view. Although it is not my goal, this chapter (and the following two) may offer some arguments in this sense (especially concerning the importance, reach and global structure of fortune in Smith’s work). In the next section, we will start to see how Smith’s irregularity of sentiment goes far beyond some insights “about consequential moral luck” (Flanders, 2006, p.193). Fortune is at the center of Smith’s morals, jurisprudence, economy and aesthetics.

THE effect of this influence of fortune is, first, to diminish our sense of the merit or demerit of those actions which arose from the most laudable or blamable intentions, when they fail of producing their proposed effects: and, secondly, to increase our sense of the merit or demerit of actions, beyond what is due to the motives or affections from which they proceed, when they accidentally give occasion either to extraordinary pleasure or pain. (TMS II.iii.2.1, p.97)

(a) Intensity decrease

Whether a person's intentions are proper and benevolent or improper and malevolent, if the person's action fails to produce the intended effects, "his merit seems imperfect in the one case, and his demerit incomplete in the other" (TMS II.iii.2.2, p.97). Smith offers the example of someone who tries to find a job for a friend but fails, and a second person who actually finds work for the same friend. This beloved friend will thank both for their good intentions, but the actual employment provided by the second brings something more that must be taken into account. A generous person will try to express the same gratitude toward both of her friends (if she is truly generous "the sentiments (...) will be nearly the same") and will see the second friend's success in securing the job as a detail ("they seem lose but a trifle"). However, "between the friend who fails and the friend who succeeds, all other circumstances are equal, there will, even in the noblest and the best mind, be some little difference of affection in favor of him who succeeds" (ibidem, pp.97-8). The full actualization of an intention unbalances the field: "The person obliged, we are apt to think, may, with some justice, imagine himself on a level with the first: but we cannot enter into his sentiments, if he does not feel himself inferior to the second" (ibidem, p.97).

If a generous person might avoid this gap, the rest of "mankind" will take it seriously. For them, the intention counts only insofar as those who want to help actually have the means to do it: The best intention of someone who does not have the means to accomplish the goal will be utterly undervalued. Even if he manages to find the means with the concurrence of others, the helped one's gratitude will be divided among those involved. In the eyes of mankind, the helped one's moral debt is smaller regarding someone without the means to accomplish the intended goals (ibidem, pp.97-8). Besides lack of means, helpless situations, with events completely out of control and plans unmade, also interfere with our sentiments (TMS II.iii.2.3, p.98). Generous spectators may recognize someone with superior talents and potential virtues, but these talents and

virtues do not have “the same effect with [i.e., as] the superiority of achievements” (ibidem, p.99).

Unlike many other parts of Smith’s theory, where the asymmetry between pleasure and pain brings a series of consequences, here, unsuccessful attempts to commit evil deeds have similar effects to unsuccessful attempts to do good deeds: “The design to commit a crime, how clearly soever it may be proved, is scarce ever punished with the same severity as the actual commission of it.” With the exception of treason,¹⁶ the mere intention to commit a crime is not enough to demand a punishment, even if the “real demerit”—the criminal intent—is the same (TMS II.iii.2.4, p.99).

The last example of intensity decrease is the most interesting in its effects. Someone is about to commit a crime and, at the last moment, an accident prevents him from doing so:

The person himself who either from passion, or from the influence of bad company, has resolved, and perhaps taken measures to perpetrate some crime, but who has fortunately been prevented by an accident which put it out of his power, is sure, if he has any remains of conscience, to regard this event all his life after as a great and signal deliverance. (...) But though his hands are innocent, he is conscious that his heart is equally guilty as if he had actually executed what he was so fully resolved upon. It gives great ease to his conscience, however, to consider that the crime was not executed, though he knows that the failure arose from no virtue in him. He still considers himself as less deserving of punishment and resentment; and this good fortune either diminishes, or *takes away altogether*, all sense of guilt. (TMS II.iii.2.5, p.101—italics mine)

This happy accident contradicts Smith’s original moral maxim: Not only does the demerit decrease, but also it might eventually vanish entirely, leaving behind no trace of guilt. This is another moment where a quantitative variation becomes a qualitative modification, thoroughly extinguishing a sentiment.

(b) Intensity increase

If in the last examples fortune intervened, reducing the intended effects of action, here it will magnify them, causing more pleasure or pain than was expected. It is here that Smith resumes his metaphor of a shadow of sentiment:

¹⁶ Treason is an exception due to the fact that the sovereign “is naturally more jealous of it”: “It is his own resentment which he indulges in the one case: it is that of his subjects which by sympathy he enters into in the other.” In other words, in cases of common crime, it is impossible for him to justify his own partiality (TMS II.iii.2.4, p.99).

The agreeable or disagreeable effects of the action often throw a shadow of merit or demerit upon the agent, though in his intention there was nothing that deserved either praise or blame, or at least that deserved them in the degree in which we are apt to bestow them. (TMS II.iii.2.6, p.101)

Historically, a messenger with bad news for a king, for instance, was at risk simply for being their bearer; the bearer of good news, on the other hand, was often rewarded for it. This imagined “coauthorship” is transitory but nevertheless real. An Armenian king once killed the messenger who told him of the imminent arrival of a powerful enemy army. To a distant spectator this brutality seems gratuitous, and yet if the messenger had been bearing good news and the king had rewarded him for it, the reward would not have seemed equally improper. Where does this difference come from, since there is neither real merit nor real demerit in either case?

It is because any sort of reason seems sufficient to authorize the exertion of the social and benevolent affections; but it requires the most solid and substantial to make us enter into that of the unsocial and malevolent. (ibidem, p.102)

Despite this, spectators agree and accept that at least one kind of improper, non-malicious act deserves punishment: a negligent act that results in damage to someone else:

if a person should throw a large stone over a wall into a public street without giving warning to those who might be passing by, and without regarding where it was likely to fall, he would undoubtedly deserve some chastisement. A very accurate police would punish so absurd an action, even though it had done no mischief. The person who has been guilty of it, shows an insolent contempt of the happiness and safety of others. There is real injustice in his conduct. He wantonly exposes his neighbour to what no man in his senses would chuse to expose himself, and evidently wants that sense of what is due to his fellow-creatures which is the basis of justice and of society. Gross negligence therefore is, in the law, said to be almost equal to malicious design. (TMS II.iii.2.8, p.102)

When a person ignores someone else’s well-being, this person crosses the line of resentment: By throwing a stone (improper act), even without the intention of causing damage (non-malicious act) and even if the stone does not hit anyone (there is no real damage), passersby have the right to resent the person (there is an injury or offense). Resentment is determined not only by real damage but also by the person principally concerned’s disrespect for “what is due to his fellow-creatures.” Any impartial spectator will sympathize with this resentment if the agent acts in an inconsiderate, disrespectful manner. Hence, negligence becomes a central case in the correct institution of justice, as

it clearly demonstrates how resentment is also based on something more than real damage or hurt—namely, an equity principle. However, any unilateral reading misses what Smith has in mind here, for spectators must take into account both the equity principle and the damage done:

if, by the imprudent action above-mentioned, he should accidentally kill a man, he is, by the laws of many countries (...) liable to the last punishment. And though this is no doubt excessively severe, it is not altogether inconsistent with our natural sentiments. Our just indignation against the folly and inhumanity of his conduct is exasperated by our sympathy with the unfortunate sufferer. Nothing, however, would appear more shocking to our natural sense of equity, than to bring a man to the scaffold merely for having thrown a stone carelessly into the street without hurting any body. (ibidem)

Without real damage, spectators' "natural sense of equity" requires them to take into account the dignity of the stone thrower as well; after all, although negligent, he still deserves respect¹⁷ (TMS II.ii.3.10, p.90). However, if the stone actually hits someone, resentment will be justified. As in the case of the potential criminal person who is thwarted by a 'happy accident,' an inverse kind of accident intervenes here, transforming an improper, non-malicious yet negligent act into an injustice (although there was no bad intention). Once again, fortune is capable not only of altering the intensity of gratitude and resentment but also of creating one or the other where there is no material basis (i.e., no intention) for it.

An attenuated version of this case is negligence that deserves to be censored but not really punished, as when someone damages or hurts someone else through carelessness. Amends is the sort of punishment "approved of by the natural sentiments of all mankind" in cases of carelessness (TMS II.iii.2.9, p.103).

An even lighter case of negligence, the last presented by Smith, consists of the "want of the most anxious timidity and circumspection, with regard to all the possible consequences of our actions." The most interesting aspect of this case is that, if nothing bad happens, it is this excessive circumspection and care that become blamable:

¹⁷ The role of this equity principle must be neither ignored nor overstated. Real damage is seldom dispensable for the approval of resentment: "The folly and inhumanity of his conduct, however, would in this case be the same; but still our sentiments would be very different [because of the presence of real damage]. The consideration of this difference may satisfy us how much the indignation, even of the spectator, is apt to be animated by the actual consequences of the action. In cases of this kind there will, if I am not mistaken, be found a great degree of severity in the laws of almost all nations; as I have already observed that in those of an opposite kind there was a very general relaxation of discipline" (TMS II.iii.2.8, p.103).

The want of this painful attention, when no bad consequences follow from it, is so far from being regarded as blamable, that the contrary quality is rather considered as such. That timid circumspection which is afraid of every thing, is never regarded as a virtue, but as a quality which more than any other incapacitates for action and business. (TMS II.iii.2.10, p.103)

A person who, before acting, considers every possible future consequence of the action rarely acts at all. Even worse, a person who renounces acting because of “an anxiety about merely possible events, which it is to no purpose to be aware of” deserves blame for such a hesitation. Due to his character, this person will be the first to seek compensation for an accident and “do every thing he can to appease that animal resentment, which he is sensible will be apt to arise in the breast of the sufferer,” although not even an impartial spectator would expect this behavior (*ibidem*). This is another sentiment that might be created without any material basis for it. Once again, Smith’s original maxim (there is only merit or demerit with previous intention) is contradicted, not only as a result of quantitative alterations but also because demerit might appear where there is no bad intention.

Smith’s metaphor of a shadow of sentiment may be thus correctly understood (TMS II.iii.1.7, pp.96-7). In the passage, Smith restricts it to the last cases presented: those of a merit or demerit created though there is no intention. A shadow of merit or demerit “falls upon” agents who had no intention to do either good or bad things. The agent is the surface where fortune cast the shadow of a sentiment, either gratitude or resentment, that he does not deserve.¹⁸

5. Fortune and its effects II: Propriety and impropriety

Fortune’s effects are more easily seen from merit judgments, but it also alters propriety judgments and therefore sympathy operation as a whole. It affects propriety judgments the same way it affects merit judgments: either intensifying or diminishing the

¹⁸ The metaphor’s sense could easily be extrapolated to the cases of quantitative alterations. When the intensity diminishes, we could speak of shadow in the sense of an attenuated presence, gradually fading out as the intensity decreases, as when the light in a room is decreased by a dimmer. The limit is found when complete darkness is reached: Then not even the object casting the shadow is visible anymore. On the other hand, when fortune intensifies the consequences of an action, the metaphor of a shadow could be understood as the enhancement and deformation of shadows obtained with a low angle of lightning, such as the shadow of someone on a beach at sunset. The limit here is a theater of shadows, where the images formed are illusions created by things that have nothing to do with those alluded to by the cast shadows. However, as seen, Smith restricts the scope of this metaphor to cases of a creation of merit or demerit with no previous intention.

sympathetic emotion up to a point where a qualitative alteration takes place. In the latter instance, fortune establishes the general frame of sympathy's possibility (see 4.13). To evaluate fortune's influence on propriety it is best to start with how we sympathize with pleasure and pain:

Pain besides, whether of mind or body, is a more pungent sensation than pleasure, and our sympathy with pain, though it falls greatly short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer, is generally a more lively and distinct perception than our sympathy with pleasure, though this last often approaches more nearly, as I shall shew immediately, to the natural vivacity of the original passion. (TMS I.iii.1.3, p.44)

The greater pungency of pain causes two effects: First, it causes us to avoid experiencing pain, either immediately or sympathetically. Second, the quantitative gap between original and sympathetic pains is usually bigger than the gap between original and sympathetic pleasures (which often frustrates the sufferer). As a result of these two effects, "we often struggle to keep down our sympathy with the sorrow of others" (TMS I.iii.1.4, p.44). On the other hand,

when there is no envy in the case, our propensity to sympathize with joy is much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow; and that our fellow-feeling for the agreeable emotion approaches much more nearly to the vivacity of what is naturally felt by the persons principally concerned, than that which we conceive for the painful one. (TMS I.iii.1.5, p.45)

It is important to note that envy is not an exception to this rule but a kind of reverse sympathy: When I envy someone, her suffering brings me pleasure and her pleasure brings me pain. Envy has "greatness" as an object (TMS I.iii.2.1, p.51) and consists of wanting bad things to happen to the envied one: "Envy is that passion which views with malignant dislike the superiority of those who are really entitled to all the superiority they possess" (TMS VI.iii.16, p.244). It is a passion completely determined by fortune, providing essential data for how it affects sympathy. Once greatness is its objects, its usual targets would be wealthy, powerful, and successful people. One might think of the high aristocracy of eighteenth-century Europe; however, they are outside the reach of envy. According to Smith, the "mob never bear any envy to their superiors" (TMS I.iii.1.11, p.47). This is evidently a case of qualitative alteration caused by fortune: The superiors Smith mentions are the sovereign and his closest circle. To Smith, the extremely wealthy and powerful (especially the members of ancient wealthy and powerful families) are not envied because most people cannot truly sympathize with them: "The great mob

of mankind are the admirers and worshippers, and, what may seem more extraordinary, most frequently the disinterested admirers and worshippers, of wealth and greatness” (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62).

All sympathy demands concern, even more important, to take place, it requires some affective proximity. This is precisely what does not happen here: The greater someone’s fortune, the farther away she is from the unfortunate mob. The pinnacle of this situation involves those Smith dubs the “hypocrites of wealth and greatness”:

Vain men often give themselves airs of a fashionable profligacy, which, in their hearts, they do not approve of, and of which, perhaps, they are really not guilty. They desire to be praised for what they themselves do not think praise-worthy, and are ashamed of unfashionable virtues which they sometimes practice. (TMS I.iii.3.7, p.64)

These “hypocrites” do not truly believe that ostentation is the correct way to moral approbation, so even they consider their behavior improper. Why would someone act like this? To obtain a specific kind of approbation bestowed by fortune: “In equal degrees of merit there is scarce any man who does not respect more the rich and the great, than the poor and the humble” (TMS I.iii.3.4, p.62). Smith considers this to be complete nonsense from a moral point of view, yet he admits it is nevertheless true:

It is scarce agreeable to good morals, or even to good language, perhaps, to say, that mere wealth and greatness, abstracted from merit and virtue, deserve our respect. We must acknowledge, however, that they almost constantly obtain it; and that they may, therefore, be considered as, in some respects, the natural objects of it. (TMS I.iii.3.4, p.62)

The moralist condemns the fact that the philosopher must acknowledge.¹⁹ Nevertheless, if good fortune brings respect (even if it is undeserved), what does misfortune bring? Someone suffering in a terrible situation is not only the object of spectators’ sympathy but also the object of their indulgence. If she demonstrates mastery in controlling these emotions, she might likewise be the object of spectators’ admiration. On the contrary, someone “in fullness of prosperity,” who can “in the same manner master his joy, seems hardly to deserve any praise.” This is because the gap between original and sympathetic grief is much bigger than the gap between original and sympathetic joy (TMS I.iii.1.6, p.45). Smith points to what he considers the “natural and ordinary state” on this topic, and what may be called the zero degree of fortune’s influence over our judgments:

¹⁹ Hume states something quite similar in *Treaty*: “riches and power alone, even tho’ unemploy’d, naturally cause esteem and respect” (THS. 2.2.5.5, p.359, see 6.6).

What can be added to the happiness of the man who is in health, who is out of debt, and has a clear conscience? To one in this situation, all accessions of fortune may properly be said to be superfluous; and if he is much elevated upon account of them, it must be the effect of the most frivolous levity. This situation, however, may very well be called the natural and ordinary state of mankind. (TMS I.iii.1.7, p.45)

Smith's three requirements (health, absence of debt, and a clear conscience²⁰) indicate quite clearly the possible sources of uneasiness (health issues, bad financial management, and bad reputation). Once one is in this "natural and ordinary state," fortune has little to offer, and whoever asks too much of it suffers from some sort of "extravagant passion" (TMS III.3.31, p.149, see section 12 below). Otherwise, the following would be clear:

Notwithstanding the present misery and depravity of the world, so justly lamented, this really is the state of the greater part of men. The greater part of men, therefore, cannot find any great difficulty in elevating themselves to all the joy which any accession to this situation can well excite in their companion. (TMS I.iii.1.7, p.45)

Once "little can be added to this [ordinary and natural] state," spectators' sympathy might easily cause any excesses of pleasure or joy (the exception being those caused by envy). However, as "much can be taken from it," rock bottom may be very far from what even the greatest sympathetic effort can achieve: "Adversity, on this account, necessarily depresses the mind of the sufferer much more below its natural state, than prosperity can elevate him above it" (TMS I.iii.1.8, p.45). Those suffering feel this sympathetic difficulty as a second burden. As if the original suffering were not enough, the person principally concerned must now deal with spectators' reluctance to sympathize with it, feeling (in extreme cases) ashamed of it:

The wretch whose misfortunes call upon our compassion feels with what reluctance we are likely to enter into his sorrow, and therefore proposes his grief to us with fear and hesitation: he even smothers the half of it, and is ashamed, upon account of this hard-heartedness of mankind, to give vent to the fullness of his affliction. (TMS I.iii.1.9, p.46)

The best the person principally concerned can do is to try acting magnanimously, controlling as best he can the manifestations of suffering:

²⁰ Meaning absence of bad reputation or infamy. This state differs from that of tranquility and acts as a sort of 'moral echo' of Smith's jurisprudence (see Section 10 below).

We feel what an immense effort is requisite to silence those violent emotions which naturally agitate and distract those in his situation. We are amazed to find that he can command himself so entirely. His firmness, at the same time, perfectly coincides with our insensibility. (TMS I.iii.1.13, p.48)

This is one of the most fascinating cases of sympathy: Spectators sympathize with the agent's self-command because they cannot truly sympathize with his suffering. The agent's firmness equals the spectators' insensibility, and his conduct is judged proper and admirable: first, because he does not demand too much from the spectators, and second, because his conduct is unusual.

He makes no demand upon us for that more exquisite degree of sensibility which we find, and which we are mortified to find, that we do not possess. There is the most perfect correspondence between his sentiments and ours, and on that account the most perfect propriety in his behaviour. It is a propriety too, which, from our experience of the usual weakness of human nature, we could not reasonably have expected he should be able to maintain. We wonder with surprise and astonishment at that strength of mind which is capable of so noble and generous an effort. (ibidem; cf. TMS I.ii.1.12, pp.30-1)

The inverse happens in the case of a criminal sentenced not to death but to a disgraceful punishment. To be left alive in situations like these is (morally) worse than dying, because there the sole sympathy possible is "with his shame, not with his sorrow," which does not provide any comfort (TMS I.iii.2.10, pp.60-1).

Fortune quantitatively alters spectators' judgments inside certain boundaries, beyond which it precludes sympathy from working completely. Extreme misfortune begets a shameful pity, not sympathy: "Those who pity him, blush and hang down their heads for him. He droops in the same manner, and feels himself irrecoverably degraded by the punishment, though not by the crime" (ibidem, p.61). To be sent to the scaffold would be less unbearable if there were some space left for sympathy, even if only for the self-command shown in his last steps.

Thus, fortune influences judgments of propriety in two ways.²¹ Quantitatively, it associates more merit with fortunate people and less with misfortunate (and in different degrees of intensity according to the degree of fortune). Qualitatively, she completely

²¹ An additional point of interest on this topic is that this is Smith's explanation of the psychological dynamics grounding the search for wealth, and with it one of the main contact points between *Theory* and *Wealth of Nations*: "It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow, that we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty. Nothing is so mortifying as to be obliged to expose our distress to the view of the public, and to feel, that though our situation is open to the eyes of all mankind, no mortal conceives for us the half of what we suffer" (TMS I.iii.2.1, p.50).

alters sympathy's operation in extreme cases, either of good fortune (the extremely wealthy and powerful who are admired in a disinterested way) or of misfortune, in two ways: When there is great suffering involved, sympathy with self-command (or with the shame of those who cannot master themselves) replaces sympathy with grief, and when the suffering is small, sympathy becomes contempt and aversion.²² The general result is the following:

As to become the natural object of the joyous congratulations and sympathetic attentions of mankind is, in this manner, the circumstance which gives to prosperity all its dazzling splendour; so nothing darkens so much the gloom of adversity as to feel that our misfortunes are the objects, not of the fellow-feeling, but of the contempt and aversion of our brethren. (TMS I.iii.2.9, p.58)

In a way, fortune establishes the frame of possibilities for the operations of sympathy and of judgments of propriety and merit.²³ It likewise determines the intermediate cases (the most frequent), in which propriety and merit add up to those disinterested judgments (of the beauty bestowed by the appearance of futility), forming an approval sentiment of a complex nature (TMS VI.concl.6, p.264).

6. Observing fortune

Despite fortune's effect on propriety and merit judgments, a true impartial spectator is not fooled:

The esteem and admiration which every impartial spectator conceives for the real merit of those spirited, magnanimous, and high-minded persons, as it is a just and well-founded sentiment, so it is a steady and permanent one, and altogether independent of their good or bad fortune. (TMS VI.iii.30, p.252)

A moral judgment will be well grounded only if the spectator can correctly grasp the agent's intention. From there, it will be easy to determine which effects were caused by the original intention and, consequently, which were caused by fortune. It will also be

²² "It is often more mortifying to appear in public under small disasters, than under great misfortunes. The first excite no sympathy; but the second, though they may excite none that approaches to the anguish of the sufferer, call forth, however, a very lively compassion. The sentiments of the spectators are, in this last case, less wide of those of the sufferer, and their imperfect fellow-feeling lends him some assistance in supporting his misery. Before a gay assembly, a gentleman would be more mortified to appear covered with filth and rags than with blood and wounds. This last situation would interest their pity; the other would provoke their laughter" (TMS I.iii.2.9, p.60).

²³ Fortune also opens *Theory*: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (TMS I.i.1.1, p.9).

easy to judge both the propriety and merit of the agent. The excessive conceit of those whose success is due more to fortuitous events than personal merit will become obvious:

Success covers from his [the agent's] eyes, not only the great imprudence, but frequently the great injustice of their enterprises; and, far from blaming this defective part of their character, he often views it with the most enthusiastic admiration. When they are unfortunate, however, things change their colours and their names. What was before heroic magnanimity, resumes its proper appellation of extravagant rashness and folly; and the blackness of that avidity and injustice, which was before hid under the splendour of prosperity, comes full into view, and blots the whole lustre of their enterprise. (ibidem; cf. VI.iii.27, p.249)

There is no clearer evidence that fortune clouds our judgments than the way they change together with the fortune of their object. The impetuous entrepreneur becomes someone anxious, her daring decision suddenly seems risky, her boldness becomes petulance, her business acumen appears arbitrary... The example of Julius Caesar is quite elucidative:

Had Caesar, instead of gaining, lost the battle of Pharsalia [where he defeated Pompey, ending civil war], his character would, at this hour, have ranked a little above that of Catiline, and the weakest man would have viewed his enterprise against the laws of his country in blacker colours, than, perhaps, even Cato, with all the animosity of a party-man, ever viewed it at the time. His real merit, the justness of his taste, the simplicity and elegance of his writings, the propriety of his eloquence, his skill in war, his resources in distress, his cool and sedate judgment in danger, his faithful attachment to his friends, his unexampled generosity to his enemies, would all have been acknowledged; as the real merit of Catiline, who had many great qualities, is acknowledged at this day. But the insolence and injustice of his all-grasping ambition would have darkened and extinguished the glory of all that real merit. (TMS VI.iii.30, p.252)

Fortune alters the weakest man's²⁴ judgment in a different way than Cato's factitious partiality does. A failure against Pompey would have more profoundly affected our moral judgments about Caesar than partiality deeply rooted in factious political prejudices. Prejudices cause subjective bias in moral judgments; fortune objectively alters the output of actions. If Caesar had lost in Pharsalia, our moral weakness would be objectively correct in painting him with the darkest possible colors. The opposite is equally true: As he defeated Pompey, his good fortune enhanced his moral qualities (greater intensity) and eased (less intensity) or even erased altogether his moral flaws and

²⁴ Smith's "weakest man" is anyone whose judgments are highly volatile; he is particularly impressed by external things (fortune among them) and responds almost exclusively to them (TMS III.3.23-4, pp.145-6).

faults (qualitative alteration). In short, we are objectively correct in praising or perhaps even exalting him. It is extremely difficult to argue against either failure or success (even personal failure or success):

Fortune has (...) great influence over the moral sentiments of mankind, and, according as she is either favourable or adverse, can render the same character the object either of general love and admiration, or of universal hatred and contempt. (ibidem, pp.252-3)

Only an extremely strong subjective constitution can transcend this influence. As is clear in the opening quotation of this section, in which Smith says that a truly impartial spectator is not fooled by (either good or bad) fortune, this constitution is the same one that solves the problem of partiality.²⁵ There are two problems and one solution: a subject who divides herself (and her self) into agent and judge and judges herself as an impartial spectator would.

A philosopher must recognize, however, that this influence of fortune over our moral sentiments is not only natural but also useful:

Our admiration of success is founded upon the same principle with our respect for wealth and greatness, and is equally necessary for establishing the distinction of ranks and the order of society. By this admiration of success we are taught to submit more easily to those superiors, whom the course of human affairs may assign to us; to regard with reverence, and sometimes even with a sort of respectful affection, that fortunate violence which we are no longer capable of resisting; (...). By this admiration, however, they are taught to acquiesce with less reluctance under that government which an irresistible force imposes upon them, and from which no reluctance could deliver them. (ibidem)

Seen by the “undistinguishing eyes of the great mob of mankind,” success, wealth, and power bring with them a ‘splendor’ that makes it easier for mankind to accept the inequalities and injustices they cause. This “fascination of greatness (...) indeed, is so powerful, that the rich and the great are too often preferred to the wise and the virtuous” (TMS VI.ii.1.20, p.226; cf. I.iii.2.1, p.51). Even a wise and virtuous person will seldom correctly discern someone else’s true intention and real merit (even her own intention might be difficult to grasp), whereas anyone can easily judge success, wealth, and power. If the moralist must frequently “exhort us to charity and compassion” in an attempt to

²⁵ It is more complicated to judge cases of success, as pain is more pungent and, in a way, brings those who feel it closer to reality. When dealing with the excessive self-esteem of successful men, Smith speaks of an “intoxication of prosperity” (TMS VI.iii.32, p.254).

oppose this natural tendency, the philosopher must analyze the situation in its global aspect:

Nature has wisely judged that the distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, would rest more securely upon the plain and palpable difference of birth and fortune, than upon the invisible and often uncertain difference of wisdom and virtue. The undistinguishing eyes of the great mob of mankind can well enough perceive the former: it is with difficulty that the nice discernment of the wise and the virtuous can sometimes distinguish the latter. In the order of all those recommendations, the benevolent wisdom of nature is equally evident. (TMS VI.ii.1.20, p.226)

If the moralist's rhetoric often opposes fortune and virtue, the philosopher must show three things:

- (1) that fortune and virtue are not always in opposition (in preceding chapters we saw that a person might seek empirical approbation in a non-vain way, through actions that deserve this approbation, what Smith dubs the search for a well-grounded honor or just glory);
- (2) the ways our moral judgments become more complex because of fortune's influence; and
- (3) that fortune's influence is grounded in the good constitution of human nature and is useful: An unordered society cannot exist, and every social order demands some sort of authority.

7. Authority of fortune: People, labor, and sentiments

Authority is grounded in acknowledged superiority—that is, when spectators sympathize with the one who feels superior.²⁶ Smith presents his theory of authority in Book V of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, when dealing with the “second duty of the sovereign,” —namely, “of establishing an exact administration of justice”²⁷ (WN V.i.b.1, pp.708-9). Smith's theory of justice (at least as

²⁶ We can remember the “sense of superiority” of princes and kings, such as Louis XIV (TMS I.iii.2.5, p.54). There are few studies about Smith's theory of authority. A good exception is Khalil (2005). I address this subject in a paper (Müller, 2013).

²⁷ In a famous passage of the book, Smith describes the three duties of the sovereign: “According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain publick works and certain publick institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or

it can be inferred from some passages in *Theory* and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, as well as his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* of 1762–3 and 1766²⁸) distinguishes three levels of individual rights from the three ways a person can be injured or offended²⁹: (1) as a man, (2) as a member of a family, and (3) as a member of a state. As a man, a person may be injured in three other instances: (a) in his person, (b) in his reputation, and (c) in his estate (or fortune).³⁰ Resuming a traditional distinction, the first two sub-levels (1.a and 1.b) are natural, and the third (1.c) is adventitious—that is, conventional³¹ (LJ, p.399). Regarding injuries against the person or his reputation, in a way, nature manages the situation well:

Envy, malice, or resentment, are the only passions which can prompt one man to injure another in his person or reputation. But the greater part of men are not very frequently under the influence of those passions; and the very worst men are so only occasionally. As their gratification too, how agreeable soever it may be to certain characters, is not attended with any real or permanent advantage, it is in the greater part of men commonly restrained by prudential considerations. Men may live together in society with some tolerable degree of security, though there is no civil magistrate to protect them from the injustice of those passions. (WN V.i.b.2, p.709)

small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society” (WN IV.ix.51, pp.687-9).

²⁸ All the editions of *Theory* bring a promise in the last paragraphs: “I shall in another discourse endeavour to give an account of the general principles of law and government, and of the different revolutions they have undergone in the different ages and periods of society, not only in what concerns justice, but in what concerns police, revenue, and arms, and whatever else is the object of law” (TMS VII.iv.37, p.342). As the “Advertisement” to the sixth edition states, this promise was only partially fulfilled: “In the last paragraph of the first Edition of the present work, I said, that I should in another discourse endeavour to give an account of the general principles of law and government, and of the different revolutions which they had undergone in the different ages and periods of society; not only in what concerns justice, but in what concerns police, revenue, and arms, and whatever else is the object of law. In *Wealth*, I have partly executed this promise; at least so far as concerns police, revenue, and arms. What remains, the theory of jurisprudence, which I have long projected, I have hitherto been hindered from executing, by the same occupations which had till now prevented me from revising the present work. Though my very advanced age leaves me, I acknowledge, very little expectation of ever being able to execute this great work to my own satisfaction; yet, as I have not altogether abandoned the design, and as I wish still to continue under the obligation of doing what I can, I have allowed the paragraph to remain as it was published more than thirty years ago, when I entertained no doubt of being able to execute every thing which it announced” (TMS Advertisement, p.3). Two notebooks of Smith’s *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, of the years 1762–3 and 1766, are the sole sources of this promised but not published “discourse.” They are a valuable resource, but when dealing with them one should always keep in mind that they are students’ notes containing material Smith chose not to publish after all. (It is not unlikely that his studies on jurisprudence were among the manuscripts thrown in the fire a few days before his death in 1790).

²⁹ For more about justice as a “negative virtue,” see 5.5.

³⁰ “We trust our health to the physician; our fortune and sometimes our life and reputation to the lawyer and attorney” (WN I.x.b.19, p.122).

³¹ The editors of LJ point to Hutcheson as the source (see *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Book II, Chapters 5 and 6; cf. LJA i.12, p.8). Haakonssen speaks in a “tradicional distinction” (1981, p.102).

Far more serious problems arise with estate inequality, demanding another kind of solution.³² The accumulation of property in particular excites numerous passions, sometimes driving people to commit crimes:

But avarice and ambition in the rich, in the poor the hatred of labour and the love of present ease and enjoyment, are the passions which prompt to invade property, passions much more steady in their operation, and much more universal in their influence. Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many. The affluence of the rich excites the indignation of the poor, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions. (ibidem)

Smith concludes:

The acquisition of valuable and extensive property, therefore, necessarily requires the establishment of civil government. Where there is no property, or at least none that exceeds the value of two or three days labour, civil government is not so necessary. (ibidem)

Since every government “supposes a certain subordination,” and the government’s needs increase *pari passu* with this property growth, a potentially serious problem could be triggered. However, as “the principal causes which naturally introduce subordination gradually grow up with the growth of that valuable property” (WN V.i.b.3, p.710), this problem does not actually evolve. Estate inequality is the most important source of “superiority.” There are four such sources, organized in pairs. First are individual characteristics: personal qualifications (physical and mental) and age. Concerning personal qualifications, Smith lists “strength, beauty and agility of body,” and “wisdom, virtue, prudence, justice, fortitude of mind.” However, corporeal abilities “unless supported by those of the mind, can give little authority in any period of society.” Mental qualities, on the other hand, are “invisible qualities; always disputable, and generally disputed” (WN V.i.b.5, p.711). Age is tangible and valid everywhere, bestowing a superiority relative to the younger members of the same community (WN V.i.b.6, p.711).

³² Here, Smith shows he took Rousseau’s second discourse seriously. Between 1755 and 1756 Smith contributed twice to *The Edinburgh Review*, a review journal edited by his friend Alexander Wedderburn. His second contribution was an open letter to the editor, in which he insisted that the *Review* should not restrict its content to Scottish books but should reach for English and continental philosophy. After briefly speaking of some contemporary philosophers he comments on and translates three passages of Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*. Pimenta (2013) offers a good comment on Smith’s critique of Rousseau; for an explanation of how Smith seeks to respond to Rousseau’s critique of commercial society, see Rassmussen (2005).

Second are two social institutions: fortune and birth. Here, Smith points that the former grounds the latter:

Superiority of birth supposes an antient superiority of fortune in the family of the person who claims it. All families are equally ancient; and the ancestors of the prince, though they may be better known, cannot well be more numerous than those of the beggar. Antiquity of family means every where the antiquity either of wealth, or of that greatness which is commonly either founded upon wealth, or accompanied with it. (WN V.i.b.8, p.713)

By “superiority of fortune” Smith means patrimonial or estate inequality.³³ This is greater in societies where there is no luxury, as the fortunate one

cannot well employ that increase [of stocks] in any other way than in maintaining a thousand men. The rude state of his society does not afford him any manufactured produce, any trinkets or baubles of any kind, for which he can exchange that part of his rude produce which is over and above his own consumption. The thousand men whom he thus maintains, depending entirely upon him for their subsistence, must both obey his orders in war, and submit to his jurisdiction in peace. He is necessarily both their general and their judge, and his chieftainship is the necessary effect of the superiority of his fortune. (WN V.i.b.7, p.712)

Without a well-established, complex, and far-reaching division of labor (one that supports manufacturing), great fortune necessarily brings political power, both military and civil, to its possessor. In rude societies, estate inequality implies an individual power to command the rest of the members of the community because they become dependent on this fortunate person (or small group). They cannot otherwise obtain the “necessaries and conveniences of life” (WN Introduction.1, p.10) and therefore submit themselves to the possessor of a great fortune. If, in this rude state of society, fortune implies command over people,

³³ Here there is a potential terminology problem. In his juridical texts, Smith speaks of estate (LJ, p.399, for instance), but in *Wealth* he introduces a series of precise economical concepts, closely related to each other yet distinguished—namely, wealth, stock, and capital. Of wealth he says, “THE annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes” (WN Intro.1, p.10). Stock is wealth saved in order to sustain its possessor for a determined period of time (WN III.intro.2, pp.276-7). Capital is the part of stock used to obtain (or expected to yield) revenue (i.e., profit) (WN III.1.2, p.279). Opulence is also closely linked to wealth but without the second’s precise time frame (the first word of *Wealth* is *annual*). In *Wealth*, opulence normally appears in expressions such as “progress of opulence” (Book III’s title, for example) or “degree of opulence” (III.ii.1, p.382), and is often connected to improvement, as in “an opulent and improved society” (WN V.I.h.2, p.814). It is a non-scientific term, and there may be a terminological evolution in Smith’s thought, from the less precise “opulence” to the scientific “wealth” (see, for instance, the title of the early draft that became the first chapter of Book I of *Wealth*: “Of the nature and causes of public opulence”; LJ, p.562), perhaps due to Physiocracy’s influence.

In an opulent and civilized society, a man may possess a much greater fortune, and yet not be able to command a dozen of people. Though the produce of his estate may be sufficient to maintain, and may perhaps actually maintain, more than a thousand people, yet as those people pay for every thing which they get from him, as he gives scarce any thing to any body but in exchange for an equivalent, there is scarce any body who considers himself as entirely dependent upon him, and his authority extends only over a few menial servants. The authority of fortune, however, is very great even in an opulent and civilized society. (WN V.i.b.7, p.712)

With the introduction of luxury³⁴ (in this case, meaning manufactured and/or foreign products), the fortunate ones can spend their fortune on themselves (in an infinity of “frivolous objects”; TMS IV.1.7, p.181) and not necessarily on sustaining a huge number of servants (WN II.iii.38, p.346). Consequently, they lose their direct power of commanding people, which does not mean they lose all power:

Wealth, as Mr. Hobbes says, is power. But the person who either acquires, or succeeds to a great fortune, does not necessarily acquire or succeed to any political power, either civil or military. His fortune may, perhaps, afford him the means of acquiring both, but the mere possession of that fortune does not necessarily convey to him either. The power which that possession immediately and directly conveys to him, is the power of purchasing; a certain command over all the labour, or over all the produce of labour which is then in the market. His fortune is greater or less, precisely in proportion to the extent of this power; or to the quantity either of other men's labour, or, what is the same thing, of the produce of other men's labour, which it enables him to purchase or command. The exchangeable value of every thing must always be precisely equal to the extent of this power which it conveys to its owner. (WN I.v.3, p.48)

In rich, commercial, and refined societies (with a broad spectrum of agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial activities, as well as fully developed juridical and political institutions), the mere possession of fortune no longer necessarily implies in political power (either military or civil) as in earlier and less developed stages of society.³⁵ Here, the power fortune bestows is the “power of purchasing; a certain command over all the labour, or over all the produce of labour which is then in the market.” The simple juxtaposition of these two passages makes it clear that, to Smith, commanding people is different from commanding labor because of market relations: The unfortunate must pay

³⁴ Smith is at the end of a long debate that took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between those who saw luxury as a corruptor, a source of all kinds of vices, and those who saw it as a civilizing element. For more about this, see Monzani (1995, chapter 1).

³⁵ The well-known Smithian scheme of four stages of economical/juridical/political development (hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce) is implicit in much of *Wealth's* exposition (here, in the discussion of authority, for instance) and is more fully developed in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJA, pp.201 ss.; LJB, pp.404 ss.). For commentary, see the classical study of Ronald Meek (1976).

for what they get—that is, they supply an equivalent for whatever they consume and stop considering themselves as dependent (at least directly) on the fortunate. This points to the political importance of luxury: By providing a new channel (or channels) for rich people to spend their fortunes, it diminishes the direct personal influence of the fortunate over the unfortunate. Commercial society transforms relations of personal dependence into relations of market interdependence, where “Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society” (WN I.iv.1, p.37).

Smith has a fully developed economic theory of commercial societies that is not the topic of this thesis. For the time being, it is important to highlight a third power of command fortune bestows: the power to command sentiments and opinions: “Great success in the world, great authority over the sentiments and opinions of mankind” (TMS VI.iii.28, p.250). With this passage (for a comment, see 4.11), the triad of the authority of fortune is complete: wealth (command over labor), power (military and civil command over people), and success (command over sentiments and opinions).³⁶

If fortune inequality presses societies to develop government institutions, it also provides the most important means to establish its stability: authority—that is, the disinterested admiration that the “great mob of mankind” (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62) feels for the wealthy, powerful, and successful people. Fortune (and fortune inequality) is one of the most important foundations of civil government regardless of its utility. It is true that “The consideration of that necessity [of the introduction of authority] comes no doubt afterwards to contribute very much to maintain and secure that authority and subordination,” but this consideration is an afterthought (WN V.i.b.12, p.715). Fortune inequality begets a division between the fortunate and unfortunate, pressing them to form a social bond of authority and dependence as well as mutual advantage.³⁷ This is a fact the philosopher must grasp if she wants to properly understand how human nature unfolds in society.

³⁶ Success begets fortune: “The great admiral is less the object of publick admiration than the great general, and the highest success in the sea service promises a less brilliant fortune and reputation than equal success in the land” (WN I.x.b.31, p.126). Credit partially depends on one’s opinion about fortune: “When a person employs only his own stock in trade, there is no trust; and the credit which he may get from other people, depends, not upon the nature of his trade, but upon their opinion of his fortune, probity, and prudence” (WN I.x.b.20, p.122).

³⁷ “The gains of both [town and country, that is, the great gains of commerce of every civilized society] are mutual and reciprocal, and the division of labour is in this, as in all other cases, advantageous to all the different persons employed in the various occupations into which it is subdivided” (WN III.i.1, p.376).

8. The empire of fortune

In the last chapter of the second part of *Theory*, dedicated to merit, Smith resumes the question of the final cause of the influence of fortune over moral sentiments and judgments—that is, the final cause of the irregularity of sentiments:

Fortune, which governs the world, has some influence where we should be least willing to allow her any, and directs in some measure the sentiments of mankind, with regard to the character and conduct both of themselves and others. That the world judges by the event, and not by the design has been in all ages the complaint, and is the great discouragement of virtue. (TMS II.iii.3.1, pp.103-4)

The problem of fortune appears once we move away from general maxims and abstract rules and toward the particularities of life, the concrete, specific situations (where merit and fortune interlace), which demand to be properly judged:

Every body agrees to the general maxim, that as the event does not depend on the agent, it ought to have no influence upon our sentiments, with regard to the merit or propriety of his conduct. But when we come to particulars, we find that our sentiments are scarce in any one instance exactly conformable to what this equitable maxim would direct. The happy or unprosperous event of any action, is not only apt to give us a good or bad opinion of the prudence with which it was conducted, but almost always too animates our gratitude or resentment, our sense of the merit or demerit of the design. (ibidem)

The good or bad opinion one has about someone's character depends more on fortune than personal merit. If complaints and remonstrance suit the moralist's rhetoric, the philosopher must try to see the bigger picture: What would happen if spectators judged only the intention (and not the action)?

Sentiments, thoughts, intentions, would become the objects of punishment; and if the indignation of mankind run as high against them as against actions; if the baseness of the thought which had given birth to no action, seemed in the eyes of the world as much to call aloud for vengeance as the baseness of the action, every court of judicature would become a real inquisition. There would be no safety for the most innocent and circumspect conduct. Bad wishes, bad views, bad designs, might still be suspected; and while these excited the same indignation with bad conduct, while bad intentions were as much resented as bad actions, they would equally expose the person to punishment and resentment. (TMS II.iii.3.2, p.104)

Imagine yourself in a work environment where you could not think ill of your boss (or of your employees), or in a conversation where you could not feel disgusted about

someone's particular opinion. Obviously it would be a world of non-human beings, some sort of godlike creatures capable of fully controlling their affections and reading each other's minds. For Smith, individual affections diverge quantitatively and qualitatively from sympathetic emotions, and this is a necessary consequence of our nature:

Sentiments, designs, affections, though it is from these that according to cool reason human actions derive their whole merit or demerit, are placed by the great Judge of hearts beyond the limits of every human jurisdiction, and are reserved for the cognizance of his own unerring tribunal. That necessary rule of justice, therefore, that men in this life are liable to punishment for their actions only, not for their designs and intentions, is founded upon this salutary and useful irregularity in human sentiments concerning merit or demerit, which at first sight appears so absurd and unaccountable. (ibidem)

The influence of fortune may be seen through the relation between nature and justice: Fortune alters the operations of merit and demerit judgments and, with it, of justice.³⁸ It invalidates the "equitable maxim" that only good effects of good intentions are meritorious and, inversely, that only bad effects of bad intentions are demeritorious (and deserve resentment). This maxim is intimately linked with the "natural sense of equity" and the impartial spectator: A merit judgment that properly circumscribes what is due to intention is a judgment that necessarily discounts fortune's influence. Thus, it is a judgment that ignores all three dimensions of wealth, power, and success, that ignores estate and income, background and education, skin color, sexual orientation, political preferences, manners,³⁹ etc., aiming at only the relationship between intention and action. In short, the impartial spectator sees and takes seriously the equality among human beings, every one subject to good and bad intentions and equally capable of good and bad actions.

What the philosopher must grasp is that this irregularity of sentiments is not only grounded in human nature but is also useful to mankind as a whole and to every individual:

³⁸ Fortune can transform a natural judgment of impropriety into an injustice: "On the contrary, he always appears, in some measure, mean and despicable, who is sunk in sorrow and dejection upon account of any calamity of his own. We cannot bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself, and what, perhaps, we should feel for ourselves if in his situation: we, therefore, despise him; unjustly, perhaps, if any sentiment could be regarded as unjust, to which we are by nature irresistibly determined" (TMS I.iii.1.15, p.49).

³⁹ An impartial spectator knows where to properly put rudeness; he does not condemn a person with no ill will simply because she expresses herself in an impolite or harsh manner.

Man was made for action, and to promote by the exertion of his faculties such changes in the external circumstances both of himself and others, as may seem most favourable to the happiness of all. (...) Nature has taught him, that neither himself nor mankind can be fully satisfied with his conduct, nor bestow upon it the full measure of applause, unless he has actually produced them. (TMS II.ii.3.3, p.106)

To Smith, it is through the “natural progress of opulence” that mankind unfolds its nature:

That order of things [first the land, then the town, and finally foreign commerce] which necessity imposes in general, though not in every particular country, is, in every particular country, promoted by the natural inclinations of man.⁴⁰ (WN III.i.3, p.377; cf. III.i.8, p.380)

The conjoint history of wealth and civil government is written through actions where fortune and merit are interwoven. Caesar’s victory over Pompey is a good example of how Smith’s analysis works and how “the great mob of mankind” usually follows fortune. If this is so, then why insist on merit and demerit judgments? If “fortune governs the world” (especially that of political economy), then why worry about individual affections and sentiments? Why not let the “weakest man” be taken by the events? Fundamentally to protect the individual (this argument is also pertinent to the “equity principle”⁴¹). This is Smith’s attempt to restore the ancient sense of the Latin term *piaculum*—the state of someone who involuntarily broke a religious law and whose redress demands some sort of atonement. He insists that

by the wisdom of Nature, the happiness of every innocent man is (...) rendered holy, consecrated, and hedged round against the approach of every other man; not to be wantonly trod upon, not even to be, in any respect, ignorantly and involuntarily violated, without requiring some expiation, some atonement in proportion to the greatness of such undesigned violation. (TMS III.iii.3.4, p.107)

To him, someone who has involuntarily committed a crime must feel that he is awaiting atonement (*piacular*) but not feel guilt. Some characters of ancient and modern tragedies offer representations of this “fallacious sense of guilt”: Jocasta in Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*, Monimia in Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan or The Unhappy Marriage*

⁴⁰ Vivienne Brown has insisted on this aspect (1993).

⁴¹ This principle forces one to restrain his ego from searching out his own little importance to the global order of things, but, at the same time, it guarantees every one’s dignity: I am not worth more than anyone else, but I am not worth less either. This principle confirms everyone’s equal value and can therefore serve as a criterion to determine resentment’s validity and, as a result, the value of justice demands.

(1680), and Isabella in Thomas Southerne's *Isabella or the Fatal Marriage* (1694).⁴² All these characters are at one point in this state, waiting for atonement, but are not actually guilty (TMS II.iii.3.5, p.108). The conscience of innocence is the last refuge for someone tormented in this way:

He then calls to his assistance that just and equitable maxim. That those events which did not depend upon our conduct, ought not to diminish the esteem that is due to us. He summons up his whole magnanimity and firmness of soul, and strives to regard himself, not in the light in which he at present appears, but in that in which he ought to appear, in which he would have appeared had his generous designs been crowned with success, and in which he would still appear, notwithstanding their miscarriage, if the sentiments of mankind were either altogether candid and equitable, or even perfectly consistent with themselves. (TMS II.iii.3.6, p.108)

Here, the impartial spectator is summoned, under the character of this maxim, stating that only good or bad intentions cause merit or demerit. This character is the only one able to give him some comfort, providing him with at least some degree of the atonement that the "more candid and humane part of mankind" would bestow if it knew what actually happened (*ibidem*).

9. Fortune vs. conscience

Fortune influences an individual's life by shaping the external circumstances (body, family, rank, etc.) in which this person will live and through her threefold commanding power, over people, labor, and sentiments (the latter through the way she influences propriety and merit judgments, or, in a word, sympathy). There are, evidently, cases of good fortune (Smith speaks of success, prosperity, and wealth⁴³), but the most

⁴² These are all female characters who could be said to have broken the rules of marriage: Jocasta has an incestuous relationship with her son, Oedipus, without knowing who he is; Monimia accepts her brother-in-law in bed thinking he is her husband; and Isabella remarries thinking her husband is dead. If this is not anodyne, we must not simply use our current gender criteria to judge Smith's (or any other eighteenth-century) work. Nevertheless, I believe Smith's point can be stated without any gender reference.

⁴³ About them, Smith says, "Are you in prosperity? Do not confine the enjoyment of your good fortune to your own house, to the company of your own friends, perhaps of your flatterers, of those who build upon your fortune the hopes of mending their own; frequent those who are independent of you, who can value you only for your character and conduct, and not for your fortune. Neither seek nor shun, neither intrude yourself into nor run away from the society of those who were once your superiors, and who may be hurt at finding you their equal, or, perhaps, even their superior. The impertinence of their pride may, perhaps, render their company too disagreeable: but if it should not, be assured that it is the best company you can possibly keep; and if, by the simplicity of your unassuming demeanour, you can gain their favour and kindness, you may rest satisfied that you are modest enough, and that your head has been in no respect turned by your good fortune" (TMS III.3.40, p.154).

relevant cases, at least the most relevant to a moral theory, are those gathered under the name of *misfortunes*, the most terrifying of which is the case of the innocent man falsely accused. Private misfortunes affect us in one of two ways, directly or indirectly.⁴⁴ Indirect misfortune reaches us through sympathy, “by affecting, in the first place, some other persons who are particularly dear to us; such as our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters, our intimate friends.” Direct misfortune affects us personally, “either in our body, in our fortune, or in our reputation⁴⁵; such as pain, sickness, approaching death, poverty, disgrace, etc” (TMS III.3.12, pp.141-2). If we remember the Smithian exigency for the “natural and ordinary state of mankind”—good health, absence of debt, and clear conscience—it is easy to see that to be in this state simply means the absence of misfortune (TMS I.iii.1.7, p.45).

Misfortune may affect someone’s body, fortune (in the purely economical meaning of estate and income), and reputation. Bodily pain and poverty (defined here by Smith as the “mere want of fortune”—that is, as a situation of zero fortune influence) excite little fellow-feeling or compassion.⁴⁶ Similar to the case of the person whose furious behavior causes spectators to feel more fear than sympathy (TMS I.i.1.7,p.11) is the case of the poor person who complains too much and therefore earns more contempt than sympathy. The reverse of this is the rich person who loses her fortune⁴⁷: Here, the passage from a situation with positive fortune influence to a situation of zero fortune influence is a misfortune in itself, followed by personal suffering and sympathetic regard (TMS III.3.17-8, pp.143-4; cf TMS I.ii.1.6, p.29). The worst kind of misfortune is that concerning reputation (TMS III.3.19, pp.144-5). Such misfortunes are the great school of the virtue of self-command⁴⁸:

⁴⁴ In a letter to Lord Carlisle dated November 8, 1779, Smith employs the expression “public misfortunes” in reference to the then recent Irish demands for “free trade”: “It makes me very happy to find, that in the midst of the Public misfortunes, a person of Your Lordships rank and elevation of mind doth not despair of the Commonwealth; but is willing to accept of an active share in Administration” (Corr. 202, p.244). For a contextualized commentary on this as well as a second letter, addressed to Henry Dundas and dated November 30, 1779, see Rae (1895, chapter XXIV).

⁴⁵ This is yet another passage drawing a connection between fortune and jurisprudence.

⁴⁶ This is, above all, the consequence of two theoretical hypotheses: First, passions originating in the body are more difficult to share than imaginary ones (see 2.4.a), and second, pain is more pungent than pleasure, causing spectators to avoid sharing it (see 4.6).

⁴⁷ “Bankruptcy is perhaps the greatest and most humiliating calamity which can befall an innocent man” (WN II.iii.29, p.342). Bankruptcy is the loss of estate/income, but it comes with the loss of reputation, a second humiliation.

⁴⁸ Usually, misfortunes are a great opportunity to exercise sympathy, especially when they happen to anyone to whom the spectator is partial. The recurrence of misfortunes shows how insensibility is much worse than affective excess, and a “moderated sensibility” does not stop anyone from performing their duties (TMS III.3.13-5, pp.142-3).

If we examine the different shades and gradations of weakness and self-command, as we meet with them in common life, we shall very easily satisfy ourselves that this control of our passive feelings must be acquired, not from the abstruse syllogisms of a quibbling dialectic, but from that great discipline which Nature has established for the acquisition of this and of every other virtue; a regard to the sentiments of the real or supposed spectator of our conduct. (TMS III.3.21, p.145)

Development of control over “passive feelings” begins in childhood, particularly when a child starts attending school, a place where the protective and highly partial parents’ regard is replaced by the indifferent, and sometimes even aggressive, regard of schoolmates:

When it is old enough to go to school, or to mix with its equals, it soon finds that they have no such indulgent partiality. It naturally wishes to gain their favour, and to avoid their hatred or contempt. Regard even to its own safety teaches it to do so; and it soon finds that it can do so in no other way than by moderating, not only its anger, but all its other passions, to the degree which its play-fellows and companions are likely to be pleased with.⁴⁹ (TMS III.3.22, p.145)

Spectators’ eyes imply in a kind of vigilance. The agent must feel the presence of their look and become conscious of being watched. The degree of self-command’s exertion varies from individual to individual, but nature shows the road to everyone: Someone suffering from misfortune, while visited by some friends,

is immediately impressed with the view in which they are likely to look upon his situation. Their view calls off his attention from his own view; and his breast is, in some measure, becalmed the moment they come into his presence. This effect is produced instantaneously and, as it were, mechanically; but, with a weak man, it is not of long continuance. (TMS III.3.23, p.145)

Nature shows itself in the immediacy of the point of view shift and of its soothing effects. It shows itself also in their quick disappearance. This is precisely where self-command must intervene, retaining the agent’s attention over the spectator’s point of view:

With a man of a little more firmness, the effect is somewhat more permanent. He endeavours, as much as he can, to fix his attention upon the view which the company are likely to take of his situation. (TMS III.3.24, p.146)

⁴⁹ Smith does not speak of the teachers’ regard. For more about education in general, see WN V.i.f (pp.758-88).

In this case, command means to sustain something naturally ephemeral over long periods. Without self-command, the “weakest man” acts as a child, quickly returning to his own personal point of view and appealing for his spectators’ compassion (TMS III.3.23, pp.145-6). This might work only with an extremely partial audience. A “man of a little more firmness” can achieve better results: Instead of appealing for everyone else’s compassion, he chooses to moderate his suffering.

In most cases he avoids mentioning his own misfortune; and his company, if they are tolerably well bred, are careful to say nothing which can put him in mind of it. He endeavours to entertain them, in his usual way, upon indifferent subjects, or, if he feels himself strong enough to venture to mention his misfortune, he endeavours to talk of it as, he thinks, they are capable of talking of it, and even to feel it no further than they are capable of feeling it. (TMS III.3.24, p.146)

The paradigm for understanding the full operations of sympathy’s mechanism was the narrative of a ‘case’ by the person principally concerned to an interested listener/spectator (see 2.6). This case demands a high level of partiality from the listener/spectator. Here, Smith describes how the emotional communication works in cases of lesser partiality (or higher indifference), when the listener/spectator is not at the agent’s full disposal. In some aspects, this case is actually closer to the one seen above, that of sympathy between an agent’s commanded insensibility and the spectator’s indifference (TMS I.iii.1.13, p.48, see 4.6). Under these circumstances (with a spectator who is “tolerably well bred” but still not disposed to listen to every detail of the person principally concerned’s case), the good affective transmission is far more implicit than explicit: By avoiding the sensitive issue, the person principally concerned highlights her effort in commanding herself, which the (well-meaning but partially indifferent) spectator understands as a signal of the emotional violence she feels. Everything that really matters is said while they talk about something else.⁵⁰ If the person principally concerned decides to speak of her misfortune, it is only superficially, in a degree that neither will disturb her guest’s indifference nor demand much attention and sympathetic effort. They both leave the rendezvous contented with themselves: the agent for being able to control herself and for not overtiring her guest, the spectator for not being bored by a subject that does not interest him that much and for helping his host.

⁵⁰ Though they have different starting points, Hume’s and Smith’s theories join at the summit: In a way, at the apex of sympathy the spectator must perform a sort of moral induction (THN 2.2.9.13 -274). George Eliot remarks, “When people are well known to each other, they talk rather of what befalls them externally, leaving their feelings and sentiments to be inferred” (Eliot, 1999, p.30).

In her attempt to sustain a less partial point of view, the person principally concerned repositions her point of view in alignment with the impartial spectator's. The middle case of a "man of a little more firmness" is particularly revealing of the self-command dynamics, where the relationship between moral (approbation) and fortune unfolds as an internal conflict:

He feels, at the same time, the esteem and approbation which they naturally conceive for him when he thus preserves his tranquillity; and, though under the pressure of some recent and great calamity, appears to feel for himself no more than what they really feel for him. He approves and applauds himself by sympathy with their approbation, and the pleasure which he derives from this sentiment supports and enables him more easily to continue this generous effort.⁵¹ (TMS III.3.24, p.146)

In a world governed by fortune, the only space left to merit, its last fortress, is the individual consciousness:

The reward which Nature bestows upon good behaviour under misfortune, is thus exactly proportioned to the degree of that good behaviour. The only compensation she could possibly make for the bitterness of pain and distress is thus too, in equal degrees of good behaviour, exactly proportioned to the degree of that pain and distress. In proportion to the degree of the self-command which is necessary in order to conquer our natural sensibility, the pleasure and pride of the conquest are so much the greater; and this pleasure and pride are so great that no man can be altogether unhappy who completely enjoys them. (TMS III.3.27, p.147)

Nevertheless, even there merit's kingdom is fragile. The last sentence states that no one aware of his own effort to overcome his misfortune "can be altogether unhappy." Smith does not say he will be happy, only that he will obtain a pleasure linked to the pride of being the master of himself, nothing more than a sort of internal compensation: "though it may not altogether extinguish, must certainly allviate his sense of his own suffering" (ibidem). At best, he can hope to affect the "sense of his own suffering" but not the suffering itself.

What does all this mean? In this same paragraph, Smith states that "Misery and wretchedness can never enter the breast in which dwells complete self-satisfaction." The problem with this state of misery and wretchedness is that it attracts the severest judgment that can be naturally directed at anyone:

⁵¹ For a "man of real constancy and firmness," forged in situations of social chaos, this conflict is already decided: "He does not merely affect the sentiments of the impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with, he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel" (TMS III.3.25, p.147).

he always appears, in some measure, mean and despicable, who is sunk in sorrow and dejection upon account of any calamity of his own. We cannot bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself, and what, perhaps, we should feel for ourselves if in his situation: we, therefore, despise him; unjustly, perhaps, if any sentiment could be regarded as unjust, to which we are by nature irresistibly determined. (TMS I.iii.1.15, p.49)

Thus, the only reward nature has to offer a person for perfect Stoic behavior in the face of misfortune is to preclude him from judging himself too harshly—in other words, for feeling shame (TMS I.iii.1.9, p.46). The pride of knowing we are the complete masters of ourselves hinders us from feeling shame for our own suffering.⁵² There is a risk of duplication here: In addition to the original suffering, this person suffers from knowing his pain will not find any spectator capable of truly sympathizing with it. This is what Smith calls the “paroxysm of distress,” a situation in which the subjective division between agent and judge is quite clear:

His own natural feeling of his own distress, his own natural view of his own situation, presses hard upon him, and he cannot, without a very great effort, fix his attention upon that of the impartial spectator. Both views present themselves to him at the same time. His sense of honour, his regard to his own dignity, directs him to fix his whole attention upon the one view. His natural, his untaught and undisciplined feelings, are continually calling it off to the other. He does not, in this case, perfectly identify himself with the ideal man within the breast, he does not become himself the impartial spectator of his own conduct. The different views of both characters exist in his mind separate and distinct from one another, and each directing him to a behaviour different from that to which the other directs him. (TMS III.3.28, p.148)

The first moment is a non-identification between agent and impartial spectator. The tension is explicit: The immediate emotional reaction, “his natural, his untaught and undisciplined feelings,” conflicts with his sense of honor, with the perception of his own dignity (the loss of which brings shame). The first urges him to be carried away by suffering; the other urges him to contain it. If he chooses the second option, nature supplies him with the above discussed ‘reward,’ unable to eradicate the original suffering but strong enough to preclude a shameful response.⁵³ To follow this path, time is required:

⁵² Once again, the philosopher sees signs of the good constitution of human nature: “If it did completely compensate them, he could, from self-interest, have no motive for avoiding an accident which must necessarily diminish his utility both to himself and to society; and Nature, from her parental care of both, meant that he should anxiously avoid all such accidents” (TMS III.3.28, p.148).

⁵³ These passages clearly show how the internal senses are entirely reflexive, allowing us to focus on Smith’s critique of Hutcheson around the idea of the moral sense as a peculiar “power of perception” while, at the same, retaining the description of their workings. This is the propriety of Hutcheson’s theory of moral

not much in particular cases, but the constitution of a constant and firm (in a word, manly⁵⁴) character demands years of controlled habits. Paradoxically, once this character is fully formed, its results are effortless. By the exercise of honor and dignity,

he soon comes, without any effort, to enjoy his ordinary tranquillity. (...) He soon identifies himself with the ideal man within the breast, he soon becomes himself the impartial spectator of his own situation. He no longer weeps, he no longer laments, he no longer grieves over it, as a weak man may sometimes do in the beginning. The view of the impartial spectator becomes so perfectly habitual to him, that, without any effort without any exertion, he never thinks of surveying his misfortune in any other view. (TMS III.3.29, pp.148-9)

10. Tranquility and liberalism

According to Smith, sooner or later, everybody ends up accepting their lot in life. Stoic philosophers insisted on the “never-failing certainty” of this acceptance, an aspect of their philosophy that Smith considered interesting:

The never-failing certainty with which all men, sooner or later, accommodate themselves to whatever becomes their permanent situation, may, perhaps, induce us to think that the Stoics were, at least, thus far very nearly in the right; that, between one permanent situation and another, there was, with regard to real happiness, no essential difference: or that, if there were any difference, it was no more than just sufficient to render some of them the objects of simple choice or preference; but not of any earnest or anxious desire: and others, of simple rejection, as being fit to be set aside or avoided; but not of any earnest or anxious aversion. (TMS III.3.30, p.149)

This sentence is a clear example of some difficulties the Smithian rhetoric eventually poses to the reader. The idea is relatively straightforward: The observation that men usually end up accepting their lot in life offers good evidence that some Stoic notions might be correct. Such concepts as *ouk eph'emin* (things that do not depend on men, that are not under men's control) and *adiaphora* (morally indifferent things, inherently neither

sense: Although mistaken about their substrate, he still described correctly how the internal senses operate (TMS VII.iii.3.6, p.322).

⁵⁴ This ideal is not opposed to a highly developed sensibility: “Our sensibility to the feelings of others, so far from being inconsistent with the manhood of self-command, is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded. (...) The man of the most perfect virtue, the man whom we naturally love and revere the most, is he who joins, to the most perfect command of his own original and selfish feelings, the most exquisite sensibility both to the original and sympathetic feelings of others” (TMS III.3.34-5, p.152). Smith belongs to the eighteenth-century tradition of the “man of feeling,” seeking to unite what were seen as male and female virtues.

good nor bad) could be easily remembered.⁵⁵ Yet what draws the most attention is another aspect: the quantity of qualifications. This observation begets a certainty that although “never-failing” does not necessarily prove these Stoic philosophical concepts. The most it can do is “perhaps, induce us” to think they were “in the right.” Such “never-failing certainty” “may, perhaps, induce us” to think the Stoics had covered some ground in the direction of the constitution of a good theory of happiness (particularly under the practical point of view). The only thing unequivocal about this sentence is Smith’s hesitation.

The remainder of the paragraph is much clearer about its meaning and allows the reader to think that anything that is proper about the Stoics’ practical morality must be read with the notion of tranquility in the background:

Happiness consists in tranquillity and enjoyment. Without tranquillity there can be no enjoyment; and where there is perfect tranquillity there is scarce any thing which is not capable of amusing. But in every permanent situation, where there is no expectation of change, the mind of every man, in a longer or shorter time, returns to its natural and usual state of tranquillity. In prosperity, after a certain time, it falls back to that state; in adversity, after a certain time, it rises up to it. (TMS III.3.30, p.149)

Placed on a time axis, tranquility works as a sort of gravitational center to moods or states of mind associated with good and bad fortune: prosperity brings moods in which pleasant things appear to prevail; adversity begets moods where the pleasure field seems narrow. After some time, the mind resumes its “natural and usual state of tranquility.” “Perfect tranquility,” in turn, is opposed to both of these fortune moods: A perfectly tranquil person is able to enjoy and value any pleasure available in any situation (either of good or bad fortune). It is a state of mind where every pleasant thing may be perceived and enjoyed.⁵⁶ Tranquility is also the proper state of mind (from both affective and cognitive points of view) for sympathy: A tranquil person can overcome all the difficulties brought by fortune through the operations of sympathetic imagination.

The most interesting aspect of fortune is temporality: “The state of a man's fortune varies from day to day” (WN V.ii.j.2, p.867). Every fortuitous thing is transitory. Wealth, power, and success, as well as luck and chance, are all subject to the effects of the passage

⁵⁵ Smith was introduced to Stoic philosophy early on in his school life, when he was still in the Burgh School of Kirkcaldy, directed by David Millar. Texts he read during that time include Epictetus’s *Enchiridion* (the manual Arrian wrote for his students, based on the teachings of his master, the Roman slave philosopher) and Cicero’s *De officiis* (see Philipson, 2011, chapter 1).

⁵⁶ Perhaps this is the point where Stoic philosophy has “bordered upon the truth”: describing the proper mood or state of mind to the best enjoyment of life, in which the concrete data of fortune are taken as indifferent to our happiness, opening the field to a true perception of everything around us (the source of either a big or small pleasure or pain).

of time. The place where the “empire of fortune” unfolds is history. Tranquility is the individual antithesis of every transitivity, the space where the individual recenters and recovers herself. In the world of sympathy, this evidently means that she recovers herself in the other and finds the other in herself: The person must settle down to be able to well read the other, to be well read, and to well read herself through someone else’s point of view.⁵⁷ Tranquility is the state of active patience and of passive attention to everything happening around the individual. It is also the natural state of the sympathetic individual, where fortune stops influencing affections and judgments:

In the end, Time, the great and universal comforter, gradually composes the weak man to the same degree of tranquillity which a regard to his own dignity and manhood teaches the wise man to assume in the beginning. (...) Time, however, in a longer or shorter period, never fails to compose the weakest woman to the same degree of tranquillity as the strongest man. In all the irreparable calamities which affect himself immediately and directly, a wise man endeavours, from the beginning, to anticipate and to enjoy before-hand, that tranquillity which he foresees the course of a few months, or a few years, will certainly restore to him in the end. (TMS III.3.33, p.151)

Tranquility is the vanishing point or, in economic terms, the long-run equilibrium of Smith’s moral individual. Smith’s liberal metaphysics ensures that, left alone, nature regulates itself well: The moral individual will achieve the proper state for the sympathetic exercise by simply letting time pass. *Il ne faut que laisser-passer le temps...* but as the mercantile system proves, simply *laisser-passer* is a difficult task: There are few people capable of enjoying the good order of the world without wanting to intervene in it, and an idle imagination is a source of strong moral storms.

11. Idleness and passional extravagance

If tranquility is the state of mind in which the individual is correctly able to grasp (and enjoy) what happens around her, intranquility (or uneasiness) may be defined as the state of mind in which the individual is not able to properly perceive and appreciate what happens around her. The most relevant cases of intranquility are those in which a person

⁵⁷ The Smithian device of cases’ narrative helps here: While remembering what happened to her, the person principally concerned relives the situation, but with a lower degree of emotional intensity. Besides, the casual chain that structures every narrative is the most appropriate to deal with fortune’s temporal dimension.

undervalues her own situation vis-à-vis another, apparently more pleasant one, in a “foolish admir[ation]” found in what Smith calls the “extravagant passions”:

The great source of both the misery and disorders of human life, seems to arise from over-rating the difference between one permanent situation and another. Avarice over-rates the difference between poverty and riches: ambition, that between a private and a public station: vain-glory, that between obscurity and extensive reputation. (TMS III.3.31, p.149)

If it is true that some situations are objectively better than others, it is equally true that there is no “ordinary situation of human life” that a “well-disposed mind” cannot view with calm and cheer. Smith qualifies the lowest of these ordinary states as “the most humble station, where there is only personal liberty,” establishing personal freedom as the only minimal necessary condition.⁵⁸ There is nothing in any concrete situation of life that can justify a passionate quest, where rules of prudence and even of justice are broken (ibidem, pp.149-50). It is only imagination, in its moments of idleness, that paints others’ situations with more vibrant colors:

In the most glittering and exalted situation that our idle fancy can hold out to us, the pleasures from which we propose to derive our real happiness, are almost always the same with those which, in our actual, though humble station, we have at all times at hand, and in our power. (ibidem)

The dangers of an idle fancy and the extravagant passions it yields are more frequent and alive when the misfortune appears to have a solution (TMS III.3.33, p.151-2). When the misfortune appears to be permanent, the work of time is less turbulent (TMS III.3.32, p.150-1). Anyway, these passions perform an important political-economic role. Ambition, vanity, and pride are underlie almost every hazardous trade, such as that of the smuggler or the soldier, for instance: “The presumptuous hope of success seems to act here as upon all other occasions, and to entice so many adventurers into those hazardous trades” (WN I.x.b.33, p.128). Smith often compares these trades to a lottery: Navy jobs are part of “the lottery of the sea” (WN I.x.b.31, p.126), mining is the “most disadvantageous lottery in the world” (WN IV.vii.a.18, p.562; cf. I.xi.c.26, p.187), and even British colonial politics is once compared to a lottery⁵⁹ (WN IV.vii.c.75, p.623). The lottery is based exclusively in “the vain hope of gaining” a great prize (WN I.x.b.27,

⁵⁸ Slavery consists of three misfortunes (juridical, economical, and political): Being someone’s property, and thus being poor and thoroughly submitted (in a private dimension) to his owner, the slave cannot gather an estate,.

⁵⁹ For more about eighteenth-century British philosophy’s art of living as a sort of game playing, see the last work of Marcio Suzuki (2014).

p.125), and insurance is a sort of inverse lottery (WN I.x.b.28, p.125). Among these lottery-like “hazardous trades” is the establishment of any new trade or business by a charater Smith calls “the projector”:

The establishment of any new manufacture, of any new branch of commerce, or of any new practice in agriculture, is always a speculation, from which the projector promises himself extraordinary profits. These profits sometimes are very great, and sometimes, more frequently, perhaps, they are quite otherwise; but in general they bear no regular proportion to those of other old trades in the neighbourhood. If the project succeeds, they are commonly at first very high. When the trade or practice becomes thoroughly established and well known, the competition reduces them to the level of other trades. (WN I.x.b.43, pp.131-2)

This is precisely the same mechanism of imaginary overevaluation described in *Theory*: one that begets an uneasiness that precludes all true happiness (TMS III.3.31, p.150). It is the excess point of the “principle of self-evaluation,” which the impartial spectator finds more blameable than its absence (TMS VI.iii.22, p.246). It is that “overweening conceit which the greater part of men have of their own abilities,” in addition to a less discussed “absurd presumption in their own good fortune” (WN I.x.b.26, p.124), where “the chance of gain is naturally over-valued” (WN I.x.b.27, p.125) at the same time that “the chance of loss is frequently under-valued” (WN I.x.b.28, p.126). It is that self-indulgency and complacency required to achive any great thing:

Great success in the world, great authority over the sentiments and opinions of mankind, have very seldom been acquired without some degree of this excessive self-admiration. The most splendid characters, the men who have performed the most illustrious actions, who have brought about the greatest revolutions, both in the situations and opinions of mankind; the most successful warriors, the greatest statesmen and legislators, the eloquent founders and leaders of the most numerous and most successful sects and parties; have many of them been, not more distinguished for their very great merit, than for a degree of presumption and self-admiration altogether disproportioned even to that very great merit. (TMS VI.iii.28, p.250)

Smith rejects the projector’s speculations in favor of the sobriety of the prudent capitalist⁶⁰ (WN II.iv.15, p.357). Smith’s major argument against the projective

⁶⁰ Prudence is the driving force behind of the invisible hand metaphor in the famous passage of the *Wealth of Nations*: “By preferring the support of domestick to that of forenign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other eases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention” (WN IV.ii.9, p.456). What this individual seeks above all is to safeguard his capital. As stated in *Theory*, “Security (...) is the first and the principal object of prudence. It is averse to expose our health, our fortune, our rank, or reputation, to any sort of hazard. It is rather cautious

“prodigality” seems to be the potential loss of capital in which this speculative career usually ends (ibidem, cf. TMS III.3.31, p.150). However, his criticism is not only of an economical nature, as seen above (4.6): “Success covers from his eyes, not only the great imprudence, but frequently the great injustice of their enterprises”⁶¹ (TMS VI.iii.30, p.252). The projector’s imprudence often comes too close to breaking the fair-play of social climbing (TMS II.ii.2.1, p.83).

Smith was definitely not a great admirer of economic projectors (or anyone taken by one of these extravagant passions, for that matter). Yet, in the sixth edition of *Theory*, published in 1790,⁶² he draws a distinction between vanity and pride:

The proud man is sincere, and, in the bottom of his heart, is convinced of his own superiority (...).
The vain man is not sincere, and, in the bottom of his heart, is very seldom convinced of that superiority which he wishes you to ascribe to him. (TMS VI.iii.35-6, p.255)

The vain man tries “to usurp th[e] respect” directed to those in the highest rank and fortune, dressing and acting as one of them (TMS VI.iii.37, p.256; cf. TMS VI.iii.46, p.259). The proud man, in turn, behaves according to his own rank due to “his sense of his own dignity” (TMS VI.iii.38, p.256). Indeed, the ordinary use of these terms suggests this interpretation: “The words vain and vanity are never taken in a good sense. The words proud and pride, on the contrary, are sometimes taken in a good sense” (TMS VI.iii.43-4, p.258).

than enterprising, and more anxious to preserve the advantages which we already possess, than forward to prompt us to the acquisition of still greater advantages. The methods of improving our fortune, which it principally recommends to us, are those which expose to no loss or hazard; real knowledge and skill in our trade or profession, assiduity and industry in the exercise of it, frugality, and even some degree of parsimony, in all our expences” (TMS VI.i.6, p.213).

⁶¹ It is not only the investments that Smith analyzes with this dichotomy in sight. Personal spending can be classified as either prudent or prodigal: “A man of fortune, for example, may either spend his revenue in a profuse and sumptuous table, and in maintaining a great number of menial servants, and a multitude of dogs and horses; or contenting himself with a frugal table and few attendants, he may lay out the greater part of it in adorning his house or his country villa, in useful or ornamental buildings, in useful or ornamental furniture, in collecting books, statues, pictures; or in things more frivolous, jewels, baubles, ingenious trinkets of different kinds; or, what is most trifling of all, in amassing a great wardrobe of fine cloaths, (...). Were two men of equal fortune to spend their revenue, the one chiefly in the one way, the other in the other, the magnificence of the person whose expence had been chiefly in durable commodities, would be continually increasing, every day’s expence contributing something to support and heighten the effect of that of the following day: that of the other, on the contrary, would be no greater at the end of the period than at the beginning. The former too would, at the end of the period, be the richer man of the two. He would have a stock of goods of some kind or other, which, though it might not be worth all that it cost, would always be worth something. No trace or vestige of the expence of the latter would remain, and the effects of ten or twenty years profusion would be as completely annihilated as if they had never existed” (WN II.iii.38, pp.346-7).

⁶² Perhaps in response to Bentham’s criticism in Letter XIII of his *Defense of Usury*, published in 1787.

Therefore, there is at least one kind of excessive self-evaluation that is only partially blameworthy: “Pride is, in this case, confounded with magnanimity” (ibidem). The proud person is not entirely lost (especially in a highly competitive environment⁶³). However, albeit clearly distinguishable (at least analytically), they seldom are seen separately: “the proud man is often vain; and the vain man is often proud.” This happens because they are variations of misapplications of the same internal sense: an unjustified sense of superiority according to the fortuitous circumstances in which this person finds himself (TMS VI.iii.46, p.259).

The sympathetic imagination works here through the sense of superiority: The ambitious man seeks the sympathy of a real audience to establish his sentiment of superiority. However, if this sentiment is unreal, is it still proper to speak of sympathy? If this sentiment is nothing more than an idle fancy driven by an extravagant passion, what does it mean to share this illusion? It is an empty sympathy, an emotional sharing without real emotion, a hollow sentiment.⁶⁴ Thus, vanity points to yet another limit of sympathetic imagination, because it is grounded in a sort of abstract operation of sympathy, a sympathy without real affection (as the case of the hypocrites of wealth and power made clear).

The second boundary concerns fortune in general. The impartial spectator might be able to discount its influence, but the person calling for its help certainly does not. The impartial spectator might enlarge the individual point of view up to point where she loses the ability to discern herself from everyone else, but it cannot hinder her from feeling what she feels, from emotionally reacting to what happens to her. Tranquility might help this person, furnishing a state of mind conducive to a calm and careful analysis of the

⁶³ “Rivalship and emulation render excellency, even in mean professions, an object of ambition, and frequently occasion the very greatest exertions. Great objects, on the contrary, alone and unsupported by the necessity of application, have seldom been sufficient to occasion any considerable exertion” (WN V.i.f.4, pp.759-60).

⁶⁴ An outstanding example of this sort of process can be found in William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*. Amelia’s propensity to sympathize with others’ sufferings makes her share the lies Rebecca tells about her life. The ultimate outrage is the central lie that excites and sustains the sympathetic response: the mother-son relationship. Underneath, the same imaginary mechanism grounds both sympathy and vanity. This is also a possible explanation of why, in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, the true solution to Gwendolen Harleth’s vanity is not love but Deronda’s sympathy. In this regard, it is interesting to note the development from a previous work such as *Silas Marner* (1861), where Silas rediscovers social relations he had previously abandoned through his love for little Eppie. The main difference between love and sympathy can be seen in Silas’s failed attempt to rediscover his hometown (chapter 21). Love allows for the socialization in extremely small (and only relatively well protected) spheres, such as the case of Raveloe (also because Godfrey Cass, the wealthiest and most influent citizen, has an active interest in Eppie’s life and safety). In her later works (*Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*), Eliot’s characters always aim for an active life concerning broader social circles (including world history, as in the case of Deronda), which can be achieved through sympathy.

situation, but it cannot supply the required time. Indeed, every human being is partial and submerged in a fortuitous world. These two features of human experience shape morality, especially when the agent is about to act and a decision must be made. There, in the heat of the moment, sympathetic imagination has very little to offer. Without time to consider the data, without the detachment necessary to analyze the emotions felt and to compare them to what others would feel in the same situation, without being able to calmly judge what is happening, the impartial spectator simply cannot be called. A second solution must be found.

Chapter 5 – Rules and duty

(...) the populace, whose good nature, in most cases, forgets the crime of the condemned person, and dwells only on his misery.

Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*

FANCY what a game at chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning: if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain also about your own; if your knight could shuffle himself on to a new square by the sly; if your bishop, in disgust at your castling, could wheedle your pawns out of their places; and if your pawns, hating you because they are pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), *Felix Holt: The Radical*

1. Self-command vs. self-deceit

Smith thinks that human action is fundamentally driven by passions and emotions, preferably regulated by an impartial spectator,¹ which is not always possible. Thus, weakness of will or incontinence (the two most common translations of the Greek *akrasia*²) appears as the background of the practical part of Smith's moral philosophy, which is clearly seen in his treatment of duty³:

¹ "The sentiment or affection of the heart from which any action proceeds (...)" (TMS I.i.3.5, p.18).

² This is the problem left by Aristotle in Book VII of *The Nicomachean Ethics*: "pode-se perguntar como uma pessoa que tem uma concepção correta das coisas pode ser incontinente em suas ações" (1146 a, 1985, p.130). Especially in Plato's *Protagoras* (1973, 2002, pp.47-123), Socrates radically denied this possibility: "pois ninguém, dizia ele, age contrariamente ao que considera melhor, consciente de estar agindo mal, a não ser por ignorância" (Aristóteles, 1146 a, 1985, p.130). As Ogien points out, the term *akrasia* is usually retained because of this Aristotelian origin, but in fact it designates a "set of questions (*ensemble de questions*)" more than a well-defined and unique problem (1993, p.6). In twentieth-century analytical tradition, this problem (or the most accepted version of it) is named weakness of will: "D. In doing x an agent acts incontinently if and only if: (a) the agent does x intentionally; (b) the agent believes there is an alternative action y open to him; and (c) the agent judges that, all things considered, it would be better to do y than to do x" (Davidson, 1982, p.22). As the following quotation shows, Smith accepts the possibility of someone who perfectly knows his duty being diverted from it because of the interference of passions. Indeed, his comment on Aristotle in TMS finishes with a clear reference to this question: "Virtue, according to Plato, might be considered as a species of science, and no man, he thought, could see clearly and demonstratively what was right and what was wrong, and not act accordingly. Passion might make us act contrary to doubtful and uncertain opinions, not to plain and evident judgments. Aristotle, on the contrary, was of opinion, that no conviction of the understanding was capable of getting the better of inveterate habits, and that good morals arose not from knowledge but from action" (TMS VII.ii.1.14, p.272).

³ Smith's critique of the rationalistic tradition necessarily implies the generalization of the problem of incontinence: If not reason but "immediate sense and feeling" is the source of morality, then every piece of knowledge concerning actions plays only a secondary role. This is an obvious consequence of the fact that sympathy is a matter of affection, not knowledge, of sensibility and not reason or understanding (another consequence is the irrelevance of theoretical reasoning to practice; TMS VII.iii.intro.3, p.315). From a speculative point of view, any attempt to understand Smith's moral philosophy from the idea of a practical reason (as in Carrasco's work, for instance) involves, at best, only one kind of moral approbation—namely,

THE man who acts according to the rules of perfect prudence, of strict justice, and of proper benevolence, may be said to be perfectly virtuous. But the most perfect knowledge of those rules will not alone enable him to act in this manner: his own passions are very apt to mislead him; sometimes to drive him and sometimes to seduce him to violate all the rules which he himself, in all his sober and cool hours, approves of. The most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect self-command, will not always enable him to do his duty. (TMS VI.iii.1, p.237)

A perfect knowledge of rules is not enough for a person to act in a virtuous manner. It is perfectly possible for someone to act against duty. This problem has many causes, such as when partial spectators are near and impartial ones far away (TMS III.3.41, p.154) or when accidents prevent the proper sentiments from being felt about a situation (TMS VI.ii.1.8, p.220). However, the violence of the spontaneous and immediate emotional reaction remains the most general and inexorable obstacle:

In order to pervert the rectitude of our own judgments concerning the propriety of our own conduct, it is not always necessary that the real and impartial spectator should be at a great distance. When he is at hand, when he is present, the violence and injustice of our own selfish passions are sometimes sufficient to induce the man within the breast to make a report very different from what the real circumstances of the case are capable of authorising. (TMS III.4.1, pp.156-7)

Such affective intensity is felt particularly in the most important moment—namely, that of the final impulse for an action:

When we are about to act, the eagerness of passion will seldom allow us to consider what we are doing, with the candour of an indifferent person. The violent emotions which at that time agitate us, discolour our views of things; even when we are endeavouring to place ourselves in the situation of another, and to regard the objects that interest us in the light in which they will naturally appear to him, the fury of our own passions constantly calls us back to our own place, where every thing appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love. (TMS III.4.3, p.157)

Even after the action, with emotions already subdued and some more time at her disposal, the person principally concerned will seldom judge herself properly:

The opinion which we entertain of our own character depends entirely on our judgments concerning our past conduct. It is so disagreeable to think ill of ourselves, that we often purposely turn away our

duty. From a practical point of view, however, such attempts have a much larger scope, as in most situations, general rules appear as the most stable and consistent criterion at the moment a decision is made. Thus, in a way, rules are the keeper of morality, and acting according to rules is, perhaps, the most important practical question to Smith. Indeed, the importance of self-command in Smith's philosophy is enough to suggest that weakness of will is a central practical issue.

view from those circumstances which might render that judgment unfavourable. (TMS III.4.4, p.158)

While the emotional spontaneity and high intensity of the moments just prior to an action, paired with the lack of time to analyze the situation, might attenuate or perhaps even remove the agent's responsibility, the situation is altogether different once the action has been completed. Following an action, when its effects are visible and the agent has had time to calm down and think, the agent must actively justify her action:

Rather than see our own behaviour under so disagreeable an aspect, we too often, foolishly and weakly, endeavour to exasperate anew those unjust passions which had formerly misled us; we endeavour by artifice to awaken our old hatreds, and irritate afresh our almost forgotten resentments: we even exert ourselves for this miserable purpose, and thus persevere in injustice, merely because we once were unjust, and because we are ashamed and afraid to see that we were so. (ibidem)

This is what Smith calls self-deceit: the active interference in our own judgments regarding ourselves and our previous actions in order to avoid self-blame or even reanimate already subsided emotions that, otherwise, might be easily forgotten. In other words, it is a process of self-justification at all costs. For Smith, time naturally brings the necessary tranquility to properly judge oneself and others, but it is much easier to do something than to simply let time pass (see 4.10-11). Here, self-deceit interferes with the moral work of time. If the agent simply let her emotions subside on their own and, going forward, took the time to consider her actions and properly judge herself, she would more easily see where she has erred and ended up blaming herself. Self-deceit prevents this natural process from taking place: By artificially reanimating her past passions, the agent hinders time's ability to soothe and comfort (TMS III.3.33, p.151).

Although at first they seem to be in opposition, self-deceit and self-command are both active and voluntary devices postponing or anticipating affective states of mind. In a way, they are imaginary tricks and ruses playing with the passage of time. With self-deceit, the person principally concerned relives the lively and violent emotions from the moments prior to the action, keeping the same uneasy and restless state that motivated him to act in such a way. With self-command, he anticipates the tranquility that would result from allowing nature to take its course:

In all the irreparable calamities which affect himself immediately and directly, a wise man endeavours, from the beginning, to anticipate and to enjoy before-hand, that tranquillity which he

foresees the course of a few months, or a few years, will certainly restore to him in the end. (TMS III.3.33, p.151)

Self-deceit and self-command are artificial devices contrived to alter the natural course of sentiments. The main difference is the direction of the change: The first seeks to extend a past emotion or state of mind that motivated a reckless action in order to justify it; the second aims to avoid reckless acts by anticipating the future emotion and state of mind able to properly judge them. Self-deceit and self-command are the two possible ways of justifying one's own actions resulting from an emotion or passion. To characterize self-deceit, Smith once again quotes Malebranche: "The passions, upon this account, as father Malebranche says, all justify themselves, and seem reasonable and proportioned to their objects, as long as we continue to feel them" (TMS III.4.2, p.157; cf., EPS, p.48). Obviously, justification through self-deceit is incomplete, as it lacks communication (the affective sharing). Such an agent keeps justification and communication apart, the two complementary parts of the process that transforms emotions into sentiments (see 1.7): When an agent acts in response to a strong passion, she assumes the act is justified, leaving her to deal later with the difficulty of finding a spectator to sympathize with such a violent emotion and thereby socially validate her behavior. Self-command, on the other hand, has a more complex justification procedure: The agent who considers the endorsement of an internalized impartial spectator prior to acting thereby anticipates the future tranquility enabling her to (more) properly judge her own actions, and this virtual communication serves as a justification.

Self-deceit and self-command are further distinguished by the sort of justification they respectively seek: partial and impartial. If self-deceit is the most selfish and partial manner to justify an emotion, self-command is the most complete way to face this procedure. Resorting to an internalized impartial spectator is the most complete but also the most demanding method for the person principally concerned—perhaps too demanding.

2. Natural does not mean simple: Remorse as the sense of justice

Smith presents justice with beneficence, aiming to establish an opposition between these two virtues (TMS II.ii.1). Beneficent actions deserve reward, as they are the proper objects of gratitude, from both the recipients of the actions and the spectators

(TMS II.ii.1.1, p.78). On the other hand, hurtful actions deserve punishment, as they are the proper objects of both the sufferers' and the spectators' resentment (TMS II.ii.1.2, p.78, see 4.2).

Resentment grounds justice through the “sense of justice” and actions according to “the great law which is dictated to us by Nature,” a law of reciprocity that in this case appears as nothing more than a simple “retaliation” (TMS II.ii.1.10, p.82). Resentment is just when it is the product of the “natural sense of equity” together with the general maxim stating that only good or bad intention begets merit or demerit—that is, when the agent resorts to the internalized impartial spectator. Smith’s point is that we may cause harm to someone else only if she has previously harmed or injured us. To offend anyone solely because she stands in our way is not only unjust but also, in a way, unnatural. Nature made us selfish, but it also “endowed us with a desire to please, and an original aversion to offend our brethren” (TMS III.2.6, p.116), and the easiest way of pleasing others is to act according to what they would have us do, according to the judgment formed from their point of view. The internalization of an impartial spectator is, largely, a spontaneous and natural process. In order to show that, Smith exposes the ‘case’ of an offender and his “sense of guilt”—that is, the remorse his “evil action” yields by breaking “the most sacred laws of justice” (TMS, II.ii.2.2, pp.83-4; cf., LJ, p.399). The natural basis of these laws must be found in the judgment the offender cannot prevent from happening:

The violator of the more sacred laws of justice can never reflect on the sentiments which mankind must entertain with regard to him, without feeling all the agonies of shame, and horror, and consternation. When his passion is gratified, and he begins coolly to reflect on his past conduct, he can enter into none of the motives which influenced it. (TMS II.ii.2.3, pp.84-5)

The simple passage of time eases the offender’s passions, allowing for a severe judgment of his past action:

They appear now as detestable to him as they did always to other people. By sympathizing with the hatred and abhorrence which other men must entertain for him, he becomes in some measure the object of his own hatred and abhorrence. The situation of the person, who suffered by his injustice, now calls upon his pity. He is grieved at the thought of it; regrets the unhappy effects of his own conduct, and feels at the same time that they have rendered him the proper object of the resentment and indignation of mankind, and of what is the natural consequence of resentment, vengeance and punishment. The thought of this perpetually haunts him, and fills him with terror and amazement. (TMS II.ii.2.3, p.84)

Pity or compassion is sympathy with fellow sorrow (TMS I.i.1.1, p.9; I.i.1.5, p.10). Even the offender is naturally impelled to feel it, to sympathize with the target of his injury. He becomes grieved (a judgment of impropriety) and regrets his past action's effects (a first judgment of demerit). When he enlarges his point of view, covering not only the offended's but also the spectators', he will agree with their sympathy for the injured person (a second judgment of demerit, confirming the first) and even with the need to punish himself (here, the sense of duty may enter into action, applying the proper rule of society's penal code). This set of emotions starts tormenting him day and night:

He dares no longer look society in the face, but imagines himself as it were rejected, and thrown out from the affections of all mankind. He cannot hope for the consolation of sympathy in this his greatest and most dreadful distress. The remembrance of his crimes has shut out all fellow-feeling with him from the hearts of his fellow-creatures. The sentiments which they entertain with regard to him, are the very thing which he is most afraid of. Every thing seems hostile, and he would be glad to fly to some inhospitable desert, where he might never more behold the face of a human creature, nor read in the countenance of mankind the condemnation of his crimes. (TMS II.ii.2.3, p.84)

To avoid such torment, he will seek to avoid any social contact, thus evading the critical eye of everyone who saw or heard about his crime. Solitude, however, is a double-edged sword: By excluding himself from any social contact to avoid the gaze of everyone sympathizing with the offended he is also avoiding the gaze of anyone who might sympathize with his sorrows, or perhaps even with his remorse, and thereby relieve his conscience. Far away from social interaction, the only voice echoing in his head is his own consciousness, a heavy and unforgiving voice:

(...) solitude is still more dreadful than society. His own thoughts can present him with nothing but what is black, unfortunate, and disastrous, the melancholy forebodings of incomprehensible misery and ruin. The horror of solitude drives him back into society, and he comes again into the presence of mankind, astonished to appear before them, loaded with shame and distracted with fear, in order to supplicate some little protection from the countenance of those very judges, who he knows have already all unanimously condemned him. (ibidem, pp.84-5)

Tormented and bewildered, the unhappy offender has no other choice but to return to society and voluntarily surrender to the punishment it decides. This is the nature of the "most dreadful" of "sentiments which can enter the human breast—remorse:

It is made up of shame from the sense of the impropriety of past conduct; of grief for the effects of it; of pity for those who suffer by it; and of the dread and terror of punishment from the consciousness of the justly provoked resentment of all rational creatures.⁴ (ibidem, p.85)

Smith poses an incredibly complex sentiment as the natural basis of justice, composed of shame brought by the remembrance of the crime's motives (impropriety), grief for its bad effects (demerit), pity for the offended (sympathy with his sorrow), and dread and terror of the possible punishment (duty) due to him (sympathy with the offended's resentment).⁵ Remorse is remarkable in many ways. First, it is a complex sentiment, composed of several layers of emotions and judgments, clearly showing both processes of sentimental justification and communication. This is particularly true of sympathetic resentment: When the offender feels remorse he necessarily shares and approves of the injured's and spectators' resentment. Impartiality is mandatory: Before approving of the offended's resentment, the offender must disapprove of his own motives, those that drove him to act in the first place.⁶ Remorse is also an outstanding example of the need to internalize the impartial spectator: To approve of the injured's resentment, the offender must be able to, first, judge himself (divide himself into agent and judge); second, see himself as equal to the offended (apply the principle of equity); and third, discount the effects of fortune (he will always feel remorse in the case of an action driven by a bad intention, even if its full bad effects did not take place). Smith's description also

⁴ This paragraph as a whole is a remarkable example of Smith's literary rhetoric. Remorse's description demands the narrative of the succeeding affective states through which the offender passes.

⁵ These sentiments, however complex, still operate naturally and largely unconsciously: "Before we can make any proper comparison of those opposite interests, we must change our position. We must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us. Here, too, habit and experience have taught us to do this so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it; and it requires, in this case too, some degree of reflection, and even of philosophy, to convince us, how little interest we should take in the greatest concerns of our neighbour, how little we should be affected by whatever relates to him, if the sense of propriety and justice did not correct the otherwise natural inequality of our sentiments" (TMS III.3.3, pp.135-6). Indeed, "The most vulgar education teaches us to act, upon all important occasions, with some sort of impartiality between ourselves and others, and even the ordinary commerce of the world is capable of adjusting our active principles to some degree of propriety" (TMS III.3.7, p.139).

⁶ This is the most important difference between gratitude and resentment, and perhaps, the reason why Smith chooses to ground justice in it. B might feel gratitude toward A because of a fortuitous combination of events (see 4.4a). In this case, A knows that this gratitude is improper (or at least not fully proper), and yet "any sort of reason seems sufficient to authorize the exertion of the social and benevolent affections; but it requires the most solid and substantial to make us enter into that of the unsocial and malevolent" (TMS II.iii.2.6, p.102). Unsocial passions demand more to be justified than social ones; ideally, they demand impartiality: "There is no passion, of which the human mind is capable, concerning whose justness we ought to be so doubtful, concerning whose indulgence we ought so carefully to consult our natural sense of propriety, or so diligently to consider what will be the sentiments of the cool and impartial spectator" (TMS I.ii.3.8, p.38). Remorse can only be felt by those able to impartially view and judge themselves.

highlights the difference between real and virtual communication: While running away from social intercourse and seeking solitude, the regretful offender faces the internalized impartial spectator, whose judgment, in this case, is ruthless. His only choice is to come back to society, where along with his guilt his grief might also be shared (offering him some consolation). The virtual communication (with the internalized spectator) is isolated but confirmed afterward by the empirical communication (with the remainder of society, real spectators). This ‘case’ shows one of the possible interactions between virtual and real affective communication: The internal judgment anticipates the external judgment and the possible punishment, and the external judgment appears as a confirmation of the internal judgment, punishing but also providing some comfort (for it is also a sympathetic response to the actor’s remorse). Finally, remorse also reveals the correct behavior by opposition (TMS II.ii.2.4, p.85).

Nevertheless, the most striking feature of Smith’s ‘case’ of remorse is the enormous amount of subjective effort it demands from the offender. At least four emotions/judgments concerning many aspects of his past behavior (motivation, immediate effects, remote effects, etc.) are at stake, not to mention the sorrow and grief caused by these painful reflections. The charms of self-deceit become evident: If my motivation is partial, why not keep it until its ultimate consequences are revealed? Why suffer from such an implacable inner censure? Someone virtuous, on the other hand, should be able to make a decision taking into account the possible future consequence of remorse, thus avoiding actions begetting it. Those able to truly guide themselves (or at least some of their actions) by communicating with an internalized impartial spectator are scarce and bound by a series of other difficulties, such as lack of information (about either the situation or the people involved, as well as the future effects of the action) and lack of time to process all these judgments. Even if, in a particular situation, someone were able to fully articulate all these inferences and achieve a full and complete solution from a theoretical, speculative point of view, without self-command this person would not be able to implement this solution. Weakness of will is a real problem, according to Smith. Furthermore, even if all these conditions were met, fortune could (and probably would) intervene, altering the intended effects in a quantitative (if not qualitative) fashion.⁷ An

⁷ Before presenting self-deceit (TMS III.3), Smith presents a sort of summary of the difficulties conscience faces in imposing its authority. The scheme is the following: moral judgments’ criteria and proceedings (§§1-2), impartiality as the proper criterion (§§3-7); two philosophical methods to practically deal with partiality (§§8-11): i. increase sensibility toward others’ interests (§§9-10), ii. diminish sensibility toward one’s self-interests (§§11); role of misfortunes (§§12-20 and §§32-3); degree of self-command (§§21-30),

alternative is more than welcome, especially one that is more effective and efficient and demands less effort.

3. Duty and its judgment: The morals of reason

Due to the countless difficulties involved in the internalized impartial spectator's judgments, as well as in their implementation in a concrete action, Smith presents a second solution to these problems that is at the same time the proper solution to self-deceit:

Nature, however, has not left this weakness, which is of so much importance, altogether without a remedy; nor has she abandoned us entirely to the delusions of self-love. Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided. (TMS III.4.7, p.159)

Although artificial devices, rules have a natural origin: The continuous observation of how the moral faculties are applied in specific 'cases' allows for an ensuing inference of rules of conduct. Everybody watches everybody else:

Some of their actions shock all our natural sentiments. We hear every body about us express the like detestation against them. This still further confirms, and even exasperates our natural sense of their deformity. It satisfies us that we view them in the proper light, when we see other people view them in the same light. We resolve never to be guilty of the like, nor ever, upon any account, to render ourselves in this manner the objects of universal disapprobation. We thus naturally lay down to ourselves a general rule, that all such actions are to be avoided, as tending to render us odious, contemptible, or punishable, the objects of all those sentiments for which we have the greatest dread and aversion. (TMS III.4.7, p.159)

Spectators have a first, spontaneous, and original reaction (the shock of the first sentence), which is confirmed and justified by other spectators' reactions (sympathy in action). This first step is the work of our moral senses, from which the rules will be inferred: Such rules "are ultimately founded upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve, or disapprove of"⁸ (TMS III.4.8, p.159). Consciously reflecting on this social censure, the

including the paroxysm of distress (§§27-8); extravagant passions (§31), ideal of man: self-command and sensibility (§§34-7 and §§44-5); solitude (§38); and partiality (§§41-3).

⁸ Good political-economy rules can be inferred from common sense: "Private people who want to make a fortune, never think of retiring to the remote and poor provinces of the country, but resort either to the capital or to some of the great commercial towns. They know, that, where little wealth circulates, there is

individual establishes for himself a negative rule: never to act in a way that causes this reaction (“We resolve never to be guilty...”). The scheme remains the same for positive cases of moral approval, but here the rule is positive: We “thus naturally lay down to ourselves a rule of another kind, that every opportunity of acting in this manner is carefully to be sought after” (TMS III.4.7, p.159). The name of this work is induction, one of the operations of reason:

The general maxims of morality are formed, like all other general maxims, from experience and induction. We observe in a great variety of particular cases what pleases or displeases our moral faculties, what these approve or disapprove of, and, by induction from this experience, we establish those general rules. But induction is always regarded as one of the operations of reason. From reason, therefore, we are very properly said to derive all those general maxims and ideas. (VII.iii.2.6, p.319)

Smith insists that it is not the breaking of a rule that outrages us; our outrage comes first, and the rule follows. Even the hypothetical spectacle of the very first murder would have outraged its observer the same way it would outrage us today⁹ (TMS III.4.8, p.159). This sensory-sentimental mechanism has not only a historical but also a logical precedence over rules (and, thus, entire legislations):

An amiable action, a respectable action, an horrid action, are all of them actions which naturally excite for the person who performs them, the love, the respect, or the horror of the spectator. The general rules which determine what actions are, and what are not, the objects of each of those sentiments, can be formed no other way than by observing what actions actually and in fact excite them.¹⁰ (TMS III.4.10, p.160)

little to be got, but that where a great deal is in motion, some share of it may fall to them. The same maxims which would in this manner direct the common sense of one, or ten, or twenty individuals, should regulate the judgment of one, or ten, or twenty millions, and should make a whole nation regard the riches of its neighbours, as a probable cause and occasion for itself to acquire riches. A nation that would enrich itself by foreign trade is certainly most likely to do so when its neighbours are all rich, industrious, and commercial nations” (WN IV.iii.c.11, pp.494-5). In such cases, a good rule for ten or twenty individuals is a good rule for ten or twenty million.

⁹ “To the man who first saw an inhuman murder, committed from avarice, envy, or unjust resentment, and upon one too that loved and trusted the murderer, who beheld the last agonies of the dying person, who heard him, with his expiring breath, complain more of the perfidy and ingratitude of his false friend, than of the violence which had been done to him, there could be no occasion, in order to conceive how horrible such an action was, that he should reflect, that one of the most sacred rules of conduct was what prohibited the taking away the life of an innocent person, that this was a plain violation of that rule, and consequently a very blamable action. His detestation of this crime, it is evident, would arise instantaneously and antecedent to his having formed to himself any such general rule” (TMS III.4.8, p.159).

¹⁰ “When we read in history or romance, the account of actions either of generosity or of baseness, the admiration which we conceive for the one, and the contempt which we feel for the other, neither of them arise from reflecting that there are certain general rules which declare all actions of the one kind admirable, and all actions of the other contemptible” (TMS III.4.9, p.160).

The definitive criterion of a rule is the sentiment grounding it: A good rule is a rule that restricts itself to the proper object of a sentiment.¹¹ It is highly improbable that the first rules formed would be precise and complete; on the contrary, these first general rules would probably have demanded several corrections before they started to resemble criminal or civil laws. Correcting a rule is not an altogether different process than forming it. The application of any rule to a particular case becomes the object of our moral sentiments: If the rule is well applied, spectators approve; if it is misapplied, spectators disapprove. Several approvals indicate this is a satisfactory rule; several disapprovals indicate it needs to be altered or perhaps even replaced.¹² This process of concurrently forming and refining rules will yield something close a legal code to deal with resentful situations, but they require more than the mere concurrence of the “sentiments of mankind”—namely, the existence of an authority able to arbitrate the conflicts and enforce its decisions (see 5.6) and a moral treaty for the other virtues (see 5.5). Rules are the basis of moral stability, performing a central role in the regulation of “our most solid judgments (...) with regard to right and wrong” (TMS VII.iii.2.6, pp.319-20). This stability begets the illusion of morality being grounded in rules when, instead, it is the other way around:

They are upon these occasions commonly cited as the ultimate foundations of what is just and unjust in human conduct; and this circumstance seems to have misled several very eminent authors, to draw up their systems in such a manner, as if they had supposed that the original judgments of mankind with regard to right and wrong, were formed like the decisions of a court of judicatory, by considering first the general rule, and then, secondly, whether the particular action under consideration fell properly within its comprehension. (TMS III.4.11, p.160)

This is the most explicit passage about how duty judgments work: There is a general rule and one must determine if this rule applies to the case at hand.¹³ Reason is

¹¹ A rule may be proper to partial sentiments, such as in the mercantile system: “As it is the interest of the freemen of a corporation to hinder the rest of the inhabitants from employing any workmen but themselves, so it is the interest of the merchants and manufacturers of every country to secure to themselves the monopoly of the home market” (WN IV.iii.c.10, p.494).

¹² The need for temporary laws demonstrates the impropriety of a legal code: “The temporary laws, prohibiting for a limited time the exportation of corn, and taking off for a limited time the duties upon its importation, expedients to which Great Britain has been obliged so frequently to have recourse, sufficiently demonstrate the impropriety of her general system. Had that system been good, she would not so frequently have been reduced to the necessity of departing from it” (WN IV.b.38, p.538; cf. IV.b.34, p.536).

¹³ For Smith, science is where these judgments are most likely to be found: Scientists classify individuals and objects according to more and more complex taxonomic frames. See the first kind of wonder Smith presents in his *History of Astronomy* (EPS, pp.37-40). Indeed, wonder plays an auxiliary role (to the moral faculties) in the process of the formation of moral rules (for an instance where wonder acts in the moral field, see TMS V.2.7, p.204). A few years later, Kant called this kind of judgment “determinant

responsible for rule formation (VII.iii.2.6, p.319), and rule application is the job of conscience, depending on the particularities of the case—the passion involved (sociable, unsociable, selfish) and the kind of rule (precise or imprecise) (TMS III.6, pp.171-8).

The closest Smith comes to a general definition of duty in *Theory* is a passage where he says that it consists of “what he owed both to himself¹⁴ and others” (TMS VII.iv.12, pp.331-2; cf. II.i.2.5, p.71; and VII.ii.1.21, p.277). The content of duty is the same as that of general rules of conduct, being a matter settled by our moral faculties (a propriety and merit issue). Justice duties (based on unsociable passions), for instance, require impartiality as the main criterion (TMS III.6.5, p.172). Beneficence duties (built upon sociable passions), such as those regarding family and friends, demand partial sentiments (TMS III.6.4, p.172; cf. III.5.1, p.162). Prudence duties (grounded in selfish passions) require a balance between cold rules and vivid sentiments (TMS III.6.6, p.173; cf. III.6.7, pp.173-4). Thus, generally, duties (like the internal senses) form an open set allowing for the introduction of new ones,¹⁵ especially because it is almost impossible to settle their relative boundaries in a definitive manner (TMS V.2.13, p.209).

The sense of duty supposes the existence of general rules and acts regardless of its content, supplying a sensory-sentimental basis to the “sacred regard” (TMS III.5.2, p.163; cf. TMS III.5.1, p.161) and “reverence” (TMS III.5.3, p.163) concerning these rules. Such features that do not necessarily imply any sort of religious engagement (TMS III.6.1, p.171). Religion furnishes reasoning and institutions that confirm the natural operations of the sense of duty, supplying it with an “additional tie, besides those which regulate the conduct of other men” (TMS III.5.13, p.170; see 1.6).

Smith’s ‘case’ of “the man of furious resentment” exposes the individual operations of the sense of duty (and its morals):

(bestimmend),” as opposed to “reflecting (reflektierend)” judgments—that is, when only the particular is given and one must find the proper universal (Kritik der Urteilskraft, Eileitung, IV). This last kind is close to Smith’s propriety. Fleischacker (1990 and 1999) establishes this link between *Wealth* and Kant’s third critique. Montes also tries to connect them (2004, p.114). More recently, Marcio Suzuki (2014) also established this link but from a broader point of view: the persistence of some central themes from the eighteenth-century British tradition of moral sentiments (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith) in Kant and German idealism.

¹⁴ “If we ourselves, therefore, were in poverty, in sickness, or in any other calamity, we ought, first of all, to use our utmost endeavours, so far as justice and our duty to others would allow, to rescue ourselves from this disagreeable circumstance. (...) If, indeed, any opportunity of extricating ourselves should offer, it became our duty to embrace it” (TMS VII.ii.1.18, p.274).

¹⁵ For instance, there are the duties of gratitude (TMS II.ii.1.3, p.79; III.6.9, p.174); “of politeness,” “which are so easily observed,” unlike those of “justice, of truth, of chastity, of fidelity” (TMS III.5.2, p.163); and of religion (TMS III.5.13, p.170).

The man of furious resentment, if he was to listen to the dictates of that passion, would perhaps regard the death of his enemy, as but a small compensation for the wrong, he imagines, he has received; which, however, may be no more than a very slight provocation. But his observations upon the conduct of others, have taught him how horrible all such sanguinary revenges appear. Unless his education has been very singular, he has laid it down to himself as an inviolable rule, to abstain from them upon all occasions. (TMS III.4.12, p.160)

This man's "reverence" for this rule and "the awe and respect with which he has been accustomed to regard it" preserves this rule's "authority with him, and renders him incapable of being guilty of such a violence." In a way, the sense of duty guarantees rules' enforcement at this sensory-sentimental level, a process not entirely reflexive nor entirely unconscious but somewhere in between. Indeed, in some persons, this process will be almost entirely based upon a vague feeling; in others, it will take advantage of more or less complex reasoning concerning, for instance, the rule's individual or public utility. A well-grounded and fully operational sense of duty will yield the following sentiment:

At the very time of acting, at the moment in which passion mounts the highest, he hesitates and trembles at the thought of what he is about to do: he is secretly conscious to himself that he is breaking through those measures of conduct which, in all his cool hours, he had resolved never to infringe, which he had never seen infringed by others without the highest disapprobation, and of which the infringement, his own mind forebodes, must soon render him the object of the same disagreeable sentiments. Before he can take the last fatal resolution, he is tormented with all the agonies of doubt and uncertainty; he is terrified at the thought of violating so sacred a rule, and at the same time is urged and goaded on by the fury of his desires to violate it. He changes his purpose every moment; sometimes he resolves to adhere to his principle, and not indulge a passion which may corrupt the remaining part of his life with the horrors of shame and repentance; and a momentary calm takes possession of his breast, from the prospect of that security and tranquillity which he will enjoy when he thus determines not to expose himself to the hazard of a contrary conduct. But immediately the passion rouses anew, and with fresh fury drives him on to commit what he had the instant before resolved to abstain from. Wearied and distracted with those continual irresolutions, he at length, from a sort of despair, makes the last fatal and irrecoverable step; but with that terror and amazement with which one flying from an enemy, throws himself over a precipice, where he is sure of meeting with more certain destruction than from any thing that pursues him from behind. (ibidem)

The most important aspect is that the psychological process here is simpler than that of remorse: Only one conflict, that between passion and rule, will ground this man's behavior (instead of the four levels of judgment involved in remorse). Smith also highlights the educational role of this process: This tension between passion and rule

allows this person to have a glimpse of the remorse he would feel if he acted entirely according to his furious resentment:

Such are his sentiments even at the time of acting; though he is then, no doubt, less sensible of the impropriety of his own conduct than afterwards, when his passion being gratified and palled, he begins to view what he has done in the light in which others are apt to view it; and actually feels, what he had only foreseen very imperfectly before, the stings of remorse and repentance begin to agitate and torment him. (ibidem)

This is the subjective side of the origin and operation of rules. An analysis of the social aspects of this process is required to complete the picture. But first, we will discuss how nature grounds society.

4. The role of utility

Human beings were “fitted by nature to that situation for which [they were] made”—namely, to live in society, because they have a sense of justice, and they are able to feel remorse and develop a “conscience of merit”¹⁶ (TMS II.ii.3.1, p.85). Due to their “more delicate frame and more feeble constitution,” as compared to other animals (LJA vi.9, p.334), and the resulting need for mutual assistance, human beings “can subsist only in society” (TMS II.ii.3.1, p.85).

This does not mean that all societies will be alike. They oscillate between two extremes: If this mutual assistance is “afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy” (ibidem); on the other hand, if “there should be no mutual love and affection, the society, though less happy and agreeable, will not necessarily be dissolved” (TMS II.ii.3.2, p.86). This is an interesting asymmetry. Without beneficent exertions, society will be less agreeable, but without justice, society falls apart:

Society, however, cannot subsist among those who are at all times ready to hurt and injure one another. The moment that injury begins, the moment that mutual resentment and animosity take place, all the bands of it are broke asunder, and the different members of which it consisted are, as

¹⁶ This chapter begins with “It is thus that man...” (TMS II.ii.3.1, p.85). In the preceding chapter, “Of the sense of justice, of remorse and of the conscience of merit,” Smith presents the case of a remorseful criminal, discussed above (TMS II.ii.2, pp.82-5).

it were, dissipated and scattered abroad by the violence and opposition of their discordant affections.
(TMS II.ii.3.3, p.86)

Even among a band of criminals, trust is crucial. Regarding society's constitution, beneficence and justice play different roles: "Beneficence, therefore, is less essential to the existence of society than justice. Society may subsist, though not in the most comfortable state, without beneficence; but the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it" (ibidem). Beneficence is an ornament embellishing the social building; "Justice, on the contrary, is the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice" (TMS II.ii.3.4, p.86). To ensure that society subsists and does not "crumble into atoms," nature has made us fearful of resentment:

In order to enforce the observation of justice, therefore, Nature has implanted in the human breast that consciousness of ill desert, those terrors of merited punishment which attend upon its violation, as the great safe-guards of the association of mankind, to protect the weak, to curb the violent, and to chastise the guilty. (ibidem)

Here, Smith is referring not to an "animal resentment" (TMS II.iii.2.10, p.104) or to a "furious resentment" (TMS III.4.12, p.160) but to a proper resentment, approved by impartial spectators. This sort of resentment is a constituent part of remorse, as to feel it, the offender must first overcome his partial view in order to disapprove of his intention. Only those who have internalized the character of an impartial spectator can feel remorse: This "consciousness" is nothing more than the necessary result of the natural and proper exertion of sympathetic faculties. Remorse, as a sort of check to egoism and partiality, serves as proof that nature formed human beings to be in society. Even in its rudest form (that of "animal resentment") it acts as a principle of self-defense (and, thus, self-preservation):

Men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for another, with whom they have no particular connexion, in comparison of what they feel for themselves; the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature, is of so little importance to them in comparison even of a small conveniency of their own; they have it so much in their power to hurt him, and may have so many temptations to do so, that if this principle did not stand up within them in his defence, and overawe them into a respect for his innocence, they would, like wild beasts, be at all times ready to fly upon him; and a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions. (ibidem)

Resentment is not only one of the original passions of human nature; it is also useful to every individual.¹⁷ Smith's goes on to describe the mistakes of those who take (public) utility as the foundation of justice and not resentment. This does not mean utility does not play a major and important role in the constitution and application of justice rules. Public utility is possibly the most important argument in justifying law and punishment, and, as such, it is the most important confirmation of the propriety of our senses and sentiments regarding justice:

And so far this account is undoubtedly true, that we frequently have occasion to confirm our natural sense of the propriety and fitness of punishment, by reflecting how necessary it is for preserving the order of society.¹⁸ (TMS II.ii.3.7, p.88)

¹⁷ Smith borrows from natural law tradition the general frame of his theory of justice. Roughly speaking, natural law resorts to the idea of natural sociability to describe the content and unity of the laws of nature, and this is done through the idea of self-preservation. The result is a minimalist yet universal theory, because it is defined in terms of survival (and not in terms of what a good life is supposed to be, as the ancients did). At its core, this is a negative conception of justice (the just is everything that is not unjust), whose main consequence is "faire du droit à la sûreté le premier, et le plus fundamental, de tous les droits" (Larrere, p.27). The fiction of a state of nature ensures this as an original right: Individual independence is seen as the care for self-preservation. Human beings enter society due to the belief that safety will be better ensured there (see Larrere's second chapter as a whole; *ibid.*, pp.17-57). Smith retains this general scheme, employing some changes from Butler's idea that nature gave us resentment (and its sympathetic sharing) to ensure our safety (both the individual's and society's): "The indignation raised by cruelty and injustice, and the desire of having it punished, which persons unconcerned would feel, is by no means malice. No; it is resentment against vice and wickedness: it is one of the common bonds, by which society is held together; a fellow feeling which each individual has in behalf of the whole species, as well as of himself. And it does not appear that this, generally speaking, is at, all too high amongst mankind. Suppose now the injury I have been speaking of, to be done against ourselves, or those whom we consider as ourselves: it is plain, the way in which we should be affected, would be exactly the same in kind; but it would certainly be in a higher degree, and less transient: because a sense of our own happiness and misery is most intimately and always present to us; and, from the very constitution of our nature, we cannot but have a greater sensibility to, and be more deeply interested in what concerns ourselves. And this seems to be the whole of this passion which is, properly speaking, natural to mankind; namely, a resentment against injury and wickedness in general; and in a higher degree when towards ourselves, in proportion to the greater regard which men naturally have for themselves, than for others" (Sermon VIII, p.70). This allows Smith, first, to root the minimal natural laws (especially the idea of justice as a negative virtue) directly in human nature, through his understanding of resentment as an original passion that is naturally regulated by sympathy, and, second, to separate from nature and to isolate the role of utility. Natural laws' reasoning, based on self-love (Larrere, pp.27-9), is retained as an additional confirmation of this passion as a foundation of society (see chapter 6).

¹⁸ Here, again, Smith follows Butler's lead: "The good influence which this passion, has, in fact, upon the affairs of the world, is obvious to every one's notice. Men are plainly restrained from injuring their fellow-creatures by fear of their resentment; and it is very happy that they are so, when they would not be restrained by a principle of virtue. And after an injury is done and there is a necessity that the offender should be brought to justice; the cool consideration of reason, that the security and peace of society requires examples of justice should be made, might indeed be sufficient to procure laws to be enacted, and sentence passed: but is it that cool reflection in the injured person, which, for the most part, brings the offender to justice? Or is it not resentment and indignation against the injury and the author of it? I am afraid there is no doubt which is commonly the case. This, however, is to be considered as a good effect, notwithstanding it were much to be wished, that men would act from a better principle, reason and cool reflection" (Sermon VIII, p.73).

Furthermore, public utility not only confirms the sense of the propriety of the punishment (and, consequently, of resentment); it also intervenes in the moment where, with subsided and pacified emotions, the terrible and violent character of punishment comes to the foreground:

When the guilty is about to suffer that just retaliation, which the natural indignation of mankind tells them is due to his crimes; when the insolence of his injustice is broken and humbled by the terror of his approaching punishment; when he ceases to be an object of fear, with the generous and humane he begins to be an object of pity. The thought of what he is about to suffer extinguishes their resentment for the sufferings of others to which he has given occasion. They are disposed to pardon and forgive him, and to save him from that punishment, which in all their cool hours they had considered as the retribution due to such crimes. (ibidem)

This is yet another moment where the natural course of our sentiments does not bring the most interesting result: During the time between the crime and the punishment, the sympathetic response to the offended's resentment usually subsides while a sympathetic response to the offender's sufferings arises. Instead of bringing forth a harsher, more severe punishment (a direct consequence of resentment), the natural course of sentiments more frequently begets a softer punishment (because spectators start sympathizing with the criminal).¹⁹ If resentment demands punishment, the appearance of the punitive apparatus suggests forgiveness.²⁰ The solution to this impasse consists of resorting to public utility considerations:

Here, therefore, they have occasion to call to their assistance the consideration of the general interest of society. They counterbalance the impulse of this weak and partial humanity²¹ by the dictates of a humanity that is more generous and comprehensive. They reflect that mercy to the guilty is cruelty

¹⁹ Once the legal system is established, one of resentment's effects is to accelerate punishment's proceedings: "Criminal causes have always a more speedy determination. One would indeed think that when a person's life is at stake, the debate should be longer than in any other case. But resentment is roused in these cases and precipitates to punish" (LJB 65, p.422; cf., Malloch's case, LJA, p.109).

²⁰ Sir Walter Scott offers a detailed description of the psychological effects of the gallows in Edinburgh around the 1780s, when the subsidiary plot of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* takes place: "It was the custom, until within these thirty years or thereabouts, to use this esplanade for the scene of public executions. The fatal day was announced to the public by the appearance of a huge black gallows-tree towards the eastern end of the Grassmarket. This illomened apparition was of great height, with a scaffold surrounding it, and a double ladder placed against it, for the ascent of the unhappy criminal and executioner. As this apparatus was always arranged before dawn, it seemed as if the gallows had grown out of the earth in the course of one night, like the production of some foul demon; and I well remember the fright with which the schoolboys, when I was one of their number, used to regard these ominous signs of deadly preparation. On the night after the execution the gallows again disappeared, and was conveyed in silence and darkness to the place where it was usually deposited, which was one of the vaults under the Parliament House, or courts of justice" (chapter 1).

²¹ According to Sir Walter Scott (see the epigraph), this weakness and partiality are just a part of human nature and, in fact, a "good" part.

to the innocent, and oppose to the emotions of compassion which they feel for a particular person, a more enlarged compassion which they feel for mankind. (ibidem, pp.88-9)

Thus, Smith's general scheme is the joining of the natural course with public utility considerations, as they "correct and regulate" the "natural sentiments by general rules" (TMS II.ii.3.10, p.90). Rules are also helpful in cases where these natural sentiments do not occur, either because some particular circumstances preclude them (TMS VI.ii.1.8, p.220) or because the action does not beget a sentimental repercussion, usually because it was directed not toward a particular person but toward society as a whole. In cases like this, the solution consists of resorting solely to public utility (TMS II.ii.3.11, p.90).

For better or for worse, utilitarian reasoning is ruthless: If the interest of the whole supersedes that of individual, the individual must suffer the consequences:

When the preservation of an individual is inconsistent with the safety of a multitude, nothing can be more just than that the many should be preferred to the one. Yet this punishment, how necessary soever, always appears to be excessively severe.²² (ibidem)

The natural sentiments conflict with public utility considerations because the passage of time soothes and pacifies spectators' sympathetic resentment: Smith gives the example of a sentinel who is sentenced to death for falling asleep while on duty. By comparing the spectators' reaction to the punishment of this "unfortunate victim" and their full approval of the punishment of "an ungrateful murderer or parricide" Smith shows how these two cases follow two different criteria: "his approbation of the one is far from being founded upon the same principles with that of the other" (ibidem, p.91).

Although it is not the foundation of morality, utility plays a major role in Smith's theory of justice. Whenever natural sentiments follow their expected course, utility plays a secondary role, correcting or regulating the consequences of these sentiments (due to either a lack or excess of resentment). In some exceptional cases in which sentiments do not take their natural course, utility becomes the determining principle, both in the

²² This is yet another subject where Bentham criticizes the moral sentiments tradition (especially Adam Smith): "The principle of sympathy and antipathy is most apt to err on the side of severity. It is for applying punishment in many cases which deserve none: in many cases which deserve some, it is for applying more than they deserve" (Principles of Morals and Legislation, Cap.II, §XVI). As just seen, to Smith, the natural course of sentiments does exactly the opposite, begetting a softer punishment, once spectators stop sympathizing with the offended's resentment and start sympathizing with the offender's suffering. Bentham's criticism is clever, imputing to Smith a criticism this last one used against what we I am calling utilitarian theories (see also 6.2c). It also makes a clear distinction between Smith's philosophy and Bentham's utilitarianism (see 5.7).

creation of rules and the doling out of punishment (such as sentencing a snoozing sentinel to the death penalty).

Thus, regarding justice, Smith's system is refractory to any simple denomination such as utilitarian or anti-utilitarian.²³ Although it plays an important role in the natural and ordinary course of sentiments, and in exceptional cases replaces the sentiments, utility cannot be considered the foundation of justice—neither utility in general (because it requires reflection and reasoning, which few take the trouble of doing²⁴) nor public utility (because our concern is naturally directed toward the particular, not the general):

The concern which we take in the fortune and happiness of individuals does not, in common cases, arise from that which we take in the fortune and happiness of society. We are no more concerned for the destruction or loss of a single man, because this man is member or part of society, and because we should be concerned for the destruction of society, than we are concerned for the loss of a single guinea, because this guinea is a part of a thousand guineas, and because we should be concerned for the loss of the whole sum. In neither case does our regard for the individuals arise from our regard for the multitude: but in both cases our regard for the multitude is compounded and made up of the particular regards which we feel for the different individuals of which it is composed. (TMS II.ii.3.10, pp.89-90)

The rest of the paragraph clearly shows that impartiality has nothing to do with public utility:

when a single man is injured, or destroyed, we demand the punishment of the wrong that has been done to him, not so much from a concern for the general interest of society, as from a concern for that very individual who has been injured. (...) The concern which is requisite for this, is no more than the general fellow-feeling which we have with every man merely because he is our fellow-creature. (ibidem, p.90)

The general fellow-feeling is the result of the conjoint operations of the sympathetic imagination and our “natural sense of equity” (see 3.5), not in any way related to a utilitarian computation. Indeed, defending the whole against any of its

²³ References concerning this topic can be found in Montes (2004, pp.114-5).

²⁴ As Smith's defense of property rules clearly shows, “when we are asked why we should not act in such or such a manner, the very question seems to suppose that, to those who ask it, this manner of acting does not appear to be for its own sake the natural and proper object of those sentiments. We must show them, therefore, that it ought to be so for the sake of something else. Upon this account we generally cast about for other arguments, and the consideration which first occurs to us, is the disorder and confusion of society which would result from the universal prevalence of such practices. We seldom fail, therefore, to insist upon this topic” (TMS II.ii.3.8, p.89). “All men, even the most stupid and unthinking, abhor fraud, perfidy, and injustice, and delight to see them punished. But few men have reflected upon the necessity of justice to the existence of society, how obvious soever that necessity may appear to be” (TMS II.ii.3.9, p.89).

constituent parts goes against human nature, against the natural sentiments, as the spectator's reaction to the punishment of the sleepy sentinel shows:

He looks upon the centinel as an unfortunate victim, who, indeed, must, and ought to be, devoted to the safety of numbers, but whom still, in his heart, he would be glad to save; and he is only sorry, that the interest of the many should oppose it. (TMS II.ii.3.11, p.91)

Putting the interest of “numbers” before the interest of someone of flesh and bone (even if this particular person is not in front of you) is not a simple task; it requires a huge amount of effort and self-command: “A man of humanity must recollect himself, must make an effort, and exert his whole firmness and resolution, before he can bring himself either to inflict it [i.e., the punishment of this unfortunate sentinel], or to go along with it when it is inflicted by others” (ibidem, p.90). Yet again, sympathy displays its function of safeguarding individuals, either from partiality or from fortune, and now, from raw utilitarian considerations. After all, if the “man of humanity” ends up approving of this sleepy sentinel's punishment, it is not because of but in spite of his “natural sentiments” and at the cost of much subjective effort.

5. Kinds of artifice

Unsocial passions, namely “hatred and resentment, with all their modifications,” draw a division in sympathy and, consequently, set up an opposition: regarding “all such passions, our sympathy is divided between the person who feels them, and the person who is the object of them. The interests of these two are directly opposite” (TMS I.ii.3.1, p.34). Beneficence, on the other hand, begets a “redoubled sympathy”: “We enter into the satisfaction both of the person who feels them [the beneficent affections of the first agent], and of the person who is the object of them [the second agent's gratitude]” (TMS I.ii.4.1, pp.38-9). Selfish passions, however, hold “a sort of middle place between them” (TMS I.ii.5.1, p.40), neither an open opposition nor a happy duplication.²⁵ Selfish and beneficent passions concur, respectively, in a competitive or in a non-competitive way. Unsocial

²⁵ In game theory terms, the opposition structure of unsocial passions determines a zero-sum game for justice. Selfish passions establish the non-zero-sum competitive game of prudence: It might be the necessarily positive-sum game of prudence or the negative-sum game of prodigality; it might also acquire the lottery nature of the “hazardous trades.” Social passions' duplication structure results in the positive uncompetitive game of beneficence. If this interpretation is correct, the prudential general frame of *Wealth* becomes a little less strange: Political economy is the science of this non-zero-sum competitive game of prudence. Jurisprudence is the science of this zero-sum game of justice.

passions clash, and this opposition requires a peculiar solution from human communities—namely, justice rules. This is the basis of an important difference between justice and the other virtues:

that we feel ourselves to be under a stricter obligation to act according to justice, than agreeably to friendship, charity, or generosity; that the practice of these last mentioned virtues seems to be left in some measure to our own choice, but that, somehow or other, we feel ourselves to be in a peculiar manner tied, bound, and obliged to the observation of justice. (TMS II.ii.1.5, p.80)

Vis-à-vis beneficence, in particular, justice appears as a “negative virtue” that does not, in most cases, demand any sort of specific action except simply refraining from positively causing harm to others: “We may often fulfil all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing” (TMS, II.ii.1.9, p.82; III.6.10, p. 175; LJB 6, p.399). Smith seems to imply that kids learn beneficence in the family circle,²⁶ but when they enter more complex social relations, they usually have to deal more with its absence than with it. Worse, in a relation of equals, there is no way of imposing beneficence²⁷; spectators can only praise its perpetrator. On the other hand, everyone can (and should) demand the strictest compliance with justice (TMS, II.ii.1.7). The enforcement of beneficence rules demands the delicate work of persuasion.²⁸ The general picture is that of an opposition between beneficence and justice rules:

The rules of justice may be compared to the rules of grammar; the rules of the other virtues, to the rules which critics lay down for the attainment of what is sublime and elegant in composition. The one, are precise, accurate, and indispensable. The other, are loose, vague, and indeterminate, and

²⁶ “That seems blamable which falls short of that ordinary degree of proper beneficence which experience teaches us to expect of every body; and on the contrary, that seems praise-worthy which goes beyond it. The ordinary degree itself seems neither blamable nor praise-worthy. A father, a son, a brother, who behaves to the correspondent relation neither better nor worse than the greater part of men commonly do, seems properly to deserve neither praise nor blame” (TMS, II.ii.1.6).

²⁷ Family ties are peculiarly prone to partiality and impartiality must be searched in the relationship among equals: “A very young child 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. By noise and threatening they are, for their own ease, often obliged to frighten it into good temper; and the passion which incites it to attack, is restrained by that which teaches it to attend to its own safety. When it is old enough to go to school, or to mix with its equals, it soon finds that they have no such indulgent partiality. It naturally wishes to gain their favour, and to avoid their hatred or contempt. Regard even to its own safety teaches it to do so; and it soon finds that it can do so in no other way than by moderating, not only its anger, but all its other passions, to the degree which its play-fellows and companions are likely to be pleased with. It thus enters into the great school of self-command, it studies to be more and more master of itself, and begins to exercise over its own feelings a discipline which the practice of the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection” (TMS III.3.20).

²⁸ See footnote 67 below.

present us rather with a general idea of the perfection we ought to aim at, than afford us any certain and infallible directions for acquiring it.²⁹ (TMS III.6.11, pp.175-6; cf. VII.iii.4.1, p.327)

Smith establishes three qualities of justice rules: They are precise, accurate, and indispensable. The last is the easiest to explain: Justice rules are indispensable because justice “is the main pillar that upholds the whole [social] edifice” (TMS II.ii.3.4, p.86); they are the fulcrum of society (TMS II.ii.3.6, p.87). It is more complicated to explain why justice rules are precise and accurate. Their indispensability might imply that they *must be* precise and accurate, but that is not precisely what these terms mean.

The rules of justice are accurate in the highest degree, and admit of no exceptions or modifications, but such as may be ascertained as accurately as the rules themselves, and which generally, indeed, flow from the very same principles with them. (TMS III.6.10, p.175)

By precise and accurate, Smith does not mean that these rules are immutable; instead, their alterations are inscribed in their own constitution. Even Latin grammar, with its nominal declensions and verbal conjugations that appear to include more exceptions than regular cases, is a set of precise and accurate rules, because all these modifications are determined by the same linguistic principle that enlivens the regular cases.³⁰ Unlike rhetoric rules of good writing, whose principles cannot be found in language itself, nothing prevents one from using foreign words instead of national ones (LRBL, pp.3-5) or determines the correct sequence of words in a sentence (LRBL, pp.5-7) or its size (LRBL, p.7). Here, Smith assumes that the best guide is the sentiment, a non-linguistic principle (LRBL, p.25). Smith uses debt as an example to show how legal grammar works:

If I owe a man ten pounds, justice requires that I should precisely pay him ten pounds, either at the time agreed upon, or when he demands it. What I ought to perform, how much I ought to perform, when and where I ought to perform it, the whole nature and circumstances of the action prescribed, are all of them precisely fixt and determined. (TMS III.6.10, p.175)

²⁹ There are some unpublished passages where Smith states that this distinction is not as clear-cut as it may appear: “There is indeed a certain degree of looseness and inaccuracy [of] in what may be called the natural principles of punishment. What is the extent of the Right which is violated, and wherein consists its v[e?](i)olation, can in almost all cases be determined with exact precision. But what degree of Resentment or punishment is due for this violation cannot easily be fixed exactly by general Rules which have any great foundation in nature; but varies with every variety of Circumstances: And so far the principles and rules of punishments resemble those of Beneficence” (Appendix II in TMS, p.390). This same “looseness and inaccuracy” appear when he tries to show how property is originated by accession.

³⁰ See, for instance, the comparison between the use of adjectives and prepositions in English with Latin declensions (LRBL, pp.207-11).

In a debt, everything is settled: who owes whom, the amount, and the date and place of payment. However, in the case of a good deed that is not officially a debt, nothing is determined except the people involved. Therefore, for the other virtues besides justice (even gratitude, whose “rules are the most precise, and admit of the fewest exceptions”), nothing is truly determined (TMS III.6.9, p.174).

Because they are precise, accurate, and indispensable, justice rules are the most proper object for the sense of duty. This conjunction results in “the most sacred laws of justice,” precisely “those whose violation seems to call loudest for vengeance and punishment.” They are composed of

laws which guard the life and person of our neighbour; the next are those which guard his property and possessions; and last of all come those which guard what are called his personal rights, or what is due to him from the promises of others. (TMS, II.ii.2.2, pp.83-4)

Person (body and reputation), estate, and personal rights are the three objects that the laws of justice must regulate and protect.

6. Constitution of legal grammar

To Smith, justice is a negative virtue, whose goal is to prevent other people from getting harmed or injured:

Let us consider then in how many ways justice may be violated, that is, in how many respects a man may be injured. – 1st, he may be injured as a man; 2^{dly}, as a member of a family; and 3^{dly}, as a citizen or member of a state. (LJA 9-10, p.7; LJB 6, p.399)³¹

These are the only three possibilities: private law, family law, and public law. For our purposes, the most important case is the first: A person might be harmed in her body (bodily harm or confinement), her reputation, or, finally, her estate. Individual rights to body and reputation are “*iura hominum naturalia*”—natural rights—and individual rights to estate are “*iura adventitia*”—adventitious rights, rights arising from artificial

³¹ LJA and LJB present basically the same content with some differences, mainly in form. LJA is, usually, more detailed (almost 400 pages vs. around 250 of LJB), but LJB is better organized (for instance, the origin of property opens the LJA, while in LJB it is presented in the chapter dedicated to private rights, after a discussion about justice and public and family rights). I will use both almost interchangeably, noting the differences only when they are significant.

causes, that is, invented rights³² (LJA 12, p.8; LJB 7, p.399). Smith insists they can be either real or personal:

A real right is that whose object is a real thing and which can be claimed a *quocumque possessore*. Such are all possessions, houses, furniture.

Personal rights are such as can be claimed by a law-suit from a particular person, but not a *quocumque possessore*. Such are all debts and contracts, the payment or performance of which can be demanded only from one person.³³ (LJB 8-9, pp.399-400)

There are four kinds of real rights: “Property, Servitudes, Pledges, and Exclusive Priviledges” (LJB 9, p.400). There are three kinds of personal rights: based on “contract, quasi contract, or delinquency.” These seven rights, or more properly, “The objects of these seven rights make up the whole of a man's estate” (LJB 10, p.400). They are the most difficult to deal with, both theoretically and practically:

The origin of natural rights is quite evident. That a person has a right to have his body free from injury, and his liberty free from infringement unless there be a proper cause, no body doubts. But acquired rights such as property require more explanation. Property and civil government very much depend on one another. The preservation of property and the inequality of possession first formed it, and the state of property must always vary with the form of government.³⁴ (LJB 11, p.401)

Adventitious rights (property rights, family and public law) are not evident as natural ones (private law, except property),³⁵ demanding not only the correct constitution of rules but also a government apparatus to ensure their enforcement: “Property and civil

³² For more about the heuristic function of this distinction in Smith (sign of the moral urgency and historical aspect of rights), see Haakonssen (1981, p.102). More important for our purpose is that “it inevitably recalls Hume’s distinction between natural and artificial virtues and his treatment of justice as an artificial virtue; and first of all it reminds us that Hume’s account of justice was mainly in terms of property (...), whereas Smith’s concept of justice (...) covers natural as well as acquired rights. (...) Smith’s rejection of a ‘utilitarian’ or consequentialist account of rights and their comparative virtues, and his adoption of a unitarian spectator account, gives him the best of both worlds: on the one hand he can keep natural rights well within his concept of justice and hence has a more complete tool for the analysis of law; on the other hand the natural primacy of the more negative over the less negative in the eyes of any spectator still makes it possible for him to retain some reasonably clear and useful distinction between the two groups” (1981, pp.102-3).

³³ This distinction is intimately related to the difference between productive and unproductive labor. Productive labor “fixes and realizes itself in some particular subject or vendible commodity, which lasts for some time at least after that labour is past” (WN II.iii.1, p.330). Unproductive labor, on the other hand, “generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them” (ibidem). Although both kinds of labor are exerted as a personal right of their employer (among the personal rights are contracts, and, thus, labor contracts), only the first results in an increase of his estate. Therefore, from a juridical point of view, productive labor transforms a personal right into a real right.

³⁴ As Haakonssen points out, the passage of 1762-3, in which property is considered a natural right (“The only case where the origin of naturall rights is not altogether plain, is in that of property”; LJA i.25, p.13; cf. i.12), is, most likely, a mistake by the student (1981, p.205, note 10).

³⁵ See the table in Haakonssen (1981, p.105).

government very much depend on one another”; to preserve property, and, necessarily, property inequality, is the main goal of civil government. The text of *Wealth* is even more explicit:

Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all.³⁶ (WN V.i.b, p.715)

The symbiotic relationship between property rules and government is evident in their mutual origin. Indeed, it is impossible to present one without the other. Smith’s exposition has two peculiarities: He resorts to the impartial spectator and employs his theory of the four economic stages of society—namely, harvest (hunting/fishing), shepherd, agriculture, and commerce.³⁷ The impartial spectator is called forth to solve both general and particular problems, as he is the one who determines the (initial) boundaries of property rules. Such problems will be peculiar to each economical stage, in a succession that engenders a progressive broadening of these laws.

Smith points out the five possible sources of property: occupation, accession, prescription, succession, and voluntary transfer (LJB 149, p.459; LJA i.26, pp.13-4). Here, only occupation will be briefly analyzed. Spectators determine the validity of the occupation (as of all property, and justice):

Occupation seems to be well founded when the spectator can go along with my possession of the object, and approve me when I defend my possession by force. If I have gathered some wild fruit it will appear reasonable to the spectator that I should dispose of it as I please. (LJB 150, p.459)

Its basic issue is a double determination: “The first thing that requires notice in occupation among hunters is what constitutes it and when it begins, whether it be on the discovery of the wild beast or after it is actually in possession” (ibidem). The economic

³⁶ One of main differences between *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and *Wealth* is the concept of fortune replacing that of estate or property: “It is in the age of shepherds, in the second period of society, that the inequality of fortune first begins to take place (...)” (WN V.i.b, p.715). The reason is perhaps that in *Wealth*, Smith is dealing with the origins of authority: “It is in the age of shepherds, in the second period of society, that the inequality of fortune first begins to take place, and introduces among men a degree of authority and subordination which could not possibly exist before. It thereby introduces some degree of that civil government which is indispensably necessary for its own preservation: and it seems to do this naturally, and even independent of the consideration of that necessity” (ibidem). What Smith tries to explain is how a fortuitous superiority in estate becomes the proper and legal foundation of government authority. This inequality is “necessary,” but the “considerations of that necessity comes no doubt afterwards” (ibidem)—that is, the first origin of government has nothing to do with any sort of social contract or utilitarian considerations. It is a fortuitous process, with plenty of room for arbitrary acts.

³⁷ For more about this scheme, see the pioneering work of Ronald Meek (1976). See also Pocock for the importance of the age of shepherding (1999). For a critical approach, see Marouby (2005).

background is essential: In this first stage, all the cases revolve around gathering a fruit, hunting an animal, or fishing. However, even here, in this undeveloped economic stage, the impartial spectator intervenes to create property from bare possession:

The first thing to be attended to is how occupation, that is, the bare possession of a subject, comes to give us an exclusive right to the subject so acquired. – How it is that a man by pulling an apple should be imagined to have a right to that apple and a power of excluding all others from it – and that an injury should be conceived to be done when such a subject is taken from the possessor. (...) [W]e may conceive any injury was done one when an impartial spectator would be of opinion he was injured, would join with him in his concern and go along with him when he defend(ed) the subject in his possession against any violent attack, or used force to recover what had been thus wrongfully wrested out of his hands. This would be the case in the above mentioned circumstances. The spectator would justify the first possessor in defending and even in avenging himself when injured, in the manner we mentioned. The cause of this sympathy or concurrence betwixt the spectator and the possessor is, that he enters into his thoughts and concurs in his opinion that he may form a reasonable expectation of using the fruit or whatever it is in what manner he pleases. (LJA i.35-7, pp.16-7)

Property (in the sense of something the agent possesses or that she was the first to possess) is grounded in the shared expectation of usufruct, whereas spectators cannot share the sentiments of anyone interfering:

This expectation justifies in the mind of the spectator, the possessor both when he defends himself against one who would deprive him of what he has thus acquired and when he endeavours to recover it by force. – {The spectator goes along with him in his expectation, but he can not enter into the designs of him who would take the goods from the 1st possessor.} (LJA i.37, pp.17)

If a second agent interferes, spectators share the first agent's resentment, sympathizing with the first agent, not the second. For Smith, this is the foundation of property: the shared expectation of usufruct, an expectation socially validated by sympathy.

The second issue concerns the time boundaries of property: “at what time property is conceived to begin by occupation. – Whether it be when we have got a sight of the subject, or when we have got it into our actual possession” (LJA i.37, p.17). The general rule remains actual possession, but particular cases are determined by the economic stage:

In most cases the property in a subject is not conceived to commence till we have actually got possession of it. A hare started does not appear to be altogether in our power; we may have an expectation of obtaining it but still it may happen that it shall escape us. The spectator does not go

along with us so far as to conceive we could be justified in demanding satisfaction for the injury done us in taking such a booty out of our power. – We see however that in this point lawyers have differed considerably. (LJA i.38, pp.17-8)

The multiple ‘solutions’ proposed clearly show that some degree of arbitrariness is unavoidable: Some lawyers think property begins with the wound, others only with actual possession. A third group distinguishes between the weapon that wounded the animal (a missile does not establish property; a hand weapon does), and some others distinguish between cases of a non-mortal wound, followed by a mortal wound inflicted by someone else within the following twenty-four hours, etc. Even here, in the simplest economic stage, some power is necessary to arbitrate the possible contentions (here there are only personal causes of authority: perhaps the strongest or most intelligent or the oldest in the community will decide). The next question is about time continuity and the eventual end of property (LJA i.40, p.18). Yet again, actual possession is the first rule to appear:

At first property was conceived to end as well as to begin with possession. They conceived that a thing was no longer ours in any way after we had lost the immediate property of it. A wild beast we had caught, when it gets out of our power is considered as ceasing to be ours. But as there is some greater connection betwixt the possessor who loses the possession of the thing he had obtained than there wast before he had obtain'd (it), property was considered to extend a little farther, and to include not only those animalls we then possessed but also those we had once possessed though they were then out of our hands, that is, so long as we pursued them, and had a probability of recovering them. (LJA i.41, pp.18-9)

It is clear by now that problems arise only when the actual possession is not evident. Smith analyzes this question with two examples: first of an agent going to pick an apple from a tree being interrupted by second agent’s interference, the second of a hunt and a second agent’s interference, followed by the spectator’s respective considerations (LJA i41-4, p.19). These examples are broken down in the following chart:

| The second agent interferes when the first | Spectator’s consideration |
|---|----------------------------------|
| is going to pick the apple. | Incivility, but not theft. |
| picks the apple, but it falls on the ground. | Incivility bordering on theft. |
| has the apple in hand. The second takes it. | Theft. |
| is hunting a hare. | Incivility. |

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| captures the hare. It escapes, and the hunt continues. | Incivility bordering on theft. |
| captures the hare. It escapes and is lost. | Loss of any right over it. |

In an age of gatherers, the only situation that can truly warrant a dispute is the hunt, since that is the only situation where the possession is not entirely secured. Once the agent possesses the hunted animal (and it is impossible to hunt something immobile or not easily carried), there is no further ground for quarrel: “Among savages property begins and ends with possession, and they seem scarce to have any idea of any thing as their own which is not about their own bodies” (LJB 150, p.450). The same goes for their hunting devices: They are individual, easily carried, and they are buried together with the hunter when he dies, hardly becoming subject of argument. “In this age of society therefore property would extend no farther than possession” (LJA i.44, p.20).

Once shepherding starts, the situation changes: What does it mean to possess a herd? Smith’s solution lies in the taming process and a consequent broadening of the property beyond possession. The first tamer of a wild animal can claim to be its possessor³⁸ (LJA i.46, p.20). Thus, occupation is determined by the kind of economic activity: In immediate gathering, actual possession determines property, but shepherding establishes a first dissociation between possession and property. Sheep and cattle are animals and therefore relatively autonomous in relation to humans. The solution first becomes occupation—that is, the proprietor is the one who tamed the animal (the first who possessed it). Smith highlights how this process demands an enlargement of this notion, culminating in the appropriation of land, already in the agricultural state of society. Agriculture (which is also partially grounded in human imagination³⁹) is inseparable from sedentary settlements:

The notion of property seems at first to have been confined to what was about one person, his cloaths and any instruments he might have occasion for. This would naturally be the custom amongst hunters, whose occupation lead them to be continually changing their place of abode. The

³⁸ There is an important distinction here, between tamed individuals of a wild species (*mansuefactae*) and individuals of a tamed species (*mansuetae*). Occupation determines possession of the former; accession determines possession of the latter.

³⁹ “But when a society becomes numerous they would find a difficulty in supporting themselves by herds and flocks. Then they would naturally turn themselves to the cultivation of land and the raising of such plants and trees as produced nourishment fit for them. They would observe that those seeds which fell on the dry bare soil or on the rocks seldom came to any thing, but that those[s] which entered the soil generally produced a plant and bore seed similar to that which was sown. These observations they would extend to the different plants and trees they found produced agreeable and nourishing food. And by this means they would gradually advance, in to the age of agriculture” (LJA i.30-1, p.15).

introduction of shepherds made their habitation somewhat more fixed but still very uncertain. The huts they put up have been by the consent of the tribe allowed to be the property of the builder. For it would not appear at first why a hut should be the property of one after he had left it more than I of another. A cave or grotto would be considered as belonging to him who had taken possession of it as long as he continued in it; but it would not appear that one had any right to it tomorrow night because he had lodged there this night. The introduction of the property of houses must have therefore been by the common consent of the several members of some tribe or society. Hence in time the house and the things in it became to be considered as the property of the builder. (LJA i.47-8, pp.20-1)

Two things become clear: First, it is economic dynamics that fuel this enlargement of the notion of property; second, land possession requires the explicit consent of the community. If building a house does not guarantee its possession, what do we say about the land on which it was built?

The property of the spot he built on would be conceived to end as soon as he had left it, in the same manner as the seats in a theatre or a hut on the shore belong no longer to any person than they are possessed by him. They would not easily conceive a subject of such extent as land is, should belong to an object so little as a single man. It would more easily be conceived that a large body such as a whole nation should have property in land. (LJA i.48-9, p.21)

The disproportion between the greatness of a plot of land and the littleness of a man hinders an easy imaginary association and implies the whole community as the first land proprietor.⁴⁰ Even after agriculture, it is only the actual presence of the individual in a determined spot that guarantees him some right (LJA i.51, p.22). To originate private land ownership, two processes must converge: full sedentary settlement and the (more or less arbitrary) decision of an aristocracy (LJA i.51-2, p.22) or the community's consent (LJB 151, p.460). In both cases, it is a political decision that determines land ownership. Smith does not fully analyze the latter cases (aristocratic decision and community's consent), but they are both linked to a kind of government, aristocratic or democratic, and to the principles of every society: authority and utility (LJB 12, p.401). Which one it will be depends on the unique history of each society. This also reminds us that any rule's accuracy and precision, even in the case of justice, can only be determined regarding a particular situation.

⁴⁰ A kind of property that still existed in eighteenth-century Britain, in corporations and societies that "would not permit any of their body to set apart for his own use any part of their common field or any tree in it, etc., as they ought to reap in common the fruit of these common'd subjects" (LJA i.50-1, p.22).

7. Regulatory function of rules: Usury laws

Smith's system establishes two primordial functions to rules, one regarding the individual and the other society as a whole: to simplify the decision-making process and to regulate the interaction of sentiments. Rules act in this second function by altering one or some of the circumstances in the context in which these passions emerge as actions. The easiest way to see how they work is to follow an example, Smith's contested defense of usury laws⁴¹:

In countries where interest is permitted, the law, in order to prevent the extortion of usury, generally fixes the highest rate which can be taken without incurring a penalty. This rate ought always to be somewhat above the lowest market price, or the price which is commonly paid for the use of money by those who can give the most undoubted security. (WN II.iv.14, p. 356)

First, the law must be well settled regarding the current conditions: If the highest allowed rate were settled below the lowest market price, it would mean the complete restriction of the market. If it were settled precisely at the lowest market rate, it would ruin the common borrower, who cannot present "the very best security" to the lender. Therefore, this law must set the rate a little above the lowest market rate:

In a country, such as Great Britain, where money is lent to government at three per cent. and to private people upon good security at four, and four and a half, the present legal rate, five per cent., is, perhaps, as proper as any. (ibidem, p.357)

If the highest allowed rate is settled much above the lowest market rate, it becomes useless, as if it did not exist (WN II.iv.15, p.357). Smith thinks that, at least from the time of Henry VIII on, Great Britain's statutory regulations are an example of well-set usury laws, saying they "seem to have been made with great propriety" (WN I.ix.5, p.106). Without a highest legal rate, or if this legal rate is much above the lowest market rate, the lender will raise his rate and change the kind of potential borrower:

Sober people, who will give for the use of money no more than a part of what they are likely to make by the use of it, would not venture into the competition. A great part of the capital of the country would thus be kept out of the hands which were most likely to make a profitable and advantageous use of it, and thrown into those which were most likely to waste and destroy it. Where the legal rate

⁴¹ Once again, the first to see the 'problem' was Bentham, in his *Defence of Usury* (1787). For more about his critique, from a strict economics point of view, see Hollander (1999). For a broader approach, see Leloup (2000).

of interest, on the contrary, is fixed but a very little above the lowest market rate, sober people are universally preferred, as borrowers, to prodigals and projectors. (WN II.iv.15, p.357)

The difference between sobriety and prodigality, or between a prudent and a prodigal person (the projector must be remembered here), is the sort of individual expending and, from a social point of view, the perspective of survival of the borrowed capital. Prodigal people usually are driven by an extravagant passion, such as ambition or vanity, in which imagination works without a proper grip on reality, as if running without breaks. Usury laws intervene precisely there, narrowing the scope of these individuals' extravagance by increasing the competition for the funds available. Extremely high rates attract only fantasy projects (with expected return rates much higher than the "ordinary profit"), incurring risks that perhaps should be avoided and more often than not ending in loss. A law that establishes a maximum amount of interest a lender can charge increases the number of potential borrowers, allowing "sober people" to consider borrowing a part of this stock. Smith believes such a law, by increasing the competition of the demand side, would increase the social quality of these borrowings (from a security point of view, "sober people" risk less and, consequently, lose less):

The person who lends money gets nearly as much interest from the former as he dares to take from the latter, and his money is much safer in the hands of the one set of people, than in those of the other. A great part of the capital of the country is thus thrown into the hands in which it is most likely to be employed with advantage. (WN II.iv.15, p.357)

Contrary to contemporary economic wisdom, Smith believes a high interest rate does not necessarily reflect high competition among borrowers. On the contrary, high interest rates reduce such competition. Like many after him, Bentham did not accept this reasoning:

High and extraordinary rates of interest, how little soever adapted to the situation of the prodigal, are certainly, as you very justly observe, particularly adapted to the situation of the projector: not however to that of the imprudent projector only, nor even to his case more than another's, but to that of the prudent and well grounded projector, if the existence of such a being were to be supposed. (Defence of Usury, Letter 13)

Bentham's presuppositions are much closer to contemporary economics: Interest rates respond to risk; the higher the risk, higher the rate. Thus, projectors may be defined as willing to face high risks in hopes of high returns, and therefore willing to borrow money at a higher rate. With Bentham, entrepreneurship finally leaves the moral field: A

projector may be prudent or imprudent; like anyone else, her “trade” simply consists of taking higher risks (or requires her to face them more often) than other investors. Smith’s economic theory simply does not work this way; what is truly at stake is the interaction between rules and passions. This may be seen in Smith’s understanding of the sort of communication that sustains market relations. Commerce is essentially communication⁴² (WN I.ii.2, pp.25-6), and to obtain money, the potential borrower must persuade the lender:

To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them. If the same arguments which convince you convince me likewise, I necessarily approve of your conviction; and if they do not, I necessarily disapprove of it: neither can I possibly conceive that I should do the one without the other. To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinions of others is acknowledged, by every body, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own. (TMS I.i.3.2, p.17)

Going straight to the point: to lend money to such a projector is to approve of his extravagant passion. The projector’s ambition is urged on by his excessive self-evaluation, by an “over-weening conceit” added to an “absurd presumption in [his] own good fortune” (WN I.x.b.26, p.124). He ends up overvaluing the potential earnings and undervaluing the risks (WN I.x.b.27-8, pp.125-6), and attaching a “presumptuous hope of success” to his project (WN I.x.b.33, p.128), precisely the one that would bring closer to him that “distant idea of (...) felicity” he attaches to wealth and power (TMS IV.1.8, p.181). To Smith, the interest rate differential is much more a sign of the borrower’s extravagant passion differential than of the project’s potential risk differential. There is no better proof that someone is not properly thinking than his taking out a loan at an exorbitant interest rate, and this goes for any project, entrepreneurial or personal (for instance, buying a house or a car one cannot afford). Smith’s projector is much more a character of morals than of economics, someone who takes higher risks than ordinary

⁴² “Whether this propensity [to truck, barter, and exchange] be one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given; or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech (...). He [man] will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of” (WN I.ii.2, pp.25-6). Bentham agrees: “In a word, the proposition I have been accustomed to lay down to myself on this subject is the following one, viz. that no man of ripe years and of sound mind, acting freely, and with his eyes open, ought to be hindered, with a view to his advantage, from making such bargain, in the way of obtaining money, as he thinks fit: nor, (what is a necessary consequence) any body hindered from supplying him, upon any terms he thinks proper to accede to” (Defence of Usury, Letter 1).

because he is overconfident in his abilities and fortune. To lend money to someone like this is to approve of (and socially validate) this self-overestimation. An economy with an elevated interest rates structure is indulgent with such extravagant passions. Smith's antiusury laws' true target is precisely this excessive self-evaluation: Lower rates attract more borrowers, increasing competition and complicating the process of convincing the lender. Thus, from a passions point of view, the projector will have to become a better self-evaluator (his judgments about himself will have to be closer to his real possibilities) if he wants the loan. To regulate an extraordinary course of nature (the excesses caused by the unbounded work of the projector's idle imagination), the most liberal choice in the sovereign's toolbox is to set a legal maximum for interest rates. This requires a stricter and more serious sentimental engagement from those seeking loans, which reduces the losses of social capital. A well-set usury law is an artificial device that allows society to better follow its natural course.

8. Overturning the natural course of society: Bounties

Well-designed rules, properly dimensioned to their particular context, immediately suggest their opposite, badly designed or poorly dimensioned rules, which, instead of helping nature's course, go against it. The example here will be Smith's criticism of "bounties upon exportation" (WN V.v.1, p.505). The most important of these was "the parliamentary bounty upon the exportation of corn,"⁴³ granted in 1688.⁴⁴ A bounty upon exportation is a sort of money premium given for a determined amount of a specific good when exported. The corn bounty was "an expedient to raise (...) artificially" its price (WN I.xi.g.10, p.215), whose "avowed end" was "to encourage tillage," even "in the most plentiful years" (WN I.xi.g.12, p.216). Modern farming techniques considerably increased agriculture's productivity (causing the real price of corn to fall),⁴⁵ but they were expensive procedures demanding large amounts of capital and, more importantly, a high

⁴³ In this context, "corn" means the most important grain produced by any country (e.g., wheat in England, oats in Scotland and Ireland, etc.).

⁴⁴ The petition and granting of this bounty is an outstanding example of how fortuitous circumstances shape historical development: (1) the low price of wheat (whose lowest pick was in 1687); (2) the publication of Mr. Gregory King's estimations about the contract price between corn merchants and corn producers; (3) the composition of Parliament, appealing to the country's gentlemanly side and (4) a still weak king (William III); and (5) trying to establish an annual land-tax (WN I.xi.g.8-10, pp.214-5).

⁴⁵ For more about the two different kinds of tillage in mid-eighteenth-century France (with oxen, by the *métiers*, and with horses, by the *fermiers*) and their respective social background (pre-modern vs. thoroughly capitalist), see Quesnay's article "Fermiers" (1756) in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Enciclopedie*.

market price (or one at least equal to the real price), allowing the tenant to pay for all the costs of production.⁴⁶ Due to its importance (to land owners,⁴⁷ to laborers,⁴⁸ and, because of its role in wage determination, to capitalists⁴⁹), corn is at the core of Smith's economics,⁵⁰ specifically, its relation with the price of silver—that is, its monetary, market, or nominal price and its variations. In his “Digression concerning the variations in the value of silver during the course of the four last centuries”⁵¹ in the eleventh chapter of Book I, the average price of corn is the measuring tool of these variations (see the charts at the end of the chapter, WN I.xi.p, pp.267-75).⁵²

This empirical data showed that the average price of corn had been decreasing since 1688, which many claimed to be the effect of the corn bounty (WN.IV.v.a.5, pp.506-7). The chain of reasoning is basically the following: The bounty would allow national corn to be sold cheaper elsewhere, increasing its external demand and raising the price

⁴⁶ “In the price of corn, for example, one part pays the rent of the landlord, another pays the wages or maintenance of the labourers and laboring cattle employed in producing it, and the third pays the profit of the farmer. These three parts seem either immediately or ultimately to make up the whole price of corn. A fourth part, it may perhaps be thought, is necessary for replacing the stock of the farmer, or for compensating the wear and tear of his labouring cattle, and other instruments of husbandry. But it must be considered that the price of any instrument of husbandry, such as a labouring horse, is itself made up of the same three parts; the rent of the land upon which he is reared, the labour of tending and rearing him, and the profits of the farmer who advances both the rent of this land, and the wages of this labour. Though the price of the corn, therefore, may pay the price as well as the maintenance of the horse, the whole price still resolves itself either immediately or ultimately into the same three parts of rent, labour, and profit” (WN I.vi.11, p.68). Smith's real price is inspired by the physiocrat's “bon prix”—the minimum price that allows for the reproduction of the same productive process (the cost of production, including wages and rent, plus the ‘ordinary’ profits of the sector).

⁴⁷ Among other things, because rent paid in species was still relevant. Although, from a theoretical point of view, this distinction is immaterial to Smith (WN I.xi.a.1, p.160).

⁴⁸ “Grain, the food of the common people” (WN I.viii.33, p.93).

⁴⁹ “The money price of labour is necessarily regulated by two circumstances; the demand for labour, and the price of the necessaries and conveniencies of life” (WN I.viii.52, p.103). Corn was the most important of these necessaries of life. The demand for labor and the price of provisions usually go in different directions, resulting in the wages being “so much more steady and permanent than the price of provisions” (WN I.viii.56, p.104).

⁵⁰ “It [money price of corn] regulates the money price of all the other parts of the rude produce of land, which, in every period of improvement, must bear a certain proportion to that of corn, though this proportion is different in different periods. It regulates, for example, the money price of grass and hay, of butcher's meat, of horses, and the maintenance of horses, of land carriage consequently, or of the greater part of the inland commerce of the country. By regulating the money price of all the other parts of the rude produce of land, it regulates that of the materials of almost all manufactures. By regulating the money price of labour, it regulates that of manufacturing art and industry. And by regulating both, it regulates that of the compleat manufacture. The money price of labour, and of every thing that is the produce either of land or labour, must necessarily either rise or fall in proportion to the money price of corn” (WN IV.v.a.13-4, pp.509-10).

⁵¹ Corn was a matter of public debate in the mid-eighteenth century, at least in France (see chapter 6 in Larrère, 1992).

⁵² This is due to (or perhaps the reason for) one of Smith's most questionable (and questioned) hypotheses: “Equal quantities of labour will at distant times be purchased more nearly with equal quantities of corn, the subsistence of the labourer, than with equal quantities of gold and silver, or perhaps of any other commodity. Equal quantities of corn, therefore, will, at distant times, be more nearly of the same real value, or enable the possessor to purchase or command more nearly the same quantity of the labour of other people” (WN I.v.15, p.53; cf., I.xi.g.16, p.216).

received by the producer, encouraging new investments. In the long term this would create such an increase in productivity that the real prices would fall, and in the end this would be good for everybody (WN IV V.a.7, pp.507-8). Smith does not agree. First of all,

It would be more proper, perhaps, to consider this variation in the average money price of corn as the effect rather of some gradual rise in the real value of silver in the European market, than of any fall in the real average value of corn. (WN I.xi.g.216)

If it is true that the discovery of South American mines lowered the price of money in Europe, this must have ended somewhere around the 1630s (WN I.xi.g.1, p.211). After that, Britain faced civil war (WN I.xi.g.3, p.212), and the corn bounty (WN I.xi.g.4, p.212) and the great debasement of silver (WN I.xi.g.5, p.213) forced a decrease in silver's value and, consequently, an increase corn's nominal price. From the end of the seventeenth century on, the price of silver rose due to an increasing demand caused by two factors: the increase of the use of silver as money worldwide (WN I.xi.g.25-9, pp.220-5) and the increase of precious metal consumption for industrial uses (WN I.xi.g.30, pp.225-6). To Smith, these are the real reasons for the fall in corn's nominal price, not the bounty upon its exportation. The bounty's true effects are of an entirely different nature:

whatever extension of the foreign market can be occasioned by the bounty, must, in every particular year, be altogether at the expence of the home market (...). The corn bounty (...) imposes two different taxes upon the people; first, the tax which they are obliged to contribute, in order to pay the bounty; and secondly, the tax which arises from the advanced price of the commodity in the home-market, and which, as the whole body of the people are purchasers of corn, must, in this particular commodity, be paid by the whole body of the people. In this particular commodity, therefore, this second tax, is by much the heaviest of the two. (...) So very heavy a tax upon the first necessary of life, must either reduce the subsistence of the labouring poor, or it must occasion some augmentation in their pecuniary wages, proportionable that in the pecuniary price of their subsistence. So far as it operates in the one way, it must reduce the ability-of the labouring poor to educate and bring up their children, and must, so far, tend to restrain the population of the country. So far as it operates in the other, it must reduce the ability of the employers of the poor, to employ so great a number as they otherwise might do, and must, so far, tend to restrain the industry of the country. (WN IV.v.a.8, p.508)

The first granting of such corn bounties can be explained by fortuitous circumstances (WN I.xi.g.8-10, pp.214-5); its endurance for so long requires other explanations. The most important is the

absurd (...) doctrine of the balance of trade, upon which, not only these restraints, but almost all the other regulations of commerce are founded. When two places trade with one another, this doctrine supposes that, if the balance be even, neither of them either loses or gains; but if it leans in any degree to one side, that one of them loses, and the other gains in proportion to its declension from the exact equilibrium. Both suppositions are false. A trade which is forced by means of bounties and monopolies, may be, and commonly is disadvantageous to the country in whose favour it is meant to be established. (WN IV.iii.c.2, p.488)

Such absurd doctrine was “originally both invented and propagated” by “the spirit of monopoly” (WN IV.iii.c.10, p.493), consisting, basically, of meanness made theory. Those in support of it consider their private interest⁵³ the sole valid end (or at least as much more valid than everyone else’s) and try to impose it upon the whole of society.⁵⁴ In order to achieve their goal, they resort to insidious reasoning and “sophistry” (ibidem, pp.493-4; IV.i.9, p.433), arousing “popular prejudices” (WN IV.v.b.23, p.533; IV.i.5, p.431), inflaming “national prejudice and animosity” between countries (WN IV.iii.a.1, p.474), and even corrupting the morals of legislators (WN IV.viii.20, p.649). At its core, “mercantile jealousy” (WN IV.iii.c.13, p.496, see 2.6e) originated in the “corporation spirit” of secrecy (WN I.x.c.22, p.142), choosing “some goods” (especially wool and linen in Great Britain) as “particular objects” and subjecting them to monopoly measures (WN IV.iv.7, p.500). The result is that

The sneaking arts of underling tradesmen are thus erected into political maxims for the conduct of a great empire. (...) By such maxims (...), however, nations have been taught that their interest consisted in beggaring all their neighbours. Each nation has been made to look with an invidious eye upon the prosperity of all the nations with which it trades, and to consider their gain as its own loss. (WN IV.iii.c.8, p.493)

⁵³ “Merchants and manufacturers are the people who derive the greatest advantage from this monopoly of the home market” (WN IV.ii.16, p.459).

⁵⁴ “Our woollen manufacturers have been more successful than any other class of workmen, in persuading the legislature that the prosperity of the nation depended upon the success and extension of their particular business. They have not only obtained a monopoly against the consumers by an absolute prohibition of importing woollen cloths from any foreign country; but they have likewise obtained another monopoly against the sheep farmers and growers of wool, by a similar prohibition of the exportation of live sheep and wool. The severity of many of the laws which have been enacted for the security of the revenue is very justly complained of, as imposing heavy penalties upon actions which antecedent to the statutes that declared them to be crimes, had always been understood to be innocent. But the cruellest of our revenue laws, I will venture to affirm, are mild and gentle, in comparison of some of those which the clamour of our merchants and manufacturers has extorted from the legislature, for the support of their own absurd and oppressive monopolies. Like the laws of Draco, these laws [forbidding sheep, lamb, ram, and wool exportation] may be said to be all written in blood” (WN IV.viii.14, pp.647-8).

Commerce's nature as a game of mutual advantage (WN I.ii.2, pp.26-7; IV.iii.c.2, p.489) is reduced to a zero-sum game, "becoming the most fertile source of discord and animosity" (ibidem). Although able to "confound the common sense of mankind," the "interested sophistry of merchants and manufacturers" can hardly be considered sophisticated in its denial of manifested truths about the real interest of the "great body of people." Indeed, some of the mercantile assumptions and arguments are so absurd that engaging too much time to disprove them appears ridiculous (WN IV.iii.c.10, p.494; IV.i.17, p.438).

The case of corn bounties is peculiarly interesting because corn is not one of those objects of mercantile jealousy (WN IV.iv.7, p.500). The landlords introduced these bounties in contradiction with their true interests (WN I.xi.p.8, p.265, see 6.4). Why did they take such incongruous measures?

Our country gentlemen, when they imposed the high duties upon the importation of foreign corn, which in times of moderate plenty amount to a prohibition, and when they established the bounty, seem to have imitated the conduct of our manufacturers. (...) They did not perhaps attend to the great and essential difference which nature has established between corn and almost every other sort of goods. (WN IV.v.a.23, p.515)

Instead of woolen and linen manufactures, whose monopolistic regulations actually yield a rise in their real value, restraining measures on the corn market affect solely its nominal price:

The nature of things has stamped upon corn a real value which cannot be altered by merely altering its money price (...) Woollen or linen cloth are not the regulating commodities by which the real value of all other commodities must be finally measured and determined. Corn is. The real value of every other commodity is finally measured and determined by the proportion which its average money price bears to the average money price of corn. (ibidem, pp.515-6)

Country gentlemen imitated merchants and manufacturers without a "compleat comprehension of their own interest"⁵⁵ (WN IV.v.a.24, p.516). Perhaps the simplest way

⁵⁵ "When the publick deliberates concerning any regulation of commerce or police, the proprietors of land never can mislead it, with a view to promote the interest of their own particular order; at least, if they have any tolerable knowledge of that interest. They are, indeed, too often defective in this tolerable knowledge. They are the only one of the three orders whose revenue costs them neither labour nor care, but comes to them, as it were, of its own accord, and independent of any plan or project of their own. That indolence, which is the natural effect of the ease and security of their situation, renders them too often, not only ignorant, but incapable of that application of mind which is necessary in order to foresee and understand the consequences of any publick regulation" (WN I.xi.p.8, p.265). Merchants and manufacturers, on the

to understand the bad global effects of a bounty is to follow the consequences of the “tonnage bounties given to the withe-herring and whale-fisheries” (WN IV.v.a.26, p.518). Like the corn bounty, these bounties “appear to have been borrowed” from Holland. The general problem of bounties is the sort of incentive structure they establish:

The usual effect of such bounties is to encourage rash undertakers to adventure in a business, which they do not understand, and what they lose by their own negligence and ignorance, more than compensates all that they can gain by the utmost liberality of government. (WN IV.v.a.35, p.522)

They distort the price mechanism, overturning “the natural balance of employments” (WN IV.v.a.39, p.523). The tonnage bounty “is proportioned to the burden of the ship, not to her diligence or success in the fishery, and it has, I am afraid, been too common for vessels to fit out for the sole purpose of catching, not the fish, but the bounty” (WN IV.v.a.32, p.520). This distortion can also be explained in terms of real price: “By means of them [i.e., bounties] a part of the capital of the country is employed in bringing goods to market, of which the price does not repay the cost, together with the ordinary profits of stock” (WN IV.v.a.26, p.518). The long-term result is the bankruptcy of these undertakings (WN IV.v.a.35, p.522), but not before they have completely disintegrated old local businesses: the bounty “has ruined the boat-fishery” and with it the Scottish home market supply (WN IV.v.a.34, p.521).

Unlike a well-set usury law, rules such as these distort “the natural balance of industry, the natural division and distribution of labour” (WN IV.iv.14, p.504). Much more important is to have a legislation ensuring that the product of individual labor can be safely enjoyed by the one who produced it:

That system of laws, therefore, which is connected with the establishment of the bounty, seems to deserve no part of the praise which has been bestowed upon it. The improvement and prosperity of Great Britain, which has been so often ascribed to those laws, may very easily be accounted for by other causes. That security which the laws in Great Britain give to every man that he shall enjoy the fruits of his own labour, is alone sufficient to make any country flourish, notwithstanding these and twenty other absurd regulations of commerce; and this security was perfected by the revolution, much about the same time that the bounty was established. (WN IV.v.b.43, p.540; cf. II.iii.36, pp.345-6)

other hand, spend their lives “engaged in plans and projects, they have frequently more acuteness of understanding than the greater part of country gentlemen” (WN I.xi.p.10, p.266).

Any relation between Britain's prosperity and the bounties rests on the fact that their creation and implementation (1688) occurred around the same time as the Glorious Revolution (1689–90). However, according to Smith, Great Britain has improved despite them.⁵⁶

9. The nature of society

The “natural balance of employments” or “industry” is nothing more than the “natural division and distribution of labour” established by the mutual interaction of individual interests Smith describes as the “propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another” (WN I.ii.1, p.25):

In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison with his companions; and he finds at last that he can in this manner get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of armourer. Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbours, who reward him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, till at last he finds it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a brazier, a fourth a tanner or dresser of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. (WN I.ii.3, pp.27-8)

The “certainty of being able to exchange” the fruits of his own labor for the fruits of another man's labor “encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business” (ibidem, p.28). There are so many different kinds of labor involved in any modern good's production that “the number of people of whose industry” took a part in it “exceeds all computation” (WN I.i.11, p.22). And yet it is possible to understand it through the “trifling” manufactures, such as the pin factory, in which “those employed in every different branch of the work can often be collected into the same workhouse, and placed at once under the view of the spectator” (WN I.i.2, p.14).

⁵⁶ Smith uses the metaphor of a dam, holding water up to a point but with the river going on as usual, even if in a lower level (WN IV.v.a.19-20, pp.511-4).

In *Wealth's* famous opening example, Smith shows how the “eighteen distinct operations” involved in pin making “are all performed by distinct hands, though in others, the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them” (WN I.i.3, p.15). An interesting aspect to highlight is that there is no difference between the inside and outside of this business: “in the way in which this business is now carried on, not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades” (ibidem, pp.14-5). Trade and business are perfect synonyms.⁵⁷ The entirety of this business is a peculiar trade, subdivided into several other trades; Attaching the head to the stem “is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into paper” (ibidem, p.15). Concerning the productive sphere, Smith appears to conceive it from the perspective of the individual trades. The model for understanding the social division of labor is the firm’s internal division of labor.⁵⁸ The particular needs of each of these peculiar trades or businesses determine the “natural division and distribution of labor”:

The trade of the corn merchant is composed of four different branches, which, though they may sometimes be all carried on by the same person, are in their own nature four separate and distinct trades. (WN IV.v.b.2, p.524)

Thus, there are two things that may determine the degree of development: simplicity and specialization:

The separation of different trades and employments from one another, seems to have taken place, in consequence of this advantage. This separation too is generally carried furthest in those countries which enjoy the highest degree of industry and improvement; what is the work of one man, in a rude state of society, being generally that of several in an improved one. (WN I.i.4, p.15)

If agriculture cannot be divided in the same way as industry, this is due to its natural characteristics, inherent to this kind of business (ibidem, p.16). However, when comparing equal (or similar) trades, the specialization comes to the fore: There are pin factories where a different individual performs each of the eighteen operations, and there are others where some individuals perform more than one operation. The first factory is more developed than the second. This is one of the places where economic legislation can

⁵⁷ Smith’s criticism of the doctrine of the “balance of trade” starts here, with the redefinition of the word *trade*.

⁵⁸ He might have been the first one to do it; see Sylvie and Daniel Diatkine (1991).

intervene: In 1551, due to “popular odium” (WN IV.v.b,7, p.527), King Edward VI forbade the trade of the inland corn merchant (WN IV.v.b.10, p.528):

Our ancestors seem to have imagined that the people would buy their corn cheaper of the farmer than of the corn merchant, who, they were afraid, would require, over and above the price which he paid to the farmer, an exorbitant profit to himself. They endeavoured, therefore, to annihilate his trade altogether. (WN IV.v.b.11, p.528)

The king forbade the character of the merchant but not the act (and cost) of transporting the corn from the farm to the final consumer. The difference was that now the farmer was forced to combine his own trade with that of the “corn merchant or corn retailer” (WN IV.v.b.12, p.529). The result was the reverse of what was expected: Forced to divide his capital into two trades and perform a business with which he had no experience, he could perform neither of these trades properly and delivered a more expensive product (see WN IV.v.a.24, p.516).

The dealer who can employ his whole stock in one single branch of business, has an advantage of the same kind with the workman who can employ his whole labour in one single operation. As the latter acquires a dexterity which enables him, with the same two hands, to perform a much greater quantity of work; so the former acquires so easy and ready a method of transacting his business, of buying and disposing of his goods, that with the same capital he can transact a much greater quantity of business. As the one can commonly afford his work a good deal cheaper, so the other can commonly afford his goods somewhat cheaper than if his stock and attention were both employed about a greater variety of objects. (WN IV.v.b.15, p.530)

This better employment of one’s capital, abilities, attention, time, etc.—the most important effect of the division of labor—increases labor’s productivity and “occasions, in a well-governed society, that universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people”⁵⁹ (WN I.i.1, p.13; I.i.5, p.17 and I.i.10, p.22). The “real interest” of

⁵⁹ This explains why it is in the individual’s interest to move from the “early and rude stage of society, which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land” (WN I.vi.1, p.65), in which “the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer” (WN I.vi.4, p.65), to a state where “the whole produce does not Always belong to the labourer,” in which he has to “share it with the owner of the stock which employs him” (WN I.vi.7, p.67) and “must give up to the landlord a portion of what his labour either collects or produces” (WN I.vi.8, p.67). The increased productive powers of labor increase the amount of wealth, even for the poor: “Compared, indeed, with the more extravagant luxury of the great, his accommodation must no doubt appear extremely simple and easy; and yet it may be true, perhaps, that the accommodation of an European prince does not always so much exceed that of an industrious and frugal peasant, as the accommodation of the latter exceeds that of many an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages” (WN I.i.10, pp.23-4). Obviously, this is not why nor how this actually occurs; this individual’s mutual advantage is, like any utility consideration, an after-thought (TMS I.i.4.4, p.20).

most of the people is “manifest”: “In every country it always is and must be the interest of the great body of the people to buy whatever they want of those who sell it cheapest” (WN IV.iii.c.12, p.495 and IV.iii.c.10, pp.493-4). Cheapness or expensiveness is always measured by the real price, never by the nominal price.⁶⁰

The continuity between the inside and the outside of a trade sheds light on two of Smith’s most controversial economic hypotheses: The first, implied in the way he uses the word *work*, is the identification of labor and its produce (labor = produce).⁶¹ The second, explicitly stated, is the identification of produce and its price (produce = price).⁶² These two hypotheses can be read as the major and minor theses in a syllogism whose result is Smith’s theory of value as commanded labor:

The value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. (WN I.v.1, p.47)

This double identification (labor = produce = price) also helps to clarify the interesting link Smith establishes between fortune and ability, between property and activity:

The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands; and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper without injury to his neighbour, is a plain violation of this most sacred property. It is a manifest encroachment upon the just liberty both of the workman, and of those who might be disposed to employ him. As it hinders the one from working at what he thinks proper, so it hinders the others from employing whom they think proper. To judge whether he is fit to be

⁶⁰ The real price is closely related to the natural price: “When the price of any commodity is neither more nor less than what is sufficient to pay the rent of the land, the wages of the labour, and the profits of the stock employed in raising, preparing, and bringing it to market, according to their natural rates, the commodity is then sold for what may be called its natural price” (WN I.vii.4, p.72). The natural price is essential in Smith’s philosophy for at least two reasons: First, it determines the proper level of economic reproduction (it pays wages, profit, and rent, allowing the society as a whole to reproduce itself, to conserve its shape), its ‘natural’ level, and second, acts as gravitational center to market price oscillations.

⁶¹ “Every workman has a great quantity of his own work to dispose of beyond what he himself has occasion for; and every other workman being exactly in the same situation, he is enabled to exchange a great quantity of his own goods for a great quantity, or, what comes to the same thing, for the price of a great quantity of theirs” (WN I.i.10, p.22).

⁶² See the passage in the last note. See also: “he is enabled to Exchange a great quantity of his own goods for a great quantity, or, what comes to the same thing, for the price of a great quantity of theirs” (WN I.i.10, p.22). Again, on the price of labor—that is, wages: “THE produce of labour constitutes the natural recompence or wages of labour” (WN I.viii.1, p.82). And on rent: “Whatever part of the produce, or, what is the same thing, whatever part of its price, is over and above this share, he naturally endeavours to reserve to himself as the rent of his land” (WN I.xi.1, p.160; I.vi.8, p.67).

employed, may surely be trusted to the discretion of the employers whose interest it so much concerns. The affected anxiety of the law-giver lest they should employ an improper person, is evidently as impertinent as it is oppressive. (WN I.x.c.12, p.138)

Many have speculated about this passage, especially because of the first sentence. Smith appears to be dabbling in a sort of Lockean metaphysics in complete opposition to his own theory of property, based on the reasonable expectation of usufruct being shared by spectators.⁶³ Whichever solution one might propose for this apparent inconsistency,⁶⁴ the truly remarkable aspect of this paragraph is in the second sentence, the enlargement of the individual's patrimony to cover his personal abilities, again supposing some sort of identity between one's work and its produce. This is yet another field covered by the notion of fortune: A gifted musician or sportsman is fortunate, his display commanding admiration. The same reasoning goes for those who are apparently unskilled: A poor man's "patrimony" consists of his "acquired and useful abilities," even if the "real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person" is not high⁶⁵ (WN II.i.17, p.282). The exertion of these abilities (as of any sort of one's capital) is also a right, as property rights include the right to usufruct.

⁶³ "Though men as a whole own the earth and all inferior creatures, every individual man has a property in his own person; this is something that nobody else has any right to. The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are strictly his. So when he takes something from the state that nature has provided and left it in, he mixes his labour with it, thus joining to it something that is his own; and in that way he makes it his property" (Second Treatise, chap.5, §27). This is different from Smith's productive labor, which "fixes and realizes itself in some particular subject or vendible commodity, which lasts for some time at least after that labour is past" (WN II.iii.1, p.330). I believe "particular subject" and "vendible commodity" are synonyms for tangible product. Productive labor produces tangible products, supporting more or less the passage of time (in a way, Smith's economics would resort to his sensory metaphysics presented in his essay "Of the external senses," where the sense of touch provides a peculiar kind of perception). This would explain the relationship between unproductive labor and services: "The labour of the menial servant, on the contrary, does not fix or realize itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity. His services generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them" (ibidem). This is obviously incorrect: A service is a good whose consumption is inseparable from its production (it will be viewed as productive or unproductive depending on one's theory of labor-value). As said above, productive labor transforms a personal right (contract) into a real right because its produce is a "particular subject or vendible commodity" whose possession is evident, forcing spectators to acknowledge it. Property is determined by this spectators' mechanism, and productive labor supplies a proper object for it. It does not create property; it creates an object that can be (more) easily possessed.

⁶⁴ I personally like Haakonssen's elegant solution: "the two clauses beginning 'as' and 'so', respectively, seem to be parallels rather than to constitute an argument in which the latter is a conclusion from the former" (1981, p.106). See also Fleischaker (2002, pp.192-3).

⁶⁵ The whole passage: "the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society. The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expence, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, so do they likewise of that of the society to which he belongs. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labour, and which, though it costs a certain expence, repays that expence with a profit" (WN II.i.17, p.282).

Therefore, corn and tonnage bounties are examples of how “impertinent and oppressive” bad rules can become. The individual subjected to such a rule should feel resentment (any impartial spectator will sympathize with it), since it is an injury: “Both laws were evident violations of natural liberty, and therefore unjust; and they were both too as impolitick as they were unjust” (WN IV.v.b.16, p.530). The legislators and sovereign who create and enforce such laws are not only unjust but also not particularly clever:

It is the interest of every society, that things of this kind should never either be forced or obstructed. The man who employs either his labour or his stock in a greater variety of ways than his situation renders necessary, can never hurt his neighbour by underselling him. He may hurt himself, and he generally does so. (ibidem)

No one is more interested in a business than the business owner himself. No one knows better his own fortune and possibilities: “the law ought always to trust people with the care of their own interest, as in their local situations they must generally be able to judge better of it than the legislator can do”⁶⁶ (ibidem, p.531). No one is more familiar with the particularities of his “little department, in which he had himself some little management and direction” (TMS VII.ii.1.39, p.290):

What is the species of domestick industry which his capital can employ, and of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, every individual, it is evident, can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. (WN IV.ii.10, p.456)

Since the goal of justice is to guarantee the security of the individual (including his fortune), those whose role it is to watch over it should be particularly careful about their own actions. The place legislators, state men, civil magistrates, and the sovereign occupy imposes on them a series of particular duties:

According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of

⁶⁶ When people cannot trust the law to let them make their own decisions, they hide their capital and the whole of society loses: “In those unfortunate countries, indeed, where men are continually afraid of the violence of their superiors, they frequently bury and conceal a great part of their stock, in order to have it always at hand to carry with them to some place of safety, in case of their being threatened with any of those disasters to which they consider themselves as at all times exposed” (WN II.i.31, p.285).

justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain publick works and certain publick institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society. (WN IV.ix.51, p.687)

To enforce these (and some other desirable) goals, the sovereign should defer not only to her subjects' interest but also to their passions and judgment, to their sensibility and reason.⁶⁷ To use one of Smith's metaphors (that was later beautifully resumed by George Eliot; see epigraph), she should act as the player of an extremely peculiar chess game:

He [the man of system] seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it. If those two principles coincide and act in the same direction, the game of human society will go on easily and harmoniously, and is very likely to be happy and successful. If they are opposite or different, the game will go on miserably, and the society must be at all times in the highest degree of disorder. (TMS VI.ii.2.17, p.234)

Establishing and enforcing unnatural laws is more than counterproductive; it is disruptive of social order. As the examples of the corn and tonnage bounties show, unnatural laws (rules that goes against the nature of society) are unjust, endangering the order of society (which does not mean that every rule is improper⁶⁸. Political economic

⁶⁷ "The civil magistrate is entrusted with the power not only of preserving the public peace by restraining injustice, but of promoting the prosperity of the commonwealth, by establishing good discipline, and by discouraging every sort of vice and impropriety; he may prescribe rules, therefore, which not only prohibit mutual injuries among fellow-citizens, but command mutual good offices to a certain degree. When the sovereign commands what is merely indifferent, and what, antecedent to his orders, might have been omitted without any blame, it becomes not only blamable but punishable to disobey him. When he commands, therefore, what, antecedent to any such order, could not have been omitted without the greatest blame, it surely becomes much more punishable to be wanting in obedience. Of all the duties of a law-giver, however, this, perhaps, is that which it requires the greatest delicacy and reserve to execute with propriety and judgment. To neglect it altogether exposes the commonwealth to many gross disorders and shocking enormities, and to push it too far is destructive of all liberty, security, and justice" (TMS II.ii.1.8, p.81). Among the sovereign's duties, therefore, is the demand not only to enforce justice but also to command some degree of mutual beneficence among the citizens. Indeed, one of the greatest difficulties of being a sovereign is to determine how (and how much) to enforce beneficence among her subjects.

⁶⁸ "Aider la nature – et c'est là toute l'ambiguïté du libéralisme naissant –, c'est ne rien faire, laisser faire la nature, ne pas intervenir, mais ce peut être aussi à l'occasion se montrer artificieux, c'est-à-dire savoir lorsqu'il le faut opposer la nature à elle-même au nom de l'intérêt supérieur de la survie" (Deleule, 1979, p.283).

systems, such as the mercantile and the agricultural, tend to forget that individuals act on particular motives, determined by the interaction between one's sensitive and intellectual constitution and one's local situation, by the mutual interaction between one's sentiments and one's fortune (wealth, rank, education, chance). Smith developed a moral theory based on an imaginary mechanism capable of fully dealing with this interaction—namely, sympathy. However, sympathy always guides an individual in a particular direction. It is definitely not a good principle for state politics:

It is not commonly from a fellow-feeling with carriers and waggoners that a public-spirited man encourages the mending of high roads. When the legislature establishes premiums and other encouragements to advance the linen or woollen manufactures [i.e., mercantile polices], its conduct seldom proceeds from pure sympathy with the wearer of cheap or fine cloth, and much less from that with the manufacturer or merchant. (TMS IV.1.1, p.185)

Public utility is an overly abstract principle, whose imposition “ought to be exercised only, which can be pardoned only in cases of the most urgent necessity,” as it requires the “sacrifice the ordinary laws of justice to an idea” (WN IV.v.b.39, p.539). Utilitarianism is too rationalistic. If the “man of system” tends to forget that individuals act on particular motives, utilitarianism tends to forget that men act on impulsive motives, on more or less natural and spontaneous reactions, and not on calculations. Smith insists on respecting particularity, as if it possessed intrinsic value. And he must show how to root global conceptions in sensibility, how it is possible to feel the world in its totality. In short, he must show what the sentiment of the word feels like.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Above was seen that Smith considers that a rule good enough for ten or twenty people will also be good for ten or twenty millions (WN IV.iii.c.11, pp.494-5). This clearly shows how Smith prefers to infer from the rigorous analysis of individual cases: “As the price or exchangeable value of every particular commodity, taken separately, resolves itself into some one or other or all of those three parts; so that of all the commodities which compose the whole annual produce of the labour of every country, taken complexly, must resolve itself into the same three parts, and be parcelled out among different inhabitants of the country, either as the wages of their labour, the profits of their stock, or the rent of their land” (WN I.vi.17, p.69). The relationship between individual and social capital is also understood in this sense: “The capital of all the individuals of a nation, has its limits in the same manner as that of a single individual, and is capable of executing only certain purposes. The capital of all the individuals of a nation is increased in the same manner as that of a single individual, by their continually accumulating and adding to it whatever they save out of their revenue” (WN II.v.20, p.366). This is the other side of the coin of Smith's suspicion of every attempt of computing social life, of statistics: “I have no great faith in political arithmetick, and I mean not to warrant the exactness of either of these computations [about the corn trade, found in Charles Smith's Three Tracts on the Corn Trade and Corn Laws, published in 1766]” (WN IV.v.b.30, pp.534-4). In my opinion, this suspicion is based in the diagnostic that the division of labor has become so complex that human reason is unable to grasp it: “Observe the accommodation of the most common artificer or day labourer in a civilized and thriving country, and you will perceive that the number of people of whose industry a part, though but a small part, has been employed in procuring him this accommodation, exceeds all computation” (WN I.i.11, p.22). The common worker consumption basket requires the concurrence of so many different kinds of labor in an interaction that is beyond human computation ability (a central theme

in twentieth-century liberalism, see Alfred von Hayek's work, for instance). This is why Smith apprehends society's operations (including its political economy) from sentiments. Reason is simply unable to grasp society as a whole.

Chapter 6 – Beauty and utility

People in Vanity Fair fasten on to rich folks quite naturally. (...)

Their affections rush out to meet and welcome money.

Their kind sentiments awaken spontaneously towards the interesting possessors of it.

William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*

Human sympathy has its limits (...)

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

1. The beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility as a peculiar kind of aesthetic judgment

At a certain point in his discussion about the way we judge the propriety of someone else's sentiments', Smith draws a distinction concerning the objects involved in the situation to be judged: They may have a particular relation to the agent (a car or house as part of her estate, for instance) and to ourselves (as spectators) or not. He understands this second kind as taste judgments:

With regard to those objects which are considered without any peculiar relation either to ourselves or to the person whose sentiments we judge of; wherever his sentiments entirely correspond with our own, we ascribe to him the qualities of taste and good judgment. The beauty of a plain, the greatness of a mountain, the ornaments of a building, the expression of a picture, the composition of a discourse, the conduct of a third person, the proportions of different quantities and numbers, the various appearances which the great machine of the universe is perpetually exhibiting, with the secret wheels and springs which produce them; all the general subjects of science and taste, are what we and our companion regard as having no peculiar relation to either of us.¹ (TMS I.i.4.2, p.19)

¹ In addition to the beauty of utility, Smith's aesthetics involve the beauty of imitation (EPS pp.176-86) and the beauty proper to instrumental music (EPS pp.187-209). Although essentially different, the aesthetic element in all of them is the result of the mastery with which an obstacle is overcome: In imitative arts, the obstacle is the material worked upon ("That pleasure is founded altogether upon our wonder at seeing an object of one kind represent so well an object of a very different kind, and upon our admiration of the art which surmounts so happily that disparity which Nature had established between them"; EPS, p.185); in instrumental music it is the creation of a musical meaning ("That music seldom means to tell any particular story, or to imitate any particular event, or in general to suggest any particular object, distinct from that combination of sounds of which itself is composed. Its meaning, therefore, may be said to be complete in itself, and to require no interpreters to explain it"; EPS, p.205). And in the appearance of utility the obstacle is the goal, the end proposed by the object, and what is evaluated is the way this object achieves this goal. For more about Smith's aesthetics as the appreciation of the (good) overcoming of obstacles (developing an idea he probably took from Voltaire), see Didier Deleule's introduction to the French translation of

Aesthetic judgments are disinterested judgments, and everyone's indifference to the object judged ensures that there is no sympathy involved:

We both look at them from the same point of view, and we have no occasion for sympathy, or for that imaginary change of situations from which it arises, in order to produce, with regard to these, the most perfect harmony of sentiments and affections. (ibidem)

Any remaining difference is not due to partiality concerning the agent(s) or these objects but arises

Either from the different degrees of attention, which our different habits of life allow us to give easily to the several parts of those complex objects, or from the different degrees of natural acuteness in the faculty of the mind to which they are addressed. (ibidem)

Here, the approbation produced by the affective accord is infinitely less important than in sympathetic cases, where the objects are in a particular relation to the person principally concerned (TMS I.i.4.5, p.21). The approbation produced by this affective accord is also different from those in sympathetic cases: Even if the sentimental accord yields approval, it has very little importance on its own. Here, much more important than the sentimental accord are the judgments:

When the sentiments of our companion coincide with our own in things of this kind (...) he seems to deserve no praise or admiration on account of them. But when they not only coincide with our own, but lead and direct our own; when in forming them he appears to have attended to many things which we had overlooked, and to have adjusted them to all the various circumstances of their objects; we not only approve of them, but wonder and are surprised at their uncommon and unexpected acuteness and comprehensiveness, and he appears to deserve a very high degree of admiration and applause. (TMS I.i.4.3, pp.19-20)

Since the scrutinized object is indifferent to both spectators, judgments become the proper primary material from which to learn how judgments work. Here, what really matters is not the result itself but how the result is achieved:

It is the acute and delicate discernment of the man of taste, who distinguishes the minute, and scarce perceptible differences of beauty and deformity; it is the comprehensive accuracy of the experienced mathematician, who unravels, with ease, the most intricate and perplexed proportions; it is the great leader in science and taste, the man who directs and conducts our own sentiments, the extent and superior justness of whose talents astonish us with wonder and surprise, who excites our admiration,

Essais esthétiques (1997), which contains some of these texts. See also Jaffro (in Troffein, 2000) and Suzuki (2014, pp.303-43).

and seems to deserve our applause: and upon this foundation is grounded the greater part of the praise which is bestowed upon what are called the intellectual virtues. (ibidem, p.20)

These intellectual qualities, able to produce admiration and even command other people's sentiments, also become the object of new judgments. After all, why do we admire these qualities and aim to acquire them? One of the possible answers is because they are useful:

The utility of those qualities, it may be thought, is what first recommends them to us; and, no doubt, the consideration of this, when we come to attend to it, gives them a new value. Originally, however, we approve of another man's judgment, not as something useful, but as right, as accurate, as agreeable to truth and reality: and it is evident we attribute those qualities to it for no other reason but because we find that it agrees with our own. Taste, in the same manner, is originally approved of, not as useful, but as just, as delicate, and as precisely suited to its object. The idea of the utility of all qualities of this kind, is plainly an after-thought, and not what first recommends them to our approbation. (TMS I.i.4.4, p.20; cf. IV.2.7, p.189)

Because they suppose the indifference of those involved, aesthetic judgments are particularly clear concerning utility's secondary role. Spectators' interest is drawn not by the object's advantageousness or usefulness, and the consideration of its utility bestows upon it a "new value," in addition those originally given by spontaneous judgments (namely, the values of propriety and merit). Smith's general idea is that utility is a secondary factor in social life: The fact that something is useful does not necessarily imply that its utility is its most relevant aspect. Utilitarian considerations² are an "after-thought" and, as will be shown, typical of philosophers³ or of those who are willing to persuade or to be persuaded.

2. Utility and utilitarian considerations

The most systematic account of utility in Smith's work can be found in Part IV of *Theory* and consists of determining its propriety—that is, the proper delimitation of its

² The term *utilitarian* simply refers to the idea that the good effects of certain behavior and institutions either for the individual (individual utility) or the society as a whole (public utility) perform an important role in morals. An utilitarian system or theory means that its understanding of society and morality is grounded in utility. The term should not be read as referring to the philosophical school established by Jeremy Bentham.

³ "Philosophers have, of late years, considered chiefly the tendency of affections, and have given little attention to the relation which they stand in to the cause which excites them" (TMS I.i.3.8, p.18).

role in aesthetics and morals (respectively, Chapters 1 and 2 of this fourth part). Smith begins with what he considers correct in these utilitarian theories. In aesthetics:

The conveniency of a house gives pleasure to the spectator as well as its regularity, and he is as much hurt when he observes the contrary defect, as when he sees the correspondent windows of different forms, or the door not placed exactly in the middle of the building. That the fitness of any system or machine to produce the end for which it was intended, bestows a certain propriety and beauty upon the whole, and renders the very thought and contemplation of it agreeable, is so very obvious that nobody has overlooked it. (TMS IV.1.1, p.179)

In morals:

THE characters of men, as well as the contrivances of art, or the institutions of civil government, may be fitted either to promote or to disturb the happiness both of the individual and of the society. The prudent, the equitable, the active, resolute, and sober character promises prosperity and satisfaction, both to the person himself and to every one connected with him. The rash, the insolent, the slothful, effeminate, and voluptuous, on the contrary, forebodes ruin to the individual, and misfortune to all who have any thing to do with him. The first turn of mind has at least all the beauty which can belong to the most perfect machine that was ever invented for promoting the most agreeable purpose: and the second, all the deformity of the most awkward and clumsy contrivance. (TMS IV.2.1, p.187)

Utility has always been, and will continue to be, an important aspect to consider: Objects are useful to their possessor, moral character is useful to individuals, institutions are useful to society, and so on. There is no mistake here, nor in acknowledging it: Utility is central to both personal and social life. For Smith, the mistake is found in theories that are not satisfied with this, and end up hypostatizing utilitarian considerations:

But that this fitness, this happy contrivance of any production of art, should often be more valued, than the very end for which it was intended; and that the exact adjustment of the means for attaining any conveniency or pleasure, should frequently be more regarded, than that very conveniency or pleasure, in the attainment of which their whole merit would seem to consist, has not, so far as I know, been yet taken notice of by any body. (TMS IV.1.3, pp.179-80)

Smith's self-claimed originality is not in seeing the importance of utility but in being the first to notice that "in a thousand instances, both in the most frivolous and in the most important concerns of human life," utilitarian considerations are more important than utility itself (ibidem). Smith's example:

When a person comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room, he is angry with his servant, and rather than see them continue in that disorder, perhaps takes the trouble himself to set them all in their places with their backs to the wall. The whole propriety of this new situation arises from its superior conveniency in leaving the floor free and disengaged. (TMS IV.1.4, p.180)

A chair's utility does not change according to its position in an empty room (though it may change in relation to a table). Whether chairs are arranged with their backs to the wall or placed randomly around the empty space, they remain useful as spots for people to sit. Arranged against the wall, however, they allow people to circulate more freely, bestowing upon the room as a whole (room plus chairs) a "superior convenience," another kind of propriety whose cost is beyond all utility:

To attain this conveniency he voluntarily puts himself to more trouble than all he could have suffered from the want of it; since nothing was more easy, than to have set himself down upon one of them, which is probably what he does when his labour is over. What he wanted therefore, it seems, was not so much this conveniency, as that arrangement of things which promotes it. Yet it is this conveniency which ultimately recommends that arrangement, and bestows upon it the whole of its propriety and beauty.⁴ (ibidem)

The disparity between the cost of acquiring the object (its price) and its utility is a sign that something other than utility is at stake here—namely, considerations regarding it. What Smith claims as original in his thought is the analysis of the role the aesthetic appreciation of utility plays. This might be more easily perceived through the way he presents the philosophical systems that theorized about utility.

3. Philosophical history of the beauty of utility

a. Epicurus: 'Utilitarian' individualism

Epicurus was the first philosopher to truly deal with utility, deriving from it a peculiar kind of moral approbation. According to Smith, the nucleus of his moral

⁴ A similar reasoning goes for technological innovations aiming only to marginally enhance objects' performance: "A watch, in the same manner, that falls behind above two minutes in a day, is despised by one curious in watches. He sells it perhaps for a couple of guineas, and purchases another at fifty, which will not lose above a minute in a fortnight. The sole use of watches however, is to tell us what o'clock it is, and to hinder us from breaking any engagement, or suffering any other inconveniency by our ignorance in that particular point. But the person so nice with regard to this machine, will not always be found either more scrupulously punctual than other men, or more anxiously concerned upon any other account, to know precisely what time of day it is. What interests him is not so much the attainment of this piece of knowledge, as the perfection of the machine which serves to attain it" (TMS IV.1.5, p.180). Given the utility of a personal watch in eighteenth-century Britain ("to tell us what o'clock it is"), two minutes more or less of precision are practically irrelevant and certainly not a material basis for such extra spending.

philosophy is a reduction of all morality to bodily pleasure and pain: Epicurus assumes that pleasure and pain are the natural objects of desire and aversion and takes this statement as his moral principle. Everything refers to this principle, and everything is reduced to it: external objects are apprehended from their tendency to produce pleasure and pain, and mental pleasure and pain are also reduced to it (TMS VII.ii.2.2-3, p.295). Mental pleasures and pains are in greater number than the bodily ones because the body experiences only the moment while the mind can also remember the past and anticipate the future (TMS VII.ii.2.4, p.295). Bodily sensations are transient, and are responsible for a smaller part of one's happiness or misery, adding little to them (ibidem, pp.295-6). If the mind is the principal source of happiness or misery, its disposition—or better, its proper disposition—is essential (TMS VII.ii.2.5, p.296). Therefore, the main goal of Epicurus's philosophy can be stated as follows:

In ease of body, therefore, and in security or tranquillity of mind, consisted, according to Epicurus, the most perfect state of human nature, the most complete happiness which man was capable of enjoying. To obtain this great end of natural desire was the sole object of all the virtues, which, according to him, were not desirable upon their own account, but upon account of their tendency to bring about this situation. (TMS VII.ii.2.7, p.296)

By limiting morality to the body, Epicurus reduces all virtue to prudence, but even this last is not understood as an end in itself:

That careful and laborious and circumspect state of mind, ever watchful and ever attentive to the most distant consequences of every action, could not be a thing pleasant or agreeable for its own sake, but upon account of its tendency to procure the greatest goods and to keep off the greatest evils. (TMS VII.ii.2.8, pp.296-7)

To Smith, prudence is an end in itself, a virtue whose object is personal happiness (TMS VI.i.5, p.213). For Epicurus, on the other hand, the value of every virtue (including prudence) comes not from itself (TMS VII.ii.2.12, pp.297-8) but from its usefulness:

To abstain from pleasure too, to curb and restrain our natural passions for enjoyment, which was the office of temperance, could never be desirable for its own sake. The whole value of this virtue arose from its utility, from its enabling us to postpone the present enjoyment for the sake of a greater to come, or to avoid a greater pain that might ensue from it. Temperance, in short, was nothing but prudence with regard to pleasure. (TMS VII.2.9, p.297)

The same happens with fortitude (TMS VII.ii.2.10, p.297) and even with justice, when they are reduced to the advantages they afford individuals. Both commutative

justice and distributive justice are reduced to means of obtaining good individual effects and avoiding bad individual effects. In a word, justice is nothing more than prudence regarding our neighbors (TMS VII.ii.2.11, p.297).

However, despite its fundamental mistakes, Epicurus's system retains some "probability" of truth:

It is not difficult, however, to discover from what phasis, if I may say so, from what particular view or aspect of nature, this account of things derives its probability. By the wise contrivance of the Author of nature, virtue is upon all ordinary occasions, even with regard to this life, real wisdom, and the surest and readiest means of obtaining both safety and advantage. (TMS VII.ii.2.13, p.298)

The good order of the world renders virtue the most appropriate way of obtaining the security and tranquility Epicurus discusses. The Epicurean confusion between means and ends clearly appears: According to this theory, to be amiable, respectable, and the proper object of esteem is less important than the bodily effects these characteristics bring. The inverse is equally true: To avoid being odious, contemptible, and the proper object of indignation is less important than to avoid their bad bodily effects (TMS VII.ii.2.12, p.298). The end is taken as a means; every virtue becomes an instrument. The theoretical mistake may be corrected as soon as the beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility is isolated:

Since the practice of virtue, therefore, is in general so advantageous, and that of vice so contrary to our interest, the consideration of those opposite tendencies undoubtedly stamps an additional beauty and propriety upon the one, and a new deformity and impropriety upon the other. Temperance, magnanimity, justice, and beneficence, come thus to be approved of, not only under their proper characters, but under the additional character of the highest wisdom and most real prudence. And in the same manner, the contrary vices of intemperance, pusillanimity, injustice, and either malevolence or sordid selfishness, come to be disapproved of, not only under their proper characters, but under the additional character of the most short-sighted folly and weakness. Epicurus appears in every virtue to have attended to this species of propriety only. (TMS VII.ii.2.13, pp.298-9)

This "additional character" is precisely this, an addition: Epicurean reasoning "stamps an additional beauty and propriety" upon virtue, a something more. In itself, this is not a problem but instead quite the opposite. Any virtuous person acquires an "outward prosperity" (TMS VII.ii.4.5, p.307), but these external individual effects must not be confused with the virtue itself. The problem is the theoretical confusion generated by the non-isolation of these utilitarian considerations. This confusion between means and ends

is particularly common when one is trying to persuade (TMS VII.ii.2.13, p.299) or when one is aiming to show “ingenuity” by economizing on principles:

By running up all the different virtues too to this one species of propriety, Epicurus indulged a propensity, which is natural to all men, but which philosophers in particular are apt to cultivate with a peculiar fondness, as the great means of displaying their ingenuity, the propensity to account for all appearances from as few principles as possible. And he, no doubt, indulged this propensity still further, when he referred all the primary objects of natural desire and aversion to the pleasures and pains of the body.⁵ (TMS VII.ii.2.14, p.299)

Epicurus’s system is the first in the history of philosophy to show in a clear way the kind of means and ends confusion that only the correct perception and isolation of the beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility is able to avoid. His moral system is a sort of ‘utilitarian’ individualism (‘utilitarian’ in the sense not of public utility considerations but prudential considerations) in which everything is reduced to the individual body. Such mistakes arise when the ancient Greek takes two goals too far: the search for simplicity (reducing everything to only one principle) and the search for eloquence (too much emphasis on the rational explanatory chains aiming at persuading an audience).

b. Hobbes: Deductivist mechanicism

In the seventeenth century, Hobbes commits similar mistakes. In many ways, his system is close to Epicurus’s. First, they share the same individualistic principle: Hobbes also states that self-love is the source of all morality (TMS VII.iii.1). Second, both Epicurus and Hobbes see virtue as a means, a simple instrument to achieve security and tranquility. The main difference lies in the reasoning chain. To Hobbes, virtue is the means to maintain social order (which is indispensable to an individual’s “comfort and security”), and vice disturbs it (becoming “offensive” to everyone) (TMS VII.iii.1.1, p.315). The Hobbesian system highlights how society works:

Human society, when we contemplate it in a certain abstract and philosophical light, appears like a great, an immense machine, whose regular and harmonious movements produce a thousand agreeable effects. As in any other beautiful and noble machine that was the production of human art, whatever tended to render its movements more smooth and easy, would derive a beauty from this

⁵ Something Epicurus also achieved in his natural philosophy: “The great patron of the atomical philosophy, who took so much pleasure in deducing all the powers and qualities of bodies from the most obvious and familiar, the figure, motion, and arrangement of the small parts of matter, felt no doubt a similar satisfaction, when he accounted, in the same manner, for all the sentiments and passions of the mind from those which are most obvious and familiar” (TMS VII.ii.2.14, p.299).

effect, and, on the contrary, whatever tended to obstruct them would displease upon that account: (...). (TMS VII.iii.1.2, p.316)

If Epicurus insists on the individual effects of virtue as his main argument, Hobbes grounds his system in a mechanistic understanding of the social effects of virtue. By understanding society as an enormous mechanism whose operations are fascinating (such as a watch), individual virtue and vice also acquire that “additional character” Smith mentioned regarding Epicurus’s system:

That the tendency of virtue to promote, and of vice to disturb the order of society, when we consider it coolly and philosophically, reflects a very great beauty upon the one, and a very great deformity upon the other, cannot, as I have observed upon a former occasion, be called in question. (...) This account, therefore, of the origin of approbation and disapprobation, so far as it derives them from a regard to the order of society, runs into that principle which gives beauty to utility (...). (ibidem)

Starting from the idea that society is artificial and that there is nothing in human nature driving men to form communities, Hobbes must convince his readers of the advantages of living in society. This will be done in a deductive manner: “those authors (...) deduce from self-love the interest which we take in the welfare of society, and the esteem which upon that account we bestow upon virtue.” This results in an undeniably persuasive system:

When those authors describe the innumerable advantages of a cultivated and social, above a savage and solitary life; when they expatiate upon the necessity of virtue and good order for the maintenance of the one, and demonstrate how infallibly the prevalence of vice and disobedience to the laws tend to bring back the other, the reader is charmed with the novelty and grandeur of those views which they open to him: he sees plainly a new beauty in virtue, and a new deformity in vice, which he had never taken notice of before, and is commonly so delighted with the discovery, that he seldom takes time to reflect, that this political view, having never occurred to him in his life before, cannot possibly be the ground of that approbation and disapprobation with which he has always been accustomed to consider those different qualities. (TMS VII.iii.1.3, p.316)

According to Smith, everything new begets a sentiment of surprise, and everything unusual begets a sentiment of wonder (EPS, p.33). These sentiments are fundamental to scientific development and also to morality, but not the way Epicurus and Hobbes thought. They bestow a “new beauty” on virtue and a “new deformity” on vice. The simple presentation of this additional dimension is not problematic on its own; the

problem occurs when one takes it as the sole source of morality, as the sole manner of granting value to virtue.

c. Hume: 'Utilitarian' organicism

The emphasis on resentment is a critique of all those who believe justice is grounded in the existence of rules, as it supposes offenses happen only because a particular law is broken. On the contrary, the operation of our moral faculties comes first, and rules are formed only afterwards. This mistake occurs when the subject at hand is the "operations (...) of mind." In fact, it is another bad analogy, as this mistake seldom happens with mechanic (e.g., a watch) or organic (e.g., the animal body) subjects (TMS II.ii.3.5, p.87). Our digestive and circulatory systems are as unaware of their goals and movements as a clock mechanism. In order for the whole to work, each part has to play its proper role, but it does not need to be conscious of the function it performs. This is obvious when the part is an inanimate object, such as a spring or a gear in a watch. However, what happens when human beings are taken as parts of something bigger? What happens in the individual-society relationship?

When by natural principles we are led to advance those ends, which a refined and enlightened reason would recommend to us, we are very apt to impute to that reason, as to their efficient cause, the sentiments and actions by which we advance those ends, and to imagine that to be the wisdom of man, which in reality is the wisdom of God. (ibidem)

This happens in some theories of justice:

As society cannot subsist unless the laws of justice are tolerably observed, as no social intercourse can take place among men who do not generally abstain from injuring one another; the consideration of this necessity, it has been thought, was the ground upon which we approved of the enforcement of the laws of justice by the punishment of those who violated them. (TMS II.ii.3.6, p.87)

It is not an egotistical theory: Despite the similarities between this reasoning and that of Hobbes, Smith's target is those who consider justice the result of a natural sociability, a set that includes natural law tradition (Grotius and Pufendorf) but also Hume's theory of justice as an artificial virtue:

Man, it has been said, has a natural love for society, and desires that the union of mankind should be preserved for its own sake, and though he himself was to derive no benefit from it. The orderly and flourishing state of society is agreeable to him, and he takes delight in contemplating it. Its disorder

and confusion, on the contrary, is the object of his aversion, and he is chagrined at whatever tends to produce it. (ibidem, p.88)

This philosophical system's principle is aesthetic: The observation of society as an organized totality (either pleasant or unpleasant) motivates individual behavior. This can take place because human beings, unlike a watch's springs or blood in an animal, see themselves as parts of this system:

He is sensible too that his own interest is connected with the prosperity of society, and that the happiness, perhaps the preservation of his existence, depends upon its preservation. Upon every account, therefore, he has an abhorrence at whatever can tend to destroy society, and is willing to make use of every means, which can hinder so hated and so dreadful an event. (ibidem)

The motivation to be just arises from this rational consideration about the utility of justice to the maintenance of social order, instead from spontaneous emotions (such as resentment).⁶ The consideration regarding justice necessity—that is, the conscious apprehension concerning the public utility of legislation and punishment—acts not only as confirmation and justification but also as a motivating element, grounding justice in all its aspects.⁷ Smith sees a mistake in the last link of this chain. Public utility is possibly the most important argument in justifying law and punishment, and, as such, it is the most important confirmation of the propriety of our senses and sentiments regarding justice. It also acts as a regulating criterion in the process of constitution and application of rules, but it cannot supply the starting point: The only way to determine something's utility is to analyze its operations. In the case of justice, resentment offers the needed impulse, not only in the origin but also in every moment an offense is committed because it is one of those “original anticipations of nature” supplied by the correct performance of our “moral faculties” (TMS III.5.5, pp.164-5; see 1.5-6). Smith's theory demands a distinction

⁶ “Every appearance of injustice, therefore, alarms him, and he runs, if I may say so, to stop the progress of what, if allowed to go on, would quickly put an end to every thing that is dear to him. If he cannot restrain it by gentle and fair means, he must beat it down by force and violence, and at any rate must put a stop to its further progress” (TMS II.ii.3.6, p.87). In this way, even the death penalty can be approved: “Hence it is, they say, that he often approves of the enforcement of the laws of justice even by the capital punishment of those who violate them. The disturber of the public peace is hereby removed out of the world, and others are terrified by his fate from imitating his example” (ibidem).

⁷ See chapter 3 of the second *Enquiry*, for instance: “THAT justice is useful to society, and consequently that part of its merit, at least, must arise from that consideration, it would be a superfluous undertaking to prove. That public utility is the sole origin of Justice, and that reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the sole foundation of its merit; this proposition being more curious and important, will better deserve our examination and inquiry” (EPM 3.1.1, p.183). Smith agrees with the first statement (justice is useful) but not with the second (public utility is its only source).

between resentment as the efficient cause and utility as the final cause of justice, despite the theoretical temptation of identifying both:

Upon a superficial view, this cause seems sufficient to produce the effects which are ascribed to it; and the system of human nature seems to be more simple and agreeable when all its different operations are in this manner deduced from a single principle. (TMS II.ii.3.5, p.87)

Once again, we see the double criticism of philosophers who go too far in their search for simplicity and eloquence: This “superficial vision” results in a system “more simple and agreeable” because it is grounded in only one principle. Yet this might not be the true problem. In Book I of *Wealth*, for instance, the “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” is, at the same time, both the efficient and final cause of the division of labor: “As it is this disposition which forms that difference of talents, so remarkable among men of different professions, so it is this same disposition which renders that difference useful” (WN I.ii.5, p.29). Although they are important criteria, simplicity and pleasantness say very little about the relevance of a theory.⁸ The question is one of propriety: The first cause of the wealth allows for an explanation based on a single principle, a cause immediately referring to the natural sociability of humankind, even if Smith refuses to analyze this subject in this work⁹ (see Section 8 below). However, like justice, wealth also has two causes: the principle to exchange and the principle to “better one’s condition” (WN Introd.2, p.10; I.ii.2, p.25 and II.iii.28, p.341). This second principle allows Smith to correct Quesnay’s mistake concerning the organicist analogy between animal body and society. Again, the problem is not in the analogy: If there is a point on which both French (Physiocracy) and British (Hume and Smith) eighteenth-century liberalism agreed, it is that the economist’s *métier* or *trade* consists of helping nature in its course, much like a physician.¹⁰ Again, the question is how to understand this analogy between natural and moral systems¹¹:

⁸ In his *History of Astronomy*, Smith characterizes Copernicus’s system by its “beauty and simplicity” (EPS, p.75; cf. p.73 e ss.). Newton’s system is described as “coherent,” “firm,” and “solid” but never as simple (EPS, pp.103-5).

⁹ “Whether this propensity be one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given; or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech, it belongs not to our present subject to enquire” (WN I.ii.2, p.25).

¹⁰ “La finalité du modèle est donc pratique, c’est-à-dire, suivant les circonstances, hygiénique ou thérapeutique: la discipline économique se constitue comme médecine pratique du corps productif” (Deleule, 1979, p.291; cf. p.282 and ss.).

¹¹ In a way, it is the same criticism Smith directs against Hutcheson’s analogy between the external senses and the moral sense.

Some speculative physicians seem to have imagined that the health of the human body could be preserved only by a certain precise regimen of diet and exercise, of which every, the smallest, violation necessarily occasioned some degree of disease or disorder proportioned to the degree of the violation. Experience, however, would seem to show that the human body frequently preserves, to all appearance at least, the most perfect state of health under a vast variety of different regimens; even under some which are generally believed to be very far from being perfectly wholesome. But the healthful state of the human body, it would seem, contains in itself some unknown principle of preservation, capable either of preventing or of correcting, in many respects, the bad effects even of a very faulty regimen. (WN IV.ix.28, pp.673-4)

Quesnay's mistake is in oversimplifying the correct means to achieve social health:

He seems not to have considered that in the political body, the natural effort which every man is continually making to better his own condition, is a principle of preservation capable of preventing and correcting, in many respects, the bad effects of a political oeconomy, in some degree, both partial and oppressive. (ibidem, p.674)

With regard to justice, resentment acts in a similar manner as the principle of "bettering one's condition" in the economic field. This happens because they are complementary forms of the same principle of self-preservation intrinsic to every living being:

The uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which publick and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived, is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things toward improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government, and of the greatest errors of administration. Like the unknown principle of animal life, it frequently restores health and vigour to the constitution, in spite, not only of the disease, but of the absurd prescriptions of the doctor. (WN II.iii.31, p.343)

Concerning prudence, the principle of "bettering one's condition" not only ensures individual safety¹² but it also furnishes the needed impulse so the principle of exchange can organize the distribution of labor in a natural way.¹³ This happens through

¹² This happens fundamentally through the acquisition of fortune: "An augmentation of fortune is the means by which the greater part of men propose and wish to better their condition. It is the means the most vulgar and the most obvious; and the most likely way of augmenting their fortune, is to save and accumulate some part of what they acquire, either regularly and annually, or upon some extraordinary occasions" (WN II.iii.28, pp.341-2).

¹³ The second cause of wealth has a logical precedence over the first: "As the accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous to the division of labour, so labour can be more and more subdivided in proportion only as stock is previously more and more accumulated" (WN II.intro.3, p.277).

a social interaction based on considerations of personal utility, an interweaving of individual advantages:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.¹⁴ (WN I.ii.2, pp.26-7)

Smith insists once again on the ways utility demands persuasion, here interweaving personal interests without requiring any wider understanding of the public utility of this phenomenon:

THIS division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. (WN I.ii.1, p.25)

As in justice, a conscious understanding of the mutual advantages generated by this (more or less) spontaneous process only appears *a posteriori*, as rational confirmations of the good constitution of human nature. Being particular, personal utility is necessarily linked to someone. Public utility, however, is abstract, requiring the conscious intervention of some authority figure: The “safety of numbers” only surpasses the security of individuals in exceptional cases, and at the cost of much subjective effort (TMS II.ii.3.11, pp.90-1; see 5.4). This reinforces the necessity of some social institution or authority figure regulating this interaction with justice laws. In economy and economics, this need is much weaker, although there is a place for conscious intervention, as Smith’s defense of usury laws has shown. Despite their differences, resentment and

¹⁴ This is how Smith roots in his theory of passion (here is the selfish passions) another of natural laws arguments, that of human frailty as the origin of the need for mutual assistance: “In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is intirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creature” (WN I.ii.2, p.26). See Larrère (1992, pp.25-9). Smith’s peculiarity consists in the principle of bettering one’s condition, an instinctive principle that does not require the conscious understanding of the advantages obtained by fortune to work.

the principle of bettering one's condition complement each other, ensuring individual safety and grounding society as a whole:

The very existence of society requires that unmerited and unprovoked malice should be restrained by proper punishments; and consequently, that to inflict those punishments should be regarded as a proper and laudable action. Though man, therefore, be naturally endowed with a desire of the welfare and preservation of society, yet the Author of nature has not entrusted it to his reason to find out that a certain application of punishments is the proper means of attaining this end; but has endowed him with an immediate and instinctive approbation of that very application which is most proper to attain it.¹⁵ (TMS II.i.5.10, pp.77-8)

Hume's mistake (and in a certain way, that of the natural law tradition) was supposing that society's preservation depends on the conscious understanding of justice's utility to social order. For Smith, the "Author of nature" is perfectly aware that one cannot resort solely to human reason when such an important goal is at stake. Hume would not have considered the existence of a spontaneous reaction to and approval of justice without utilitarian considerations as the motivating impulse (although this is their indispensable regulating function). Smith's general criticism of Hume's sympathy theory (which will be explored in Sections 7 and 8 below) insists precisely on this aspect: Hume did not distinguish propriety and merit judgments (or sentiments) from utilitarian considerations, reducing the first (and along with them, sympathy) to the last (TMS VII.iii.3.17, p.327).

d. Mandeville: Much ado about nothing

Mandeville's work is a sort of summit of mistakes regarding means and ends. Furthermore, his *Fable of the Bees* is the most complete and conclusive example of the entire degradation of moral philosophy, the epitome of morally corrupted thinking. If

¹⁵ The remainder of the paragraph is also important to the discussion: "The oeconomy of nature is in this respect exactly of a piece with what it is upon many other occasions. With regard to all those ends which, upon account of their peculiar importance, may be regarded, if such an expression is allowable, as the favourite ends of nature, she has constantly in this manner not only endowed mankind with an appetite for the end which she proposes, but likewise with an appetite for the means by which alone this end can be brought about, for their own sakes, and independent of their tendency to produce it. Thus self-preservation, and the propagation of the species, are the great ends which Nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals. Mankind are endowed with a desire of those ends, and an aversion to the contrary; with a love of life, and a dread of dissolution; with a desire of the continuance and perpetuity of the species, and with an aversion to the thoughts of its intire extinction. But though we are in this manner endowed with a very strong desire of those ends, it has not been intrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason, to find out the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts. Hunger, thirst, the passion which unites the two sexes, the love of pleasure, and the dread of pain, prompt us to apply those means for their own sakes, and without any consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends which the great Director of nature intended to produce by them" (TMS II.i.5.10, pp.77-8).

Epicurus's work, grounded in an eagerness to reduce everything to individual utility, still retained something positive:

We may learn from the system of Epicurus (...) how much the practice of both the amiable and respectable virtues is conducive to our own interest, to our own ease and safety and quiet even in this life. (TMS VII.ii.4.5, p.307)

Hobbes's good intentions partially excuse him for "so odious a doctrine" (TMS VII.iii.2.3, p.318), particularly because of the events of the time in which he lived:

It was the avowed intention of Mr. Hobbes, by propagating these notions, to subject the consciences of men immediately to the civil, and not to the ecclesiastical powers, whose turbulence and ambition, he had been taught, by the example of his own times, to regard as the principal source of the disorders of society. (TMS VII.iii.2.2, p.318)

Hume's greatness more than compensates for his mistakes:

The cause too, why utility pleases, has of late been assigned by an ingenious and agreeable philosopher, who joins the greatest depth of thought to the greatest elegance of expression, and possesses the singular and happy talent of treating the abstrusest subjects not only with the most perfect perspicuity, but with the most lively eloquence. (TMS IV.1.2, p.179)

Mandeville, on the other hand, is inexcusable:

There is, however, another system which seems to take away altogether the distinction between vice and virtue, and of which the tendency is, upon that account, wholly pernicious: I mean the system of Dr. Mandeville. (TMS VII.ii.4.6, p.308)

The theoretical nucleus of this "licentious system" (TMS VII.ii.4, p.306) consists of, first, reducing every sort of behavior to self-love and, second, presenting vanity as the only motive of social life (TMS VII.ii.4.7, p.308). This is possible, on the one hand, because of the linguistic ambiguity of some terms (some passions are named only when they occur in an offensive or unpleasant degree), and on the other, because of the "ingenious sophistry of his reasoning" (TMS VII.ii.4.11, p.312). According to Mandeville, not only there is no such a thing as a disinterested action but also any appearance of disinterest is hypocritical (TMS VII.ii.4.7, pp.308-9). The sophistry hides in the double displacement mentioned above: Everything is self-love, and all self-love is vanity. The axis of Mandeville's system lies in the notion of vanity, and Smith's theory absorbs its description. After all,

(...) how destructive soever this system may appear, it could never have imposed upon so great a number of persons, nor have occasioned so general an alarm among those who are the friends of better principles, had it not in some respects bordered upon the truth. A system of natural philosophy may appear very plausible, and be for a long time very generally received in the world, and yet have no foundation in nature, nor any sort of resemblance to the truth. (...) But it is otherwise with systems of moral philosophy, and an author who pretends to account for the origin of our moral sentiments, cannot deceive us so grossly, nor depart so very far from all resemblance to the truth. (TMS VII.ii.4.14, pp.313-4)

This is yet another difference between natural and moral philosophy. A system of natural philosophy may remain plausible for a long time, even if entirely mistaken. A moral system, on the other hand, will never be accepted unless it carries some “probability”.¹⁶ The Mandevillean system, although “in almost every respect erroneous” (TMS VII.ii.4.6, p.308), still has “in some respects bordered upon the truth” (TMS VII.ii.4.14, pp.313). Therefore, to nullify Mandeville’s reasoning, Smith seeks to disarticulate the sophistry on which it is grounded by establishing the boundaries of vanity in his theory of moral sentiments. This can be done in two ways: either with his theory of virtue, or with his conception of morality as a theater-tribunal. Resuming his virtue theory, he insists on three levels of behavior: vanity, the search for virtue (love of virtue), and the search for a well-grounded fame and reputation (true glory) (TMS VII.ii.4.12, p.313). The core of Mandeville’s mistake is the surreptitious generalization of vanity as if it were the only manner of obtaining esteem and approbation. The “remote affinity” that exists between vanity and the search for true glory is “exaggerated by the humorous and diverting eloquence of this lively author” and “has enabled him to impose upon his readers” (TMS VII.ii.4.9, p.310). To this mistake he adds the refusal of all virtue, based in an ascetic vision of morals:

It is the great fallacy of Dr. Mandeville's book to represent every passion as wholly vicious, which is so in any degree and in any direction.¹⁷ It is thus that he treats every thing as vanity which has any

¹⁶ Smith calls this “probability” when presenting Epicurus (TMS VII.ii.2.13, p.298) and “appearance of probability” when discussing Hobbes (TMS VII.iii.1.2, p.316). Smith speaks of probability mostly when something incorrect is at stake: “But an innocent man, though of more than ordinary constancy, is often, not only shocked, but most severely mortified by the serious, though false, imputation of a crime; especially when that imputation happens unfortunately to be supported by some circumstances which give it an air of probability” (TMS III.2.11, p.119). Thus, for Smith, if something is only probable, it most likely is a mistake. An instance that contradicts my last statement is when Smith speaks of probability regarding the last cause (faculty of speech) of the first cause of wealth (WN I.ii.2, p.25).

¹⁷ Smith denounces the ascetic background of Mandeville’s theory: “Some popular ascetic doctrines which had been current before his time, and which placed virtue in the entire extirpation and annihilation of all our passions, were the real foundation of this licentious system” (TMS VII.ii.4.12, p.313)

reference, either to what are, or to what ought to be the sentiments of others: and it is by means of this sophistry, that he establishes his favourite conclusion, that private vices are public benefits. (TMS VII.ii.4.11, p.312)

Unlike Hobbes, who holds that personal virtues acquired their peculiar character from the public utility of their effects, Mandeville asserts that vices cause social advantages. His organicistic conception of society (based on an analogy with a beehive) includes a perverted version of utilitarianism. Supported by a fallacious premise (all non-perfect human behavior is vicious) and based on a sophistic reasoning (vanity is the sole way of obtaining approbation and esteem), Mandeville's system is an extreme example of mistaken reasoning between means and ends—namely, the identification of private vices and public benefits.

Smith's general theory of moral sentiments, capable of correcting Mandeville's system, might also be exposed with the theater-tribunal conception of morality. The virtuous person seeks only the approbation of an imaginary and impartial audience. She wants her behavior not only to be approved but also to be the proper object of approbation; she aims to deserve approval, regardless of whether or not she receives it. The honorable man seeks a double approbation, both from the imaginary and the empirical audience, under the condition that both be as impartial as possible. He wishes the external signs of approbation to be well grounded, and aims for a deserved approval. The vain man, on the other hand, seeks only the approbation of an empirical audience, without caring if it is partial or not. He wishes for only the external signs of approbation, the applause:

He too is said to be guilty of vanity who is not contented with the silent sentiments of esteem and approbation, who seems to be fonder of their noisy expressions and acclamations than of the sentiments themselves, who is never satisfied but when his own praises are ringing in his ears, and who solicits with the most anxious importunity all external marks of respect, is fond of titles, of compliments, of being visited, of being attended, of being taken notice of in public places with the appearance of deference and attention. (TMS VII.ii.4.8, pp.309-10)

In such chaos, it is simply impossible to achieve the subtle sentimental modulation that the correct operations of sympathy require. This overwhelming environment precludes imagination from handling the complex and delicate sympathetic work of sentimental harmonization. Sympathy demands silence; otherwise, it is impossible to perceive subtle variations in emotions, even in the case of violent passions. The louder the emotional pandemonium caused by vanity, the smaller the affective spectrum that can

be transmitted and perceived. In extreme cases, only shouts can be heard, for two reasons: the presence of this sound spiral (where everyone tries to be louder than everyone else in the expression of their emotions) and the consequent deafness due to prolonged exposure (deafness that can be transient—as when you leave a rock concert with your ears buzzing, unable to hear subdued sounds—or permanent—when vanity becomes the result of an acquired deficiency). Vanity obstructs sympathy in a two-step process: First, the vain man avoids showing his true emotions at all costs (remember the hypocrites of wealth, TMS I.iii.3.7, see 4.6), searching for only the external signs of approval, and second, the “noise” of this approval prevents both the vain agent and the spectators from hearing small variations in emotional communication, and even from thinking on their own.¹⁸

Mandeville’s style is equally noisy: Vanity’s traits are “described and exaggerated by the lively and humorous, though coarse and rustic eloquence of Dr. Mandeville” in such a way that they “have thrown upon his doctrines an air of truth and probability which is very apt to impose upon the unskillful” (TMS VII.ii.4.6, p.308). Thus, there is an interesting adequacy of form and content in Mandeville’s work: The scandalous style of his *Fable of the Bees* mimics vanity, and is certainly partly responsible for all the “noise” resulting from its publication¹⁹ (TMS VII.ii.4.13, p.313).

¹⁸ The noise of vanity fair is capable of confounding even men “of sober judgment”: “The very noise of those foolish acclamations often contributes to confound his understanding, and while he sees those great men only at a certain distance, he is often disposed to worship them with a sincere admiration, superior even to that with which they appear to worship themselves” (TMS VI.iii.27, p.250). In the same sense, when blame is loudly and violently expressed it affects the operations of the tribunal of conscience: “The violence and loudness, with which blame is sometimes poured out upon us, seems to stupify and benumb our natural sense of praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness; and the judgments of the man within, though not, perhaps, absolutely altered or perverted, are, however, so much shaken in the steadiness and firmness of their decision, that their natural effect, in securing the tranquility of the mind, is frequently in a great measure destroyed. We scarce dare to absolve ourselves, when all our brethren appear loudly to condemn us” (TMS III.2.32, p.131).

¹⁹ An even more interesting case is Rousseau’s philosophy. The chemical combination of a selfish doctrine and an exacerbated republicanism (orbiting around such notions as social contract and general will, both unacceptable concepts to Smith), in the hands of an extremely skillful writer is explosive. If only rude and crude minds are fooled by Mandeville’s rhetoric, the style mastery of the Genevan yields a work able to corrupt the youth: “The passion of all young people for pastoral poetry, which describes the amusements of the indolent life of a shepherd; and for books of chivalry and romance, which describe the most dangerous and extravagant adventures, is the effect of this natural taste for these two seemingly inconsistent objects. In the descriptions of the manners of savages, we expect to meet with both these: and no author ever proposed to treat of this subject who did not excite the public curiosity. (...) It is by the help of this style, together with a little philosophical chemistry, that the principles and ideas of the profligate Mandeville seem in him to have all the purity and sublimity of the morals of Plato, and to be only the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far” (EPS, p.251). The proper answer to Rousseau, however, will demand from Smith much more than a simple chapter in his history of moral philosophy, and, moreover, it is a subject too interesting to be squeezed into only a few lines. For a commentary on this critique, see Pimenta (2013, pp.135-50).

4. How utility persuades: Ambition

The separation between utility and its appreciation, the isolation of utilitarian considerations, allows Smith not only to criticize the philosophical systems of Epicurus, Hobbes, Hume, and Mandeville but also to explain some of the most characteristic interactions of commercial society. The most evident is the consumption of all sorts of “toys” or a “multitude of baubles,” “frivolous objects,” and “trinkets” whose utility is neither “obvious” nor “striking” (TMS IV.1.6-8, pp.180-2). But Smith also employs these considerations to explain “the secret motive of the most serious and important pursuits of both private and public life” (TMS IV.1.7, p.181)—namely, ambition. An ambitious son of a poor man is an example of someone more driven by utilitarian considerations than by the actual utility of the objects he desires (TMS IV.1.8, p.181). Ambition is one of those “extravagant passions” whose main characteristic consists of “over-rating the difference between one permanent situation and another,” especially concerning those of wealthy, powerful, and successful persons (TMS III.3.31, p.149; see 4.11). This is an overevaluation grounded in an unbridled imaginary work:

He is enchanted with the distant idea of this felicity. It appears in his fancy like the life of some superior rank of beings, and, in order to arrive at it, he devotes himself for ever to the pursuit of wealth and greatness. (...) Through the whole of his life he pursues the idea of a certain artificial and elegant repose which he may never arrive at, for which he sacrifices a real tranquillity that is at all times in his power, and which, if in the extremity of old age he should at last attain to it, he will find to be in no respect preferable to that humble security and contentment which he had abandoned for it. (TMS IV.1.8, p.181)

If utilitarian philosophers are able to persuade students or readers with their mistaken reasoning, this young ambitious man can persuade himself with a fantastic and fanciful conception of happiness. It is not a rude correlation between wealth and power and happiness, but it is still quite a peculiar way of conceiving this relation:

If we examine, however, why the spectator distinguishes with such admiration the condition of the rich and the great, we shall find that it is not so much upon account of the superior ease or pleasure which they are supposed to enjoy, as of the numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting this ease or pleasure. He does not even imagine that they are really happier than other people: but he imagines that they possess more means of happiness. And it is the ingenious and artful adjustment of those means to the end for which they were intended, that is the principal source of his admiration. (ibidem, p.182)

In a way, the ambitious poor person admires more the place occupied by the rich man than the rich man himself. He is fully aware that rich people are not necessarily happier than poor people are, but they possess more means of happiness, more useful objects. There is a sort of “fitness,” a “happy contrivance,” between the place occupied by the rich and the achievement of happiness: Rich people would be in better position to achieve happiness. This utilitarian consideration concerning wealth does not take into account the personal characteristics of the rich person (his character), at the same time it is associated with that “distant” yet enchanting “idea of felicity.” Grounding the ambitious poor man’s excessive efforts to achieve the rich man’s station is a poorly made reasoning, a bad abstraction (ibidem, p.181). It is only at an old age, sick and depleted by a life of toil and trouble, that the ambitious man starts properly seeing reality:

(...) that he begins at last to find that wealth and greatness are mere trinkets of frivolous utility, no more adapted for procuring ease of body or tranquillity of mind than the tweezer-cases of the lover of toys; and like them too, more troublesome to the person who carries them about with him than all the advantages they can afford him are commodious. (ibidem, p.182)

The result of a life ruled by an extravagant passion is illness of the body. In his last, sick days, even that “idea of felicity” fades away from the ambitious mind, leaving nothing but crude reality in its place:

Power and riches appear then to be, what they are, enormous and operose machines contrived to produce a few trifling conveniencies to the body, consisting of springs the most nice and delicate, which must be kept in order with the most anxious attention, and which in spite of all our care are ready every moment to burst into pieces, and to crush in their ruins their unfortunate possessor. They are immense fabrics, which it requires the labour of a life to raise, which threaten every moment to overwhelm the person that dwells in them, and which while they stand, though they may save him from some smaller inconveniencies, can protect him from none of the severer inclemencies of the season. They keep off the summer shower, not the winter storm, but leave him always as much, and sometimes more exposed than before, to anxiety, to fear, and to sorrow; to diseases, to danger, and to death. (ibidem, pp.182-3)

In times of “sickness and low spirits” one will default to this dreary and lurid vision of things, while in happier times, when “in better health and in better humour,” he will likewise “never fail to regard them under a more agreeable aspect.”

Our imagination, which in pain and sorrow seems to be confined and cooped up within our own persons, in times of ease and prosperity expands itself to every thing around us. We are then charmed with the beauty of that accommodation which reigns in the palaces and oeconomy of the great; and

admire how every thing is adapted to promote their ease, to prevent their wants, to gratify their wishes, and to amuse and entertain their most frivolous desires. (TMS IV.1.9, p.183)

Expansiveness is the most striking feature of imagination. It defines sympathy: the faculty of imagining oneself in someone else's situation, an imaginary expansion over the other. It reappears whenever a child tries to punish the stone that hit her or when someone cherishes an inanimate object; this imaginary expansive feature is the basis of resentment and gratitude. It reappears adding a "new character" or a "new beauty" to useful objects:

If we consider the real satisfaction which all these things are capable of affording, by itself and separated from the beauty of that arrangement which is fitted to promote it, it will always appear in the highest degree contemptible and trifling. But we rarely view it in this abstract and philosophical light. We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or oeconomy by means of which it is produced. The pleasures of wealth and greatness, when considered in this complex view, strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it. (ibidem)

The only way to avoid this mistake is to isolate these two moments: the real satisfaction and the imaginary satisfaction bestowed by the appearance of utility. This is the result of what Smith calls an "abstract and philosophical light." Without it, confusion is unavoidable: These two satisfactions combine in a "complex view," capable of capturing idle imaginations and driving the desire of ambitious men. The ambitious man clearly sees the imaginary satisfaction provided by such objects but confounds it with the real satisfaction those in a higher station of life actually get. Although his old VW is just as useful to him as the Ferrari owned by a football superstar or some company's CEO (both cars take their respective owners from point A to point B), somehow a Ferrari seems closer to what a perfect car should be. Its "machine or oeconomy" simply seems better adjusted to its purpose, and most people will confound this "superior conveniency" (TMS IV.1.4, p.180) with the fact that it is a simple car. The whole point is that a supercar such as a Ferrari *is not a simple car*; it is produced with a *je ne sais quoi* that Smith calls beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility in mind.²⁰ In a way, the ambitious person adds this

²⁰ An example of this second turn of the screw can be seen in the case of the 2011 BMW M5. Due to its exceptional acoustic isolation, the engineers had to develop a sound system that reproduced the engine sound through the car's stereo. This is easily explained in Smithian terms: The engine sound is an important part of a supercar's appearance of utility (nowadays we might say an essential part of its driving experience), and to buffer it in the car's interior would drastically reduce this appearance (and its experience

imaginary satisfaction to the real one. The result is that every rich or powerful man appears to be happier than he truly is. Obviously, this mistake is not confined to the poorest classes: With the exception of the “hypocrites of wealth and greatness,” who cynically assume the appearances (TMS I.iii.3.7, p.64), most fortunate people are also fooled by this imaginary satisfaction (otherwise Ferraris wouldn’t sell) and actually think they are happier than most people are.

The philosopher, however, is able not only to separate these two kinds of pleasure but also to properly evaluate the effects of this imaginary mistake:

And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life; which have entirely changed the whole face of the globe, have turned the rude forests of nature into agreeable and fertile plains, and made the trackless and barren ocean a new fund of subsistence, and the great high road of communication to the different nations of the earth. The earth by these labours of mankind has been obliged to redouble her natural fertility, and to maintain a greater multitude of inhabitants. It is to no purpose, that the proud and unfeeling landlord views his extensive fields, and without a thought for the wants of his brethren, in imagination consumes himself the whole harvest that grows upon them. (TMS IV.1.10, pp.183-4)

Whenever the individual is driven by one of these extravagant passions (ambition, avarice, or vainglory), he becomes restless, uneasy, and consumed in an endless search for wealth, power, and success. He is constantly unsatisfied (or never fully satisfied) and incessantly propelled forward. Once wrapped inside this quest, he acquires much more than he could possibly consume on his own (Smith remembers “the homely and vulgar proverb the eye is larger than the belly”), forging the basis not only of what he calls “oeconomy of greatness” but also of wealth in general:

The capacity of his stomach bears no proportion to the immensity of his desires, and will receive no more than that of the meanest peasant. The rest he is obliged to distribute among those, who prepare, in the nicest manner, that little which he himself makes use of, among those who fit up the palace in which this little is to be consumed, among those who provide and keep in order all the different baubles and trinkets, which are employed in the oeconomy of greatness; all of whom thus derive

by the driver and passengers). The solution was to develop a software system capable of feeling the pressure put on the gas pedal and digitally reproducing the engine’s sound through the stereo system, instead of simply reducing the acoustic isolation of the car’s interior in relation to the engine. This is a remarkable example of how the appearance of utility (here, of a supercar’s engine sound) continues to be an important source of marginal technological innovations.

from his luxury and caprice, that share of the necessaries of life, which they would in vain have expected from his humanity or his justice. (ibidem, p.184)

By theoretically separating the real satisfaction from the imaginary, the philosopher can analyze how people will behave in society's development through time: Those driven by these passions will increase the aggregate produce above what they can consume for themselves. Implicitly resuming his theory about the natural and ordinary course of things (country → town, and then, internal trade → foreign trade; see Book III of *Wealth*), Smith focuses here on the first moment of economic development, agriculture:

The produce of the soil maintains at all times nearly that number of inhabitants which it is capable of maintaining. The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own convenience, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. (ibidem)

Instead of an endless spiral of ever-growing inequality, the result of the institution of private ownership of land is somewhat different:

They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for. (ibidem, pp.184-5)

The real satisfaction of both classes (wealthy landowners and poor peasants) is nearly the same. Indeed, Smith explicitly remarks that poor people are (at least potentially) closer to true happiness than rich and powerful people are. They are less vulnerable to the grip of these extravagant passions perhaps because they would

experience less with these well-contrived (but expensive) objects.^{21,22} In a way, it is easier for the poor to achieve the tranquility needed to truly enjoy life. The exception is the ambitious son of a poor man: This is the worst possible situation, because in addition to a restless imagination he has no access to the expensive objects that might (at least partially) satisfy his vanity. Even worse, surrounded by the emotional bedlam of the “circle of ambition” (TMS I.iii.2.7, p.57), it is almost impossible to calmly analyze his own situation and to distinguish, as the philosopher does, between real and imaginary satisfaction. His subjective constitution (a restless mind mastered by an extravagant passion) reinforces and is reinforced by the environment he seeks (the emotional noise of the “oeconomy of greatness”). Only the physical depletion of his body will grant him the necessary tranquility to reflect properly:

In his heart he curses ambition, and vainly regrets the ease and the indolence of youth, pleasures which are fled for ever, and which he has foolishly sacrificed for what, when he has got it, can afford him no real satisfaction. In this miserable aspect does greatness appear to every man when reduced either by spleen or disease to observe with attention his own situation, and to consider what it is that is really wanting to his happiness. (TMS IV.1.8, p.182)

Yet again, nature needs time to impose its course. All he must do is wait for enough time to pass to achieve the correct state of mind to properly judge his situation (see 4.10), and once he reaches that stage, ambition’s utilitarian (self-)persuasion stops working:

But in the languor of disease and the weariness of old age, the pleasures of the vain and empty distinctions of greatness disappear. To one, in this situation, they are no longer capable of recommending those toilsome pursuits in which they had formerly engaged him. (ibidem)

Smith truly believes that, sooner or later, tranquility will come, allowing individuals to think correctly about themselves (and everyone else). However, sometimes this tranquility comes too late.

²¹ This is an ambiguous situation: If, on one hand, the non-exposure to such objects may make someone (at least potentially) less liable to develop these extravagant passions, on the other, this non-exposure (again, potentially) restricts the imagination’s development, as the contact with these varied and different objects is an important source of experience. This last aspect not only can but also must be listed as one of the most important arguments in defense of commercial societies with its extensive division of labor, a division that must also be considered in its qualitative aspects (of producing different kinds of objects, and not only more productively).

²² This situation has obviously (if not qualitatively, at least quantitatively) changed since the end of the eighteenth century, especially due to the development of mass media and advertising.

5. How providence works: The corn merchant

In *Wealth*, the question of social consumption is organized around the discussion of interest. Dealing with interest means, first, dealing with a matter of knowledge, not of sensibility. I do not feel my interest; I know it. This is why landowners mistake their own interest²³ and the working class cannot achieve it.²⁴ Of the three social classes, only capitalists clearly know their interest.²⁵

Second, interest concerns what is advantageous, what is useful. In *Wealth*, interest appears in the concrete figure of value in use, “express[ing] the utility of some particular object” (WN I.iv.13, p.44)—that is, the “necessaries and conveniences of life,” or, in a word, wealth (WN Intro.1, p.10). Side by side with class interest, there is personal interest, both determined by individual or personal utility. Finally, there is the “general interest of society” (WN I.xi.8, p.265), which has two figures, one determined by the interest of the

²³ “When the publick deliberates concerning any regulation of commerce or police, the proprietors of land never can mislead it, with a view to promote the interest of their own particular order; at least, if they have any tolerable knowledge of that interest. They are, indeed, too often defective in this tolerable knowledge” (WN I.xi.8, p.265). This lack of knowledge about their own interest forces the landowners to play a “ridiculous” part in the transition from feudalism to modern commercial society: “A revolution of the greatest importance to the publick happiness, was in this manner brought about by two different orders of people, who had not the least intention to serve the publick. To gratify the most childish vanity was the sole motive of the great proprietors. The merchants and artificers, much less ridiculous, acted merely from a view to their own interest, and in pursuit of their own pedlar principle of turning a penny wherever a penny was to be got. Neither of them had either knowledge or foresight of that great revolution which the folly of the one, and the industry of the other, was gradually bringing about” (WN III.iv.17, p.422; cf. the chapter as a whole, pp.411-27). For more about the moral and political consequences involved in these issues, see Hirschman (1977, pp.100-13), Lewis (2000), and Müller (2013).

²⁴ “But though the interest of the labourer is strictly connected with that of the society, he is incapable either of comprehending that interest, or of understanding its connection with his own. His condition leaves him no time to receive the necessary information, and his education and habits are commonly such as to render him unfit to judge even though he was fully informed” (WN I.xi.p.9, p.266). Concerning the lack of proper intellectual stimulæ to the working class due to a life dedicated to perform only a few operations, Smith states: “The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. Of the great and extensive interests of his country, he is altogether incapable of judging; and unless very particular pains have been taken to render him otherwise, he is equally incapable of defending his country in war” (WN V.i.f.50, pp.781-2).

²⁵ “Merchants and master manufacturers are, in this order, the two classes of people who commonly employ the largest capitals, and who by their wealth draw to themselves the greatest share of the publick consideration. As during their whole lives they are engaged in plans and projects, they have frequently more acuteness of understanding than the greater part of country gentlemen. As their thoughts, however, are commonly exercised rather about the interest of their own particular branch of business, than about that of the society, their judgment, even when given with the greatest candour (which it has not been upon every occasion) is much more to be depended upon with regard to the former of those two objects, than with regard to the latter” (WN I.xi.p.10, p.266).

“great body of the people” (WN I.viii.43, p.99; V.ii.f.50, p.782), or the working class,²⁶ which clashes with the capitalist class interest²⁷ and with which the landowners’ interest converges: “In every country it always is and must be the interest of the great body of the people to buy whatever they want of those who sell it cheapest” (WN IV.iii.c.10, pp.493-4). It is simply the interest of the majority of the population of a country. The other figure of the general interest is linked to justice and is determined by public utility: “Upon some occasions, indeed, we both punish and approve of punishment, merely from a view to the general interest of society, which, we imagine, cannot otherwise be secured” (TMS II.ii.3.10, p.90; Appendix II, p.389; LJA v119-20, p.318). From this passage (whose context is the discussion about the punishment of the sentinel who slept while on duty; see 5.4) we see that public utility determines the general interest whenever the maintenance of social order is the goal (even if it implies a disproportional punishment), and demands the conscious intervention of some authority figure.

From an economical perspective, interest is closely linked to the procurement of wealth, as it is in the consumers’ interest to find whatever they want at the lowest possible price.²⁸ This applies to a merchandise in particular: “corn, the food of the great body of the people” (WN I.xi.b.12, p.166). In Smith’s days, even in the wealthy part of England, corn constituted “the principal part of the subsistence of the labourer” and “Butcher’s-meat, except in the most thriving countries, or where labour [was] most highly rewarded, [made] but an insignificant part of his subsistence”²⁹ (WN I.xi.e.29, pp.206-7). The

²⁶ The working class constitutes the “great body of the people” simply because they are more in number than the other classes, and their interest is general because of the same reason: “Servants, labourers and workmen of different kinds, make up the far greater part of every great political society. But what improves the circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as an inconveniency to the whole. No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable” (WN I.viii.36, p.96).

²⁷ “The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the publick. To widen the market and to narrow the competition, is always the interest of the dealers. To widen the market may frequently be agreeable enough to the interest of the publick; but to narrow the competition must always be against it, and can serve only to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens” (WN I.xi.p.10, p.266-7).

²⁸ Basically, this is Smith’s definition of opulence, one of the goals of police in his earlier economic writings: “That state is opulent where the necessaries and conveniencies of life are easily come at, whatever otherwise be its condition, and nothing else can deserve the name of opulence but this comeattibleness. That is, a state is opulent when by no great pains and a proper application of industry these things may be easily obtained; and this whether money or other things of that sort abound or not” (LJA vi.33-4, p.343). The notion of wealth, as defined in *Wealth*, changes this picture, especially by focusing on the revenue components of price (wage, profit, and rent), which allows Smith to articulate the three levels of interest: personal, class, and general (Brown, 1994, pp.168-70).

²⁹ Perhaps, this is the material basis of the fame peculiar to English people at that time. As the Scottish writer James Boswell writes in his London journal: “The Enemies of the People of England who would have them considered in the worst light, represent them as selfish – Beef-eaters, – and cruel. In this view I

market conditions of corn, being the most important agricultural product, were likewise part of the landowners' interest. It was such an exceptional good that even the merchants who dealt with it possessed an interest distinct of their class, converging with the general interest:

It is the interest of the people that their daily, weekly, and monthly consumption, should be proportioned as exactly as possible to the supply of the season. The interest of the inland corn dealer is the same. (WN IV.v.b.3, pp.524-5; cf. IV.v.b.38, p.538)

In addition to being the principal source of nourishment to the laboring class and the most important agricultural product, corn is also a perishable good whose production is subject to weather. Although a "production of human industry" (WN I.xi.e.28, p.206), corn growth was highly influenced by weather conditions. Good and bad harvests followed each other depending on the mood of the sky. The inland merchant had to take all this into account when setting his price:

If, by raising it too high, he discourages the consumption so much that the supply of the season is likely to go beyond the consumption of the season, and to last for some time after the next crop begins to come in, he runs the hazard, not only of losing a considerable part of his corn by natural causes, but of being obliged to sell what remains of it for much less than what he might have had for it several months before. If by not raising the price high enough he discourages the consumption so little, that the supply of the season is likely to fall short of the consumption, of the season, he not only loses a part of the profit which he might otherwise have made, but he exposes the people to suffer before the end of the season, instead of the hardships of a dearth, the dreadful horrors of a famine. (WN IV.v.b.3, p.524)

This merchant's "local situation" (WN IV.v.b.16, p.531), his "little department" (TMS VII.ii.1.39, p.290), supplies him with the needed information to achieve the best possible judgment concerning his sales:

By supplying them, as nearly as he can judge, in this proportion, he is likely to sell all his corn for the highest price, I and with the greatest profit; and his knowledge of the state of the crop, and of his daily, weekly, and monthly sales, enable him to judge with more or less accuracy, how far they really are supplied in this manner. (WN IV.v.b.3, p.525)

resolved today to be a true-born old-Englishman. I went to the City, to Dolly's Steak house in Pater-noster row and swallowed my dinner, by myself to fulfill the charge of selfishness; I had a large, fat, beef-steak to fulfill the charge of Beef-eating, and I went at five o'clock to the Royal Cock-pit in St. James's Park and saw a Cock-fighting for about five hours to fulfill the charge of Cruelty" (Boswell, 15 December 1761, 2010, p.46).

This merchant regulates the price of his goods according to harvest conditions, aiming to keep his stocks until the next harvest. In a time of shortage, he acts “pretty much in the same manner as the prudent master of a vessel is sometimes obliged to treat his crew. When he foresees that provisions are likely to run short, he puts them upon short allowance” (ibidem, p.525). The reference to prudence is extremely relevant: Just as a prudent person anticipates possible future states in order to regulate his present decision, the merchant, anticipating future dearth, raises the price of corn, forcing his consumers to buy less today, saving corn stocks for the future:

If he judges right, instead of hurting the great body of the people, he renders them a most important service. By making them feel the inconveniencies of a dearth somewhat earlier than they otherwise might do, he prevents their feeling them afterwards so severely as they certainly would do, if the cheapness of price encouraged them to consume faster than suited the real scarcity of the season. When the scarcity is real the best thing that can be done for the people is to divide the inconveniencies of it as equally as possible through all the different months, and weeks, and days of the year. The interest of the corn merchant makes him study to do this as exactly as he can; and as no other person can have either the same interest, or the same knowledge, or the same abilities to do it so exactly as he, this most important operation of commerce ought to be trusted entirely to him; or, in other words, the corn trade, so far at least as concerns the supply of the home-market, ought to be left perfectly free. (WN IV.v.b.25, p.533)

The merchant, as the “prudent master,” ends up providing for the whole population (especially the poorer ones, who have the hardest time substituting for corn goods). If he raises the price too high, he will suffer the greatest harm, as he will have to deal with consumers’ “indignation” over the high prices and also bear the losses that result from not selling his entire stock before the next harvest (WN IV.v.b.3, p.525). Instead of what claims a “popular prejudice,” this merchant simply cannot “engross and forestall” with his stock (WN IV.v.b.25-6, pp.533-4).

Any individual searching to better her condition, within the rules of justice and with fair play (TMS II.ii.2.1, p.83), acts as if driven by an invisible hand. However, there are more important trades according to the circumstances. The good performance of the corn merchant during a bad harvest, for instance, is able to prevent a dearth from becoming a famine. From a methodological point of view, the organicist’s understanding of social consumption superposes the (technological) understanding of production based on the firm. However, production prevails over consumption: The productive body is the

core of political economy.³⁰ Among the effects of the social division of labor is the division of the people into three classes: landowners, capitalists, and laborers. The division of labor concurs with the geographical and climate conditions in determining exceptional cases. The greater importance of the corn merchant is due to the importance of the good he trades, as was the case with wheat in England and France. In countries where rice production is predominant (“China or Indostan”), the role of rice merchants is different. Due to certain peculiarities of this good (especially the fact that there are three harvests per year), in those countries there is a “super-abundance of food” resulting in overpopulation (WN I.xi.g.28, p.223). Social consumption dynamics are essential but must always be analyzed together with what happens in production: “The most decisive mark of the prosperity of any country is the increase of the number of its inhabitants” (WN I.viii.23, pp.87-8). The population grows when the workers’ wages allow them to have families:

The liberal reward of labour, therefore, as it is the necessary effect, so it is the natural symptom of increasing national wealth. The scanty maintenance of the labouring poor, on the other hand, is the natural symptom that things are at a stand, and their starving condition that they are going fast backwards. (WN I.viii.27, p.91)

Finally, the figures of general interest (social order and cheap goods) are interconnected. Progress means more than simple economic growth, and the guarantee that the working class is able to obtain what they need is more than a sign of material welfare; it is a matter of justice:

It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged. (WN I.viii.36, p.96)

³⁰ “Notons que l’instauration de l’économie animale comme modèle formel de la discipline économique semble engager une rupture avec les images organiques, qui, par vertu analogique, parcouraient tout le discours mercantiliste. Tout se passe comme si la référence à l’économie animale s’accompagnait d’un déplacement de la métaphore vers la technique, l’outillage : l’argent n’est plus nerf ni sang, il devient roue ou huile qui fait avancer la roue. A une conception mécanique du corps social jouant sur la gamme des analogies physiologiques, se substitue une imagerie technologique” (Deleule, p.313, note 120). Approaching the trade of the economist with that of a physician was followed by the need of a new understanding of the rules and minutiae involved in the operations of the productive body. This new kind of knowledge resulted in a new science, named economics: “L’invention de l’économie, c’est d’abord un nouveau regard sur l’agriculture, précis, minutieux” (Larrère, 1992, p.183). Nevertheless, although relevant to the present discussion, it should be noted that the expressions *productive body* and *productive sphere* are not to be found in Smith’s work.

6. Species and character

Another apparently biological notion that plays an essential role in Smith's understanding of production is species. In *Wealth*, there are many references to the different "species" of work (WN I.i.5, p.17; I.viii.44, p.100), labor (WN I.vi.2-3, p.65; I.viii.14, p.85; several other occurrences), industry (WN I.vii.17, pp.75-6; I.x.c.18, p.141; several other occurrences), trade (WN IV.viii.40, p.657), business (WN I.ii.3, p.28), stock (WN V.ii.g.10, p.857), etc.³¹ In *Theory*, the term *species* also appears on several occasions: There are species of affections (TMS VII.ii.intro.1, p.266), beauty (TMS IV.1.title of the chapter, p.179; IV.2.3, p.188), perception (TMS IV.2.12, p.193), writing (TMS V.1.6, p.196), justice (TMS VII.ii.2.11, p.297), things (TMS V.1.8, pp.198-9), etc.

Such a varied use is inconsistent with a narrow sense of the term (such as the biological one). It points to a much broader sense, one that can only be epistemic:

In every body, therefore, whether simple or mixed, there were evidently two principles, whose combination constituted the whole nature of that particular body. The first was the Stuff, or Subject-matter, out of which it was made; the second was the Species, the Specific Essence, the Essential, or, as the schoolmen have called it, the Substantial Form of the Body. The first seemed to be the same in all bodies, and to have neither qualities nor powers of any kind, but to be altogether inert and imperceptible by any of the senses, till it was qualified and rendered sensible by its union with some species or essential form. (EPS, p.118)

Species is Smith's technical term for a group of objects all sharing the same characteristic, which differentiates them from other objects.

What constitutes a species is merely a number of objects, bearing a certain degree of resemblance to one another, and on that account denominated by a single appellation, which may be applied to express any one of them. (LRBL, p.205)

³¹ Smith speaks likewise of species of cultivation (WN I.xi.b.27, p.171), farmers (WN III.ii.11, p.389), tenants (WN III.ii.13, p.391), tenancy (WN III.ii.14, p.391), commerce as a species of contracts (WN I.ii.2, p.25), obligations (WN II.ii.67, p.309), property (WN II.iv.17, p.358), commodities (WN I.vii.17, p.76; I.xi.g.37, p.228), revenue (WN V.ii.j, title of the article, p.867; V.ii.e.10, p.844; several other occurrences), rent (WN V.i.g.22, p.801; V.ii.c.13, p.831), land-tax (WN V.ii.c.18, p.833), food (WN I.xi.b.7, p.164), clothing (WN I.xi.c.6, p.180), etc.

It is the middle ground between an individual's particularity and a substance's universality, allowing for scientific work in the natural field.³² It is the universal aspect grasped in immediate human sensorial experience:³³

Man is perpetually changing every particle of his body; and every thought of his mind is in continual flux and succession. But humanity, or human nature, is always existent, is always the same, is never generated, and is never corrupted. This, therefore, is the object of science, reason, and understanding, as man is the object of sense, and of those inconstant opinions which are founded upon sense. (EPS, p.120)

Species is the *humanity* in man and *catity* in cat, but also the *housety* in house, the *doority* in door, etc. It is what distinguishes the eighteen operations in pin making (WN I.i.3, p.15). It is what distinguishes one thing from another:

Every class of things has its own peculiar conformation, which is approved of, and has a beauty of its own, distinct from that of every other species. (...) When a number of drawings are made after one pattern, though they may all miss it in some respects, yet they will all resemble it more than they resemble one another; the general character of the pattern will run through them all; the most singular and odd will be those which are most wide of it; and though very few will copy it exactly, yet the most accurate delineations will bear a greater resemblance to the most careless, than the careless ones will bear to one another. In the same manner, in each species of creatures, what is most beautiful bears the strongest characters of the general fabric of the species, and has the strongest resemblance to the greater part of the individuals with which it is classed. Monsters, on the contrary, or what is perfectly deformed, are always most singular and odd, and have the least resemblance to the generality of that species to which they belong. (TMS V.1.8, pp.198-9)

³² "With what curious attention does a naturalist examine a singular plant, or a singular fossil, that is presented to him? He is at no loss to refer it to the general genus of plants or fossils; but this does not satisfy him, and when he considers all the different tribes or species of either with which he has hitherto been acquainted, they all, he thinks, refuse to admit the new object among them. It stands alone in his imagination, and as it were detached from all the other species of that genus to which it belongs. He labours, however, to connect it with some one or other of them. Sometimes he thinks it may be placed in this, and sometimes in that other assortment; nor is he ever satisfied, till he has fallen upon one which, in most of its qualities, it resembles. When he cannot do this, rather than it should stand quite by itself, he will enlarge the precincts, if I may say so, of some species, in order to make room for it; or he will create a new species on purpose to receive it, and call it a Play of Nature, or give it some other appellation, under which he arranges all the oddities that he knows not what else to do with. But to some class or other of known objects he must refer it, and betwixt it and them he must find out some resemblance or other, before he can get rid of that Wonder, that uncertainty and anxious curiosity excited by its singular appearance, observed" (EPS, pp.39-40).

³³ In language, the relation between species and individuals is mediated by two parts of speech, adjectives and prepositions: "When there was occasion, therefore, to mention any particular object, it often became necessary to distinguish it from the other objects comprehended under the same general name, either, first, by its peculiar qualities; or, secondly, by the peculiar relation which it stood in to some other things. Hence the necessary origin of two other sets of words, of which the one should express quality [i.e., adjectives]; the other, relation [i.e., prepositions]" (LRBL, p.205).

In moral philosophy, there is a term that plays the same role: *character*. It is a notion with at least two meanings. First, the character typifies, characterizes, and sets the differences in the moral field, not only between men (individual character) but also between virtue and vice, for instance (TMS III.1.7, p.113; VI.title of the part, p.212). Second, the character evokes the theatrical dimension of morality in two distinct but linked moments: The constitution of moral conscience depends on a person's ability to imagine herself "under the character" of both agent and spectator/judge (see 3.4), and moral practice depends on how the person is able to perform the character she builds for herself (see 3.6). The main difference between species and character is present in both these semantical fields:

To be amiable and to be meritorious; that is, to deserve love and to deserve reward, are the great characters of virtue; and to be odious and punishable, of vice. But all these characters have an immediate reference to the sentiments of others. (TMS III.1.7, p.113)

Obviously there is a connection between members of the same species (particularly visible in the reproductive process, without which no species would survive), but there is not an immediate reference to the other. A completely isolated individual remains a member of its species, but a human being cannot develop her character in isolation:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. (TMS III.1.3, p.110)

The social interaction of emotions and passions grounding morality is called sympathy (see 1.7). Together with actions, the character is the great object of our moral faculties, of our senses of propriety and merit.³⁴ In particular, the individual character is the object of the first moral judgments of any spectator, becoming the basis of self-judgment.³⁵ Obviously, a good individual character can be constructed only if the

³⁴ Smith presents them together on several occasions: "character and behaviour" (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62), "character and conduct" (TMS II.i.1.6, p.68; II.ii.3.10, p.90; several other occurrences), and "character and action" (TMS II.i.5.3, p.74; IV.2.title, p.187; several other occurrences).

³⁵ "In the same manner our first moral criticisms are exercised upon the characters and conduct of other people; and we are all very forward to observe how each of these affects us. But we soon learn, that other people are equally frank with regard to our own. We become anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause, and whether to them we must necessarily appear those agreeable or disagreeable creatures which they represent us. We begin, upon this account, to examine our own passions and conduct, and to consider how these must appear to them, by considering how they would appear to us if in their

individual has internalized an impartial spectator³⁶ (TMS III.2.3, p.114). If the character remains a product of imagination (like all morality), together with the sentiments, it is the most stable and solid of our imaginary constructions in the moral field (rules are products of reason):

When we denominate a character generous or charitable, or virtuous in any respect, we mean to signify that the disposition expressed by each of those appellations is the usual and customary disposition of the person. (TMS VII.ii.1.13, p.271)

Individual character plays a similar role to sentiments: a gravitational center responsible for ensuring stability. In order for sympathy to be possible, passions must be modulated (see 2.4). The same thing happens here:

The objects with which men in the different professions and states of life are conversant, being very different, and habituating them to very different passions, naturally form in them very different characters and manners. We expect in each rank and profession, a degree of those manners, which, experience has taught us, belong to it. But as in each species of things, we are particularly pleased with the middle conformation, which, in every part and feature, agrees most exactly with the general standard which nature seems to have established for things of that kind; so in each rank, or, if I may say so, in each species of men, we are particularly pleased, if they have neither too much, nor too little of the character which usually accompanies their particular condition and situation. (TMS V.2.4, p.201)

Besides individual profession and social rank, “The different situations of different ages and countries are apt, in the same manner, to give different characters to the generality of those who live in them.” They likewise determine “their sentiments concerning the particular degree of each quality, that is either blamable or praise-worthy” (TMS V.2.7, p.204). This “middle conformation” (TMS V.2.3, p.201)—which also determines the beauty of the non-moral³⁷—is the core of what Smith calls the “general

situation. We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct” (TMS III.1.5, p.112).

³⁶ Besides the internalization of an impartial spectator, the construction of a good character depends on the selection of the correct model to imitate, or better, emulate: “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; the one more gaudy and glittering in its colouring; the other more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline: the one forcing itself upon the notice of every wandering eye; the other, attracting the attention of scarce any body but the most studious and careful observer” (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62).

³⁷ “Every class of things has its own peculiar conformation, which is approved of, and has a beauty of its own, distinct from that of every other species. It is upon this account that a learned Jesuit, father Buffier, has determined that the beauty of every object consists in that form and colour, which is most usual among

style of character and behaviour,” a standard supplied by nature that no custom can entirely pervert:

All these effects of custom and fashion, however, upon the moral sentiments of mankind, are inconsiderable, in comparison of those which they give occasion to in some other cases; and it is not concerning the general style of character and behaviour, that those principles produce the greatest perversion of judgment, but concerning the propriety or impropriety of particular usages. (TMS V.2.12, p.209)

Just like the sentiments, the personal character is also under the influence of fortune, for better or worse. If good fortune offers a “character of splendour” to some actions and persons³⁸ (TMS VII.ii.1.32, p.286), lack of fortune brings with it social invisibility: Poor people must develop their moral character in order to be perceived.³⁹ Interestingly, the irregularity of sentiment, the way fortune influences moral judgments, is the greatest source of corruption at the same time that it is useful for keeping social order (TMS II.iii.3, pp.104-8). If the moralist has no other option than to sharpen his rhetorical tools, attempting to exhort his readers on the path of virtue, the philosopher must analyze both plans, sympathy and utility (TMS VI.ii.1.20, p.225-6), especially concerning characters.

things of that particular sort to which it belongs. Thus, in the human form, the beauty of each feature lies in a certain middle, equally removed from a variety of other forms that are ugly. A beautiful nose, for example, is one that is neither very long, nor very short, neither very straight, nor very crooked, but a sort of middle among all these extremes, and less different from any one of them, than all of them are from one another. It is the form which Nature seems to have aimed at in them all, which, however, she deviates from in a great variety of ways, and very seldom hits exactly; but to which all those deviations still bear a very strong resemblance” (TMS V.1.8, p.198). What Smith does not accept in Claude Buffier’s work is how he grounds this beauty in custom: “Such is the system of this learned and ingenious Father, concerning the nature of beauty; of which the whole charm, according to him, would thus seem to arise from its falling in with the habits which custom had impressed upon the imagination, with regard to things of each particular kind. I cannot, however, be induced to believe that our sense even of external beauty is founded altogether on custom. The utility of any form, its fitness for the useful purposes for which it was intended, evidently recommends it, and renders it agreeable to us, independent of custom” (TMS V.1.9, p.199).

³⁸ Cicero’s better writing vis-à-vis Caesar lent this “character of splendour” to Cato’s suicide (TMS VII.ii.1.32, p.286). It is a matter of fortune because if Caesar were the better writer, this character would not be associated with this kind of death. Smith also uses the term *splendid characters* to qualify Alexander the Great and Caesar (TMS VI.iii.30, p.253) and, more interestingly for our purposes, to qualify the way fortune affects those who actually possess it: “We frequently, not only pardon, but thoroughly enter into and sympathize with the excessive self-estimation of those splendid characters in which we observe a great and distinguished superiority above the common level of mankind” (TMS VI.iii.33, p.255).

³⁹ A point with important political consequences is that only someone independent can properly judge a character: “Are you in prosperity? Do not confine the enjoyment of your good fortune to your own house, to the company of your own friends, perhaps of your flatterers, of those who build upon your fortune the hopes of mending their own; frequent those who are independent of you, who can value you only for your character and conduct, and not for your fortune” (TMS III.3.40, p.154).

7. Who thinks abstractly?

Hume's mistake about the beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility might be more easily circumscribed from the way people judge the character, especially that of virtue.⁴⁰ It is undeniable that "THE characters of men, as well as the contrivances of art, or the institutions of civil government" possess a beauty when seen as means "to promote (...) the happiness both of the individual and of the society" (TMS IV.2.1, p.187). There is nothing wrong with saying that utility pleases and therefore it is an important source of moral approbation, even if only one among others. Hume himself noted that there are other possibilities: "(...) some qualities produce pleasure, because they are useful to society, or useful or agreeable to the person himself; others Produce it more immediately (...)" (EPM VIII, footnote to the title, p.261). However, Hume appears to retain solely the utility perceptions in his moral theory. The main confusion of his moral philosophy becomes clear⁴¹: He mistook this utility approbation mechanism for sympathy:

These are some instances of the several species of merit that are valued for the immediate pleasure which they communicate to the person possessed of them. No views of utility or of future beneficial consequences enter into this sentiment of approbation; yet is it of a kind similar to that other sentiment which arises from views of a public or private utility. The same social sympathy, we may observe, or fellow-feeling with human happiness or misery, gives rise to both; and this, analogy, in all the parts of the present theory, may justly be regarded as a confirmation of it.⁴² (EPM VII.29, p.260)

⁴⁰ Smith clearly refers to Hume: "The same ingenious and agreeable author who first explained why utility pleases, has been so struck with this view of things, as to resolve our whole approbation of virtue into a perception of this species of beauty which results from the appearance of utility. No qualities of the mind, he observes, are approved of as virtuous, but such as are useful or agreeable either to the person himself or to others; and no qualities are disapproved of as vicious but such as have a contrary tendency" (TMS IV.2.3, p.188).

⁴¹ This is Smith's general criticism of Hume's moral philosophy, mistaking the beauty of utility for propriety and merit: "There is another system [i.e., Hume's] which attempts to account for the origin of our moral sentiments from sympathy, distinct from that which I have been endeavouring to establish. It is that which places virtue in utility, and accounts for the pleasure with which the spectator surveys the utility of any quality from sympathy with the happiness of those who are affected by it. This sympathy is different both from that by which we enter into the motives of the agent, and from that by which we go along with the gratitude of the persons who are benefited by his actions. It is the same principle with that by which we approve of a well-contrived machine. But no machine can be the object of either of those two last mentioned sympathies. I have already, in the fourth part of this discourse, given some account of this system" (TMS VII.iii.3.17, p.327).

⁴² The same mistake can be seen in the *Treatise* chapter dealing with how we esteem rich people: "Besides, if we consider the nature of that faculty [i.e., imagination], and the great influence which all relations have upon it, we shall easily be persuaded, that however the ideas of the pleasant wines, music, or gardens, which the rich man enjoys, may become lively and agreeable, the fancy will not confine itself to them, but will carry its view to the related objects; and in particular, to the person, who possesses them. And this is

Again, the problem is a poorly constructed analogy. For Smith, there is no similitude between sympathy and this mechanism of utility approbation: “It is to be observed, that so far as the sentiment of approbation arises from the perception of this beauty of utility, it has no reference of any kind to the sentiments of others” (TMS IV.2.12, p.192). The beauty bestowed by the appearance of utility supplies us with a non-sympathetic kind of moral approbation. The beauty of utility is structured in a predominantly cognitive and rational manner, linking means and ends, actions and consequences, around the notion of advantage:

If it was possible, therefore, that a person should grow up to manhood without any communication with society, his own actions might, notwithstanding, be agreeable or disagreeable to him on account of their tendency to his happiness or disadvantage. He might perceive a beauty of this kind in prudence, temperance, and good conduct, and a deformity in the opposite behaviour: he might view his own temper and character with that sort of satisfaction with which we consider a well-contrived machine, in the one case; or with that sort of distaste and dissatisfaction with which we regard a very awkward and clumsy contrivance, in the other. (TMS IV.2.12, pp.192-3)

Seeking his own interest, a completely isolated person might approve certain behaviors due to this beauty accruing from the good adjustment between means and ends. Smith claims that the original feature of his moral philosophy is to show the importance of this mechanism “both in the most frivolous and in the most important concerns of human life” (TMS IV.1.3, p.180). From the lovers of useful or useless “trinkets” or “baubles” (TMS IV.1.5-6, p.180) to the patriot who sacrifices himself in the name of his country (TMS IV.1.11, p.185), from the ambitious person (TMS IV.1.8-9, pp.181-3) to the liberal sovereign (TMS IV.1.11, pp.185-7), from the man of system (TMS VI.ii.2.17, pp.233-4) to the “great mob of mankind” admiring and worshipping “wealth and

the more natural, that the pleasant idea or image produces here a passion towards the person, by means of his relation to the object; so that 'tis unavoidable but he must enter into the original conception, since he makes the object of the derivative passion. But if he enters into the original conception, and is consider'd as enjoying these agreeable objects, 'tis sympathy, which is properly the cause of the affection (...)" (THN 2.2.5.5, p.359). The following paragraph reaffirms that the beauty of utility is replaced by sympathy: “riches and power alone, even tho' unemploy'd, naturally cause esteem and respect. And consequently these passions arise not from the idea of any beautiful or agreeable objects.” Although it views money as an object with the power of obtaining many agreeable objects, this perception does not, on its own, beget moral approbation, being necessary to resort to sympathy: “'Tis true; money implies a kind of representation of such objects, by the power it affords of obtaining them; and for that reason may still be esteem'd proper to convey those agreeable images, which may give rise to the passion. But as this prospect is very distant, 'tis more natural for us to take a contiguous object, viz. the satisfaction, which this power affords the person, who is possess of it” (THN 2.2.5.6, p.359). Now, because of the greater distance between the prospect of acquiring objects that can be bought and the real satisfaction of their owner, beauty of utility is once again referred to as sympathy. Smith reads this in the opposite direction, as a reduction of sympathy to the kind of aesthetic approbation generated by the beauty of utility.

greatness” in a disinterested manner (TMS I.iii.3.2, p.62), the beauty of utility sustains the commercial social order. From conspicuous consumption (TMS IV.1.6, p.180) to social hierarchy (TMS I.iii.2.3, p.52), from moral sentiments corruption (TMS I.iii.3.1, p.61) to the “industry of mankind” (TMS IV.1.9, p.183), the illusion involved in this confusion between means and ends, between utility’s appearance and its concrete advantages, supports commercial society as a whole. Fortune is grounded in this theoretical mistake Smith’s philosophy claims to offer the means to untangle, not because he was the first to see the role of utility in social life but because he was the first to isolate and analyze its overvaluation:

This beauty and deformity which characters appear to derive from their usefulness or inconveniency, are apt to strike, in a peculiar manner, those who consider, in an abstract and philosophical light, the actions and conduct of mankind. When a philosopher goes to examine why humanity is approved of, or cruelty condemned, he does not always form to himself, in a very clear and distinct manner, the conception of any one particular action either of, cruelty or of humanity, but is commonly contented with the vague and indeterminate idea which the general names of those qualities suggest to him. But it is in particular instances only that the propriety or impropriety, the merit or demerit of actions is very obvious and discernible. It is only when particular examples are given that we perceive distinctly either the concord or disagreement between our own affections and those of the agent, or feel a social gratitude arise towards him in the one case, or a sympathetic resentment in the other. (TMS IV.2.2, pp.187-8)

Hume’s mistake (and the problem with utilitarian theories in general) consists of analyzing character in an abstract manner, separated from concrete situations. The “great mob’s” mistake while observing wealth and greatness lies in judging this principle without abstracting it from a concrete situation:

When we consider the condition of the great, in those delusive colours in which the imagination is apt to paint it, it seems to be almost the abstract idea of a perfect and happy state. It is the very state which, in all our waking dreams and idle reveries, we had sketched out to ourselves as the final object of all our desires. We feel, therefore, a peculiar sympathy with the satisfaction of those who are in it. (TMS I.iii.2.2, pp.51-2)

The peculiarity of this sympathy with the fortunate involves taking a concrete situation as the abstract idea of happiness. It is grounded in a poorly built abstraction that does not correctly separate the cognitive from the affective. The difference between the concerned view from a sympathetic spectator and the interested view from an agent is simple: Sympathy is a matter of affection, and interest is a matter of cognition. This

difference remains to their respective denials: Impartiality must be understood predominantly in the affective field, disinterestedness in the cognitive. Nothing hinders one to conceive an interest impartiality (the ideal position for a judge, for instance) or a disinterested partiality (someone who admires the leader of a party but despises his rival). The peculiarity of this sympathy toward the rich and powerful is a sort of contamination from the cognitive perspective, from utilitarian considerations. Correct sympathy always aims at a particular individual in a concrete situation⁴³ (TMS II.ii.3.10, pp.89-90). For Smith, sympathy is not the result of association of ideas but of an imaginary (re)construction of a situation.⁴⁴ Thus, in a way, the general mistake of all utilitarianism consists of not respecting the irreducible affective elements presents in morality, in reducing affection to cognition, a kind of knowledge that landowners and the working class do not easily achieve.⁴⁵ This kind of critique of utilitarian reason allows Smith⁴⁶ to see both the mistake of utilitarian systems (taking the affective for the cognitive), and the confusion involved in the improper attribution of an abstract idea of happiness to a particular situation, this “deception” that “rouses and keep in motion all the industry of mankind” (TMS IV.1.10, p.183).

8. Survival and speculation

⁴³ “Moral judgement is a particular judgement, not a general and typifying judgement” (1981, p.69). In a way, neither Hume nor the “great mob” distinguishes or sustains the separation between what he calls “contextual knowledge” and “system knowledge”: Contextual knowledge “is the kind of concrete knowledge which arises from specific situations and which gives rise to common-sense ideas of behavior wherever people live together. It concerns the immediate circumstances of individual actions, and it almost automatically gives rise to an evaluation. In contrast to this, system knowledge is the understanding of things, events, or persons in some sort of functional relationship to a greater ‘whole’ or system – or the understanding of all the elements in such a system” (1981, p.79).

⁴⁴ There is nothing wrong with Hume’s explanation: “When we approach a man, who is, as we say, at his ease, we are presented with the pleasing ideas of plenty, satisfaction, cleanliness, warmth; a cheerful house, elegant furniture, ready service, and whatever desirable in meat, drink, or apparel. On the contrary, when a poor man appears, the disagreeable images of want, penury, hard labour, dirty furniture, coarse or ragged clothes, nauseous meat or distasteful liquor, immediately strike our fancy. What else do we mean by saying that one is rich, the other poor?” (EPM VIII.33, pp.247-8). What Smith does not accept is calling it sympathy. As Haakonssen points out: “Hume’s explanation is in terms of the chain of association. Smith uses the broader ‘imagination’” (1981, p.48).

⁴⁵ There is a second aspect of the great mob’s disinterested admiration of wealth and greatness: It requires distance from the object of its judgment, not the sort of emotional detachment supposed by impartiality but an empirical separation: Expensive objects must be permanently outside their reach. The unequal distribution of fortune (the material condition of the principle of authority) also ensures this condition: Poor people are permanently separated from the “oeconomy of greatness.”

⁴⁶ No sentido kantiano do termo, de ciência que determina os limites e a extensão de determinado tipo de conhecimento (Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Einleitung III, B6-10; A2-6).

One of the main problems with the notions of utility, advantage, and interest is that they are cognitive, involving reasoning too complex to become the basis of morality. It is not possible to say that Hume did not offer a solution to this problem. Although we cannot “pretend to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature” or to “explain the ultimate principles of human soul” (THN Introduction.8-9, p.xvii), his science of human nature requires that some hypotheses concerning these objects are formulated.⁴⁷ Probably the most important of these hypotheses is employed under the notions of custom and habit:

Suppose a person, though endowed with the strongest faculties of reason and reflection, to be brought on a sudden into this world; he would, indeed, immediately observe a continual succession of objects, and one event following another; but he would not be able to discover anything farther. He would not, at first, by any reasoning, be able to reach the idea of cause and effect; since the particular powers, by which all natural operations are performed, never appear to the senses; nor is it reasonable to conclude, merely because one event, in one instance, precedes another, that therefore the one is the cause, the other the effect. (...) Suppose, again, that he has acquired more experience, and has lived so long in the world as to have observed familiar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together; what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not, by all his experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other; nor is it, by any process of reasoning, he is engaged to draw this inference. But still he finds himself determined to draw it: And though he should be convinced that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue in the same course of thinking. There is some other principle which determines him to form such a conclusion. This principle is Custom or Habit. (EHU V.i.3-5, pp.46-7)

This long passage clearly shows that habit and custom supply causal inferences without the intervention of reason. Causality is produced in an instinctive manner: “All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent” (EHU V.i.8, pp.36-7).

⁴⁷ Is there another way of keeping the hope of “discover[ing], at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations?” (EHU I.9, p.14). “For to me it seems evident, that the essence of the mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations. And tho’ we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, ’tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical” (THN Introduction.8, p.xvii). For more about the role of these hypotheses regarding the field of experience understood as what is observable, see Monteiro (2009, pp.25-68).

Connecting habit to instinct allows Hume to understand it as a condition necessary to our survival: “Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life”⁴⁸ (EHU V.ii, p.55).

For Smith, our ability to form causal chains is closely linked to prudence and is the product of our intellectual faculties:

The qualities most useful to ourselves are, first of all, superior reason and understanding, by which we are capable of discerning the remote consequences of all our actions, and of foreseeing the advantage or detriment which is likely to result from them (...). (TMS IV.2.6, p.189; cf. VI.i.7, p.213)

Smith employs Humean language with the explicit goal of refuting his metaphysics.⁴⁹ The association of ideas is grounded in reason and understanding, not in habit or custom. These are always posterior, confirming (or perverting) our natural sense of propriety: “When there is any natural propriety in the union, custom increases our sense of it, and makes a different arrangement appear still more disagreeable than it would otherwise seem to be” (TMS V.1.2, p.194; V.2.2, p.200). There are cases where this is evident (TMS V.2.5, p.203) and others where this “is not so obvious,” in which someone’s behavior surprises and perplexes spectators (TMS V.2.6, p.203). Smith’s conclusion remains the same in all cases: Custom can only alter particular cases where our moral faculties are applied, never their general operations (TMS V.2.14, p.209). To prove it, he resorts to a kind of reasoning also employed by Hume and later associated with natural selection⁵⁰: “No society could subsist a moment, in which the usual strain of men’s conduct and behaviour was of a piece with the horrible practice [i.e., infanticide] I have just now mentioned” (TMS V.2.16, p.211). Alongside the principles of bettering one’s condition and resentment, nature also implanted the care for children (a beneficence principle) to ensure the survival of our species:

⁴⁸ See Monteiro (2009, pp.107-34) and Suzuki (2014, pp.198-212).

⁴⁹ “[S]uperior reason and understanding are originally approved of as just and right and accurate, and not merely as useful or advantageous. It is in the abstruser sciences, particularly in the higher parts of mathematics, that the greatest and most admired exertions of human reason have been displayed. But the utility of those sciences, either to the individual or to the public, is not very obvious, and to prove it, requires a discussion which is not always very easily comprehended. It was not, therefore, their utility which first recommended them to the public admiration. This quality was but little insisted upon, till it became necessary to make some reply to the reproaches of those, who, having themselves no taste for such sublime discoveries, endeavoured to depreciate them as useless” (TMS IV.2.7, p.189).

⁵⁰ See Monteiro (2009, pp.107-133).

Nature, for the wisest purposes, has rendered, in most men, perhaps in all men, parental tenderness a much stronger affection than filial piety. The continuance and propagation of the species depend altogether upon the former, and not upon the latter. In ordinary cases, the existence and preservation of the child depend altogether upon the care of the parents. (TMS III.3.13, p.142; cf VI.ii.1.3, p.219)

Societies subsist despite absurd customs (and/or rules) because human nature is resilient enough to resist such arbitrary interferences (WN II.iii.31, p.343). In Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Philo resorts to reasoning such as this:

It is in vain, therefore, to insist upon the uses of the parts in animals or vegetables, and their curious adjustment to each other. I would fain know, how an animal could subsist, unless its parts were so adjusted? Do we not find, that it immediately perishes whenever this adjustment ceases, and that its matter corrupting tries some new form? It happens indeed, that the parts of the world are so well adjusted, that some regular form immediately lays claim to this corrupted matter: and if it were not so, could the world subsist? Must it not dissolve as well as the animal, and pass through new positions and situations, till in great, but finite succession, it falls at last into the present or some such order? (DNR VIII, p.185)

This kind of reasoning supports the most fascinating aspect of Hume's habit—that of ensuring the harmony between the world and our ideas (EHU V.ii.21, p.54-5). This is why custom is “the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us (...)” (EHU V.i.6, p.44). Philo's *a posteriori* reasoning supports this conclusion: If it were not so, humankind would have perished already. Smith employs the same reasoning to support his metaphysical hypotheses: Human action is driven by appetites and passions (selfish, unsociable, and sociable) and regulated by sympathy. His refusal of Hume's explanations for custom (and of other hypotheses, such as impressions as the fundamental perceptions, justice as an artificial virtue, etc.)⁵¹ does not imply the resurrection of any sort of substantialist metaphysics but instead suggests the need for new explanatory hypotheses around the same facts. Human beings are still alive not because they infer in an instinctive manner, as other animals do (EHU IX.5, p.106; V.ii.21, p.55), but because, as agents, they are naturally prudent, just, and benevolent; they permanently aim to “better their condition” (WN II.iii.28, p.341), resent injuries suffered (TMS II.i.5.10, p.77), and take care of their offspring (TMS III.3.13, p.142), and, as spectators, they spontaneously approve the manifestations of these instincts. If we remember that such passions will only be approved if they are “reflected passions” (TMS

⁵¹ This also applies to his denial of Hutcheson's most important metaphysical hypothesis: the moral sense as a peculiar faculty.

I.i.4.8, p.22)—meaning the agent takes into account the spectator’s vantage point—we will see that “Nature (...) acts here, as in all other cases, with the strictest oeconomy, and produces a multitude of effects from one and the same cause; (...) sympathy (...)” (TMS VII.iii.3.3, p.321).

Thus, it is no accident that Smith’s *Inquiry* (*Wealth* full title is *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*) follows the model of Hume’s two *Enquiries*, forbidding further speculation concerning final causes:

Whether this propensity [to truck, barter, and exchange] be one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given; or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech, it belongs not to our present subject to enquire.⁵² (WN I.ii.2, p.25)

Just like custom in Hume, the two explanatory hypotheses about the causes of wealth refer, one, to the natural sociability of men (principle of exchanging) and, two, to instinct and survival (principle of bettering one’s condition):

The uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which publick and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived, is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things toward improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government, and of the greatest errors of administration. Like the unknown principle of animal life, it frequently restores health and vigour to the constitution, in spite, not only of the disease, but of the absurd prescriptions of the doctor. (WN II.iii.31, p.343)

Even his reappraisal of final causes takes place only when there are two causes (or sets of causes) acting in opposite directions: The regularity of sentiments demands that merit be esteemed; their irregularity ensures that we esteem fortune. It is only when nature’s operations are not evident that the philosopher must intervene with rational explanations: Resentment is useful to individuals and society because it becomes dangerous to offend (TMS II.ii.3, pp.85-91), inequality of fortune is useful to the social order because it guarantees the authority of those in charge (TMS II.iii.3, pp.104-8), and rules are useful because they make the decision-making process easier and can help in the natural course of society (TMS III.4, pp.156-61). In most cases, to explain the utility of

⁵² Compare with the following passage of the first *Enquiry*: “By employing that word [i.e., Custom], we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity. We only point out a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects, Perhaps we can push our enquiries no farther, or pretend to give the cause of this cause; but must rest contented with it as the ultimate principle, which we can assign, of all our conclusions from experience” (EHU V.i.5, p.43).

our moral faculties or the virtues is superfluous, besides inducing us to commit the sort of mistake between means and ends utilitarian philosophers do. After all, if human nature were not well built in the sense of ensuring our survival (which necessarily implies the existence of societies, given that we are social animals), we simply would not be here anymore.

Conclusion

The core of Adam Smith's moral philosophy is the senses of propriety and merit, our moral faculties. In the description of how these internal senses work we found the metaphysical foundation of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: imagination, both in its regular and irregular operations. And there is enough evidence to show that the irregularity of sentiments prevails over the regularity, starting with imagination's nature: It is the expansive ability of our mind, the projective faculty of the human soul. In this sense, the search for propriety is nothing more than a search for the boundaries imposed by a particular situation, the convenience concerning the circumstances. As a principle of adequacy, propriety has no a priori determinations. This principle is capable of preserving individuality, but its work of reflection requires time and effort to bring results, unlike reason, whose rules determine duty instantaneously: Once the situation is determined to be a particular case of the general rule, one immediately knows what to do. Whether the rule was well formed and whether one chooses the correct rule regarding the situation are, once again, questions of propriety.

The most interesting problems with Smith's moral philosophy are built upon the relationship between imagination and the passage of time, concerning both the individual (self-deceit or self-command) and society as a whole (the role of fortune). Grounding these questions, imagination's expansive features can be analyzed under the affective or the cognitive aspects. There are partial projections, like those constantly made upon family and friends. There are impartial projections, like that of a moral subject whose conscience is built according to the theater-tribunal metaphor. There are particular projections, such as that of a child who resents the stone on which he stumbled, or of a person who cherishes an individual treasure. Finally, there are abstract projections, like that of the mob disinterestedly admiring wealth, power, and success—abstractions that are at the core of the illusion that both corrupts and organizes society according to the order of fortune. The progress of the order of fortune requires very little from the authorities, only that they do not suppress human nature. Therefore, it is a natural illusion, in the double sense of necessity and spontaneity, because it is the result of the sound and healthy operations of our imagination.

This is the context of the opposition Smith establishes between times of "better health and better humour" and times of "sickness or low spirits" (TMS IV.1.9, p.183), or

between a natural “sound and healthful state” and melancholy, “a disease to which human nature (...) is unhappily subject” (TMS VII.ii.1.34, p.287). Now and then, everybody sees the world according to that “splenetic philosophy” melancholy begets (TMS IV.1.8, pp.182-3), but Smith insists that this state is momentary.¹ The most common experience is the result of the healthy confusion between real and imaginary satisfactions, that “complex view, which strikes the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble”² (TMS IV.1.9, p.183).

This is a lesson the young James Boswell appears to have learned (either through his classes with Professor Smith or by reading *Theory* in one of its first two editions).³ As he points out in his journals, Boswell possessed a melancholy temperament, the result of a crisis he suffered when he was 17 years old and that branded his character for good (2010, pp.37-8). In order to compensate for his splenetic worldview, he decided to actively intervene to reach what most of humankind achieved spontaneously. Perhaps the

¹ “Let us suppose that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connexion with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all, express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people, he would make many melancholy reflections upon the precariousness of human life, and the vanity of all the labours of man, which could thus be annihilated in a moment. He would too, perhaps, if he was a man of speculation, enter into many reasonings concerning the effects which this disaster might produce upon the commerce of Europe, and the trade and business of the world in general. And when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his repose or his diversion, with the same ease and tranquillity, as if no such accident had happened” (TMS III.3.4, p.136).

² It is interesting to note that if political economy became known as the “dismal science” during the nineteenth century, it was despite Smith’s theory. As was seen, at the basis of economic behavior (prudence) lies this “complex view” ensuring that the quest for wealth and power is “well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it” (TMS IV.1.9, p.183). Besides Smith, only Karl Marx gave due attention to this phenomenon, with his criticism of the fetishism of merchandise. The main difference between their theories concerning this aspect of commercial life is that to Smith, the power of fortune is grounded in the natural and healthy operations of human imagination, and therefore a natural illusion that can only be regulated on an individual level. To Marx, the origin of the enchantment is the form of merchandise that the products of labor acquire when produced under capitalistic conditions. Therefore, we have a social and historical question, one that it might be possible to overcome. Marx links this illusion to Smith’s diagnosis concerning the deepening of the division of labor and one of its effects: the simplification of specialized labor, a simplification that is read as a process of abstraction operating in the concrete reality of social life (and not as a mental process). In Marx’s view, it is this real abstraction that haunts the capitalistic world, the social life organized by the form of merchandise. Smith remains with the classics: The abstraction haunting society is the result of an imaginary projection, of the overestimation of utilitarian consideration poorly located, unrelated directly to subdivided and specialized labor (excepting the fact that they produce the goods that receive this imaginary investment).

³ From 1759 to 1760, the Scottish writer James Boswell (1740-95) was a student at Glasgow University, where he attended Smith’s classes and admired him as a teacher. He did not finish the school year but instead went to London in May 1760. In 1762-63, he returned to England’s capital aiming to become an Officer in the Royal Guards. He did not succeed, and returned to Edinburgh in June 1763, but not before meeting Samuel Johnson, the subject of his most famous work, and writing a journal of his trip. From this journal I took the passages quoted here. For more about the relationship between Smith and Boswell, see Dankert (1974, pp.89-122). I owe the advice to read these journals to Nicholas Phillipson.

most interesting aspect of his formulations is the way he chooses to present them: as a conflict between two kinds of characters, each one personified by a friend—the stoic indifference of Captain Andrew Erskine and the enthusiasm of Sir James Macdonald. Here is the report of a conversation he held with the latter about the former:

When he heard Erskine's sentiments which by the by are much my own, and which I mentioned just to see what he would say – He was perfectly stunned. Why said he – he must not be a man. He is unfit to live in human society. He is not of the Species. (ibidem, p.39)

Macdonald's wonder is indicative of his way of seeing the world: Being indifferent to everything is inhuman; Erskine can only be of another species.⁴ If Boswell's temperament is closer to Erskine's, he knows that Macdonald's position is also proper, and to achieve it, he must employ a lot of artifice:

Ah! thought I, little do you know of how small duration the pleasure is of making one of these great figures, that now swell before your ambitious imagination. Yet I do think it is a happiness to have an object in view which one keenly follows. I am determined to have a degree of Erskine's indifference, to make me easy when things go cross; and a degree of Macdonald's eagerness for real life, to make me relish things when they go well. (...) The great art I have to study is to balance these two very different ways of thinking properly. It is very difficult to be keen about a thing which in reality You do not regard & consider as imaginary. (ibidem)

Between two equally proper worldviews (melancholy and ambition), Boswell's option is a kind of compromise that demands that art support nature: To complete his humanity he must compensate for his lack of enthusiasm for the world of fortune. As he would not naturally glimpse the imaginary aura that involves fortune, he pretends to be caught in the utilitarian illusion.⁵ However, once again, the road here is ambiguous: It is not impossible that Smith would consider Boswell just another “hypocrite of wealth and greatness”⁶ (TMS I.iii.3.7, p.64).

⁴ Another of Boswell's friends states something similar: “such people [as Erskine] said he must have diseased minds” (2010, p.52).

⁵ “With these notions I am pushing to get into the Guards, where to distinguish myself as a good officer & to get Promotion will be my favorite objects” (Boswell, 2010, pp.39-40).

⁶ “There appears to be no evidence that Smith and Boswell ever discussed the question of individual morality and behavior, with reference to Boswell himself. One can imagine, however, that the great economist and moral philosopher would not have endorsed the libertine actions of his younger countryman” (Dankert, 1974, p.97).

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