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# COSMOS + TAXIS

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# COSMOS + TAXIS

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## Introduction to a Symposium on Jack Russell Weinstein's *Adam Smith's Pluralism: Rationality, Education, and the Moral Sentiments*

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**Bio-sketch:** Nathaniel Wolloch is an independent Israeli scholar specializing in intellectual history, with an emphasis on early modern history and the long eighteenth century, the history of attitudes toward nature and animals, the history of historiography, and the history of economic thought. He has published various articles and also two books *Subjugated Animals: Animals and Anthropocentrism in Early Modern European Culture* (Humanity Books, 2006) and *History and Nature in the Enlightenment: Praise of the Mastery of Nature in Eighteenth-Century Historical Literature* (Ashgate, 2011). His main recent research project has centered on the history of attitudes toward nature in economic literature.

When the first installment of the Glasgow Edition of the works of Adam Smith appeared in 1976, Smith's reputation as the founder of modern liberal economics was already well-established. Yet the perception of liberal economics, and of Smith himself, was then conceived in the neo-classical perspective, centering on the promotion of economic self-interest as the prime motivator of human deliberation in modern free societies. This approach sidelined Smith's "un-economic" works, primarily the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in favor of an emphasis on the significance of the *Wealth of Nations*. In the four decades since, our understanding of Smith has, however, undergone a fundamental shift. This has not only led to increasing attention to his various works, most significantly the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but also to a re-evaluation of the *Wealth of Nations*, and an increasing understanding of the general (though not always systematic) unity of his philosophical project. What used to be termed the "Adam Smith Problem," is now considered either an obsolete approach, or else a bridge to a new comprehension of this unity. This interpretative approach, which notwithstanding other disagreements is shared by almost all Smith scholars today, has led to a new understanding of the significance of Smith for the formation of modern liberal societies. It would not be an exaggeration to see a correlation between the socio-economic problems evident in contemporary democracies, and what is broadly considered as a fundamental miscomprehension of Smith's ideas increasingly discredited by current scholarship. Does this mean that the long-standing erroneous understand of Smith was responsible for the emergence of the problems of modern economies?

That would be an overstatement. Yet it seems intellectually sound to see the current, more integrative reconsideration of Smith's ideas, as one possible source for better comprehending, and perhaps even ameliorating, modern liberalism.

It is with this in mind that Jack Russell Weinstein's new book, *Adam Smith's Pluralism: Rationality, Education, and the Moral Sentiments*, should be read. Rather than centering on an intellectual-history discussion of Smith per se, Weinstein openly declares his intention of utilizing a thorough analysis of Smith to reinvigorate modern liberalism. The result is a wide-ranging discussion of Smith's ideas, including both reassessments of well-known topics such as the Invisible Hand, and discussions of lesser-studied topics, primarily Smith's philosophy of education. The articles in the present forum highlight various aspects of this wide-ranging project, yet before considering these, a general overview of the book is in order.

In the Introduction Weinstein presents the main underlying assumptions of his account of Smith's pluralism as a prefiguration of modern theories of diversity. He rejects the notion of the Adam Smith Problem, instead identifying an essential unity in Smith's works, in which a particular account of human rationality lies at the base of his moral psychology and political economy. Furthermore, pluralism and rationality are interconnected in Smith in large part due to their connection to the human capacity to be educated. Smith's intricate aspects of rationality are altered and cultivated through education and group identity. The individual in Smith's outlook is more than just *homo economicus*. This leads to Weinstein's perception of a contiguity of liberalism

and pluralism in Smith, and the consequent need for a theory of education to solidify liberalism and citizenship. These perceptions underline the two parts of the book, the first (chapters 1-7), centering on Smith's definition of rationality, and the second (chapters 8-11), on the means to improve the judgments that result from rational deliberation.

The first chapter discusses Smith's notion of pluralism and how it relates to rational deliberation in the context of social otherness. This is followed by a discussion of Bernard Mandeville and Smith on self-interest. Chapter 2 continues with a discussion of the influence of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson on Smith. The former's notion of soliloquy is related to Smith's impartial spectator. The latter developed a concept of moral sense governing social interactions. Weinstein continues with a critique of the famous idea of an Adam Smith Problem. In contrast, he sees the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as the foundational work of Smith, with later works, principally the *Wealth of Nations*, elaborating specific aspects of human behavior treated more generally in this earlier work.

Chapter 3 presents a sophisticated discussion of Smith's notion of sympathy, emphasizing how human beings develop sympathy by living together and through acquired forms of imagination and decision-making, hence the significance of education for Smith. This is followed in chapter 4 by a discussion not of institutional education, but rather of education as socialization, the development of group identity, and the ability to balance various associations in a pluralistic society. Smithian sympathy is related to the observation of others, and is augmented in tandem with rational capabilities. The more informed individuals are, the greater their ability to overcome social differences, hence the importance of education. In this context Weinstein discusses Smith's critique of slavery, and his less acute critique of gender differences. This important chapter ends with a discussion of the significance of education for the development of moral judgment and familiarity with others, specifically for the laboring classes in the conditions of the division of labor in modern industrial societies. This last point of course is well-known to Smith scholars, but Weinstein puts it in a new context, specifically regarding Smith's ideas on education.

Chapter 5 discusses Smith's theory of rationality. The influence of earlier philosophers, and the emphasis on rhetoric, led Smith to regard moral deliberation, despite its passionate nature, as a rational process. Emotions and rationality are not separate for Smith. Like others in the early modern era, Smith rejected Aristotelian syllogistic logic in favor of a wider conception of reason. This led him to emphasize rhet-

oric over logic as a foundation for argumentation. Weinstein continues this discussion in the following chapter, emphasizing how for Smith rhetoric is a component of reason. Argumentation is a social act performed by people, and not an abstract process separate from inter-personal relationships.

In chapter 7 Weinstein claims he has established that for Smith sympathy is a rational process in which the individual creates a narrative helping to define justified inference. He then presents two examples of such argumentation in Smith – first, how in Smith's theory of price the impartial spectator encapsulates normative judgment; and second, how Smith's approach relates to modern discussions of the nature of argumentation, informal logic, and critical thinking. Smith's account of rationality is incompatible with rational choice theory or modern mathematical logic, yet it does prefigure contemporary argumentation theory. According to Weinstein both in Smith and in modern times argumentation is a vital ingredient for interaction in a pluralistic society.

In chapter 8 Weinstein discusses Smith's philosophy of education, this time, supplementing the discussion in chapter 4, centering on informal education. Human beings have an inherent will to learn, which underlines socialization and the moral activity of sympathy. In the following chapter Weinstein continues with a broad discussion of Smith's views on education, emphasizing how he prefigured modern education to pluralism. Access to education, at least at a minimal level, is a universal right, hence the need for government support of it. Smith's curriculum included philosophy and science, but also the arts. Education nurtured rationality and was therefore indispensable for a pluralistic society, as for the perennial Enlightenment battle against such things as superstition and intolerance.

In the final two chapters Weinstein addresses Smith's historiography, thus placing the discussion of rationality, sympathy and education within the wider context of Smith's views on human progress. Chapter 10 emphasizes the unity of Smith's oeuvre and history's role in it. For Smith both progress and history were natural. While he was not a historian in the strict sense, he was a philosopher of history. Smith had a notion of actual history, with specific observations on the past, coupled with a notion of an ideal history with normative claims regarding the development of humanity. The latter emphasized in particular progress and ethics. The chapter closes with a detailed discussion of Smith's famous Invisible Hand concept. This is followed in the last chapter with a comparison of the historiographies of Smith and

Michel Foucault, finding a surprising, though limited, similarity between them, despite Foucault's obvious rejection of Smith's views on progress. Nevertheless, Weinstein uses this comparison to criticize postmodernism.

This last point emphasizes a central element shared by both Weinstein and his object of study – like Smith, he seems optimistic that a proper social philosophy can help overcome the obstacles and difficulties raised by modern liberal society, which in itself remains the best option for human progress in the future as it can be construed today. This is evident in the short Conclusion to the book, aptly subtitled “A Smithian Liberalism,” in which Weinstein emphasizes Smith's relevance for a re-evaluation and reaffirmation of present-day liberalism. In the Introduction to the book, Weinstein has voiced his intention of supplementing this volume, in itself more a type of history of philosophy, with two additional volumes. The first of these will investigate how liberalism would have developed had Smith, instead of Kant, been utilized to ground political theory. The second, the last instalment to this proposed trilogy, will investigate the nature of political participation in a Smithian liberalism. One can only hope that Weinstein will follow through with this ambitious project, thus presenting a detailed incorporation of Smith's ideas within current debates about the nature of modern democratic and liberal society. The present volume no doubt presents a solid intellectual-history foundation for such a project.

Before continuing with short summations of the various papers in this forum, I would like to begin by pointing to what I myself consider a problematic methodological issue which surfaces at times in Weinstein's book. Weinstein himself recognizes this problem and addresses it in his contribution to this forum, but by its very nature this issue nonetheless remains inherently unresolved. Weinstein's book is part of a growing current in modern scholarship to utilize canonical figures from intellectual history as foundations for dealing with contemporary issues. There is, in itself, no problem with this approach, and it has indeed much merit. Nonetheless, the balance between historiography and philosophy which this type of endeavor demands is by definition challenging. This is particularly true in studies such as Weinstein's, which attempt to be not just philosophical works, but also intellectual histories.

In Smith's case this raises specific problems. In particular, one should ask not just whether Smith's philosophy includes the potential for developing a pluralistic outlook in our modern sense (which it no doubt seems to have), but also, much more problematically, whether such an outlook conforms

with Smith's own views (a much more difficult proposition to prove). Smith was one of the many cautious Enlightenment intellectuals who avoided overt political expressions for what was probably personal expediency. Few among eighteenth-century literati were willing to sacrifice their personal safety for the sake of Radical Enlightenment ideals in the sense described in recent years by Jonathan Israel. But it seems that Smith probably did not share such ideals even in private. He was part of the Scottish Enlightenment, which was by and large part of the Moderate Enlightenment. Smith himself, for example, left little evidence of his views on the French Revolution, the beginnings of which he witnessed in the year before his death. Yet it seems safe to assume that his outlook was not far from that of many moderate enlightened savants such as his friend Edward Gibbon, who abhorred the revolution and its propagators. This was a far cry from supporting democracy or pluralism in the sense in which we understand them today.

Does this undermine Weinstein's intellectual exercise? Not in the least. It does, however, emphasize the need to read his book with careful attention to the points at which historiography and philosophy intersect. Weinstein pays attention to the difference between these two perspectives, but this care should be shared by the readers, since by its nature, this type of discussion can easily blur the lines between history and philosophy, to the detriment of both. Once, however, the book is read with the proper attention, it makes a serious contribution both to modern political philosophy, and to the intellectual history of Smith.

The present forum opens with María Carrasco's detailed contribution, which takes into account many of the salient points in Weinstein's book. Carrasco emphasizes, based on Weinstein's outlook, how Smith combined a contextual normativity underlying moral psychology, together with a universally valid pluralistic morality. This means that Smith's rules of justice in particular are both context-dependent and universal. Carrasco outlines some major interpretations of Smith's moral theory, specifically emphasizing the problem of moral relativism. She then outlines how this problem is countered by the fact that Smith's context-dependent judgments are nonetheless objective. This objectivity is the outcome of Smith's process of moral sympathy, which operates in large measure, as Weinstein notes, through the creation of narratives, thus enabling understanding and proper moral judgment. Carrasco then describes how Smith's normativity depends on contexts, thus enabling intercultural judgments. These become more refined through proper education. Despite his sensitivity to cultural pluralism, Smith neverthe-

less considered some moral norms as universally binding, ruling out cultural justification for practices such as slavery. Ultimately, as both Weinstein and Carrasco agree, Smith views human beings as fundamentally similar despite cultural differences, thus enabling a universal set of moral norms. These norms, however, can inform ethical behavior only in a cultural context which fosters the sympathetic process and thus enables the perception of injustice.

Carrasco's paper is followed by Lisa Herzog's discussion, which begins with an emphasis on two aspects of Smith's thought – rationality and pluralism, as Weinstein interprets them. She agrees in general with Weinstein's interpretation, and with the emphasis on rationality as a socially-constructed human attribute. She does however claim that Weinstein does not sufficiently develop the related topic of justice in Smith's thought. Like Weinstein she sees justice as a crucial component of social interactions – both a precondition, and a result, of the development of various types of such interactions. Of these, she emphasizes in particular economic relations. While she accepts Weinstein's emphasis on the importance of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* at the expense of the *Wealth of Nations*, she nonetheless regards economic relations as a particularly significant aspect of social relations and justice in Smith's thought.

Dionysis Drosos's detailed discussion of Smith's moral theory is interwoven with an overview of some of Weinstein's central arguments. He emphasizes for example the influence of Shaftesbury's notion of soliloquy on Smith. Drosos also raises an interesting challenge both to Smith and to Weinstein, claiming that Smith's moral theory relies on an optimistic view of human nature which does not meet the regrettable challenge of the subsequent disasters of modern history. He therefore identifies a difficulty in the ability of this theory to deal with cases such as war or natural disasters, when social cohesion is compromised.

Spiros Tegos's piece, too intricate to summarize in a few words, gives a detailed comparison of Smith and Mandeville on social morality, against the background of a sophisticated overview of Weinstein's discussion, while emphasizing particularly the issue of character building. Towards the end of his paper Tegos also raises some psychoanalytic perspectives on Smith's ideas, which he claims that Weinstein has not sufficiently addressed, although he gives only a few brief suggestions on how this comparison might enrich the discussion.

The forum continues with Maria Pia Paganelli's contribution, the most critical paper here. Paganelli takes issue with Weinstein's emphasis on Adam Smith's optimism. She claims that there is little textual evidence to back the claim for

Smith as an optimist, specifically regarding the progress of economic opulence, and its purportedly ameliorating moral influences. Paganelli's interpretation is not just different from Weinstein's, but also goes against the grain of mainstream Smith scholarship, which tends to see him as an example of general Enlightenment optimism. While scholars have long recognized that there was also a more pessimistic current of thought in the Enlightenment, it is clear that Paganelli's approach to Smith's thought is not run-of-the-mill. Whether one agrees with her or not, she raises very cogent questions which challenge common interpretations of Smith.

The forum ends with Weinstein's response to all these papers. It would be superfluous to try and summarize it in a few lines, but I think that anyone interested in *Adam Smith's Pluralism* should make sure to read these highly illuminating comments, which might be viewed as constituting a kind of methodological and thematic epilogue to the book, and at the same time a prelude to the following volumes of this project.

The various papers in this volume, considered together, highlight some, though by far not all, of the ways in which Weinstein's book enriches our understanding both of Smith, and of Smith's potential for furthering current philosophical and social debates.

One might disagree with Weinstein's interpretations, but reading his book provides an original and thought-provoking look at one of the seminal figures in modern thought. At a time when scholars are inundated with a plethora of monographs, Weinstein's book is one of those which stand out, and that in itself is a remarkable achievement.<sup>1</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank both Jack Weinstein and Leslie Marsh for inviting me to edit this forum. I would also like to thank all the contributors for their timely responses and friendly cooperation throughout the preparation of this forum. This has proven an intellectually stimulating and generally pleasant experience, thanks to the personalities of all involved!

# Context-dependent Normativity and Universal Rules of Justice

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Jack Russell Weinstein correctly asserts that Adam Smith proposes a contextual normativity in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where moral rules are “after-the-fact constructs, developed from social interaction.”<sup>1</sup> This is one of the reasons why some important scholars claim that the TMS inevitably slides into relativism. Weinstein acknowledges this tension when he affirms that “[Smith] implies a universal ethics throughout his work, yet he adopts a context-dependent moral psychology” (p. 101). Relying on some of Weinstein’s insightful observations, I will propose that despite Smith’s endorsement of contextual normativity, his TMS describes a pluralistic moral theory. This means that together with culture-dependent norms, his theory is also able to justify a central core of universally valid moral norms. In other words, my aim is to take advantage of Weinstein’s insights into Smith’s pluralism, understood as “the political situation in which people of different fundamental beliefs and histories share equally in common governance, and live within common borders” (p. 264), in order to claim that Smith is also a *moral pluralist*, and explore the consequences of this position for moral judgments “beyond the common borders.”

In general, we can distinguish three kinds of moral theories: universalistic, pluralistic and relativistic. Universalists hold that moral norms ought to be the same for everyone in every culture without exception. Morality is culturally

neutral and ahistorical. Clearly, Smith’s theory is not universalistic in this strong sense. Pluralists suggest that there are some rules that should apply equally to everybody, while the rest would be culture-dependent. Relativists, in turn, assert that moral standards depend on each community and that there is no culturally unbiased absolute order to which every particular code of ethics ought to conform itself. Moral judgments would be incommensurable.

Given this framework, my claim is that even without the necessity of appealing to transcendent or metaphysical frameworks to provide warrant for universal moral truths, Smith’s empiricist moral psychology nonetheless has sufficient resources to overcome moral incommensurability and cultural relativism. There is a small group of norms that are simultaneously context-dependent *and* universal. These are the rules of justice: a core set of rules with absolute authority that precludes relativistic interpretations of the TMS and lay the ground for an empiricist justification of universal human rights. Moreover, my contention is that context-dependency is precisely the feature that enables a defense of the existence of these universally binding norms.

In order to show how Smith accounts for his pluralistic theory I will start in Section I by explaining why some interpreters claim that the TMS slides into relativism: it doesn’t admit of a universal criterion to evaluate the particular impartial spectators’ judgments or legitimate intercultural as-

assessments. In Section II I focus on the objective justification of moral judgments, the first step towards moral commensurability. In Section III I show how intercultural judgments may be assessed; finally, in Section IV I claim that Smith's moral psychology supports a group of moral norms with universal authority, norms that enable people to judge the practices of other cultures.

## EMPIRICISM AND MORAL RELATIVISM

What speaks most in favor of the relativistic interpretation of the TMS is the empirical origin of the moral conscience. Indeed, when Smith describes its genesis, he clearly says that the impartial perspective is not innate to us; on the contrary, we acquire it in “the great school of self-command” where “through the sense of propriety and justice, [we are taught] to correct the otherwise natural inequality of our sentiments” (TMS III.3.3). Smith explains that we are all born with a strong desire to sympathize with our neighbors and a desire for their approval. This is easily achieved within the family, since their partiality means they will indulge almost any passion we express. However, when “we go out to the world” and face indifferent people for the first time, we realize that not everybody approves of our conduct. We experience a lack of sympathy and the frustration of one of our strongest natural desires. Henceforth, motivated by our desire for the pleasure of mutual sympathy, we break away from our innate self-centeredness by looking at ourselves through the eyes of those indifferent bystanders. In that moment we realize that, from their point of view, we are nothing but one in a multitude of equals and that if we don't restrain our egotism and act impartially we will gain neither their approval nor the pleasure of mutual sympathy (TMS II.ii.2.1; III.3.4; VI.ii.2.2). From then on we begin to train ourselves in this new attitude. We strive to acquire the habit of looking at ourselves and others from this new perspective, from which we discover what conduct an impartial spectator might approve of. This is, for Smith, the moral perspective: a new standpoint in the world. Taking it is not innate, but is nonetheless a natural development of our original tendencies.

Consequently, in this theory, morality is like a second-order structure built upon our innate psychological drives. In the first part of the TMS Smith describes how those drives incite the sympathetic process. He explains his particular understanding of the notion of sympathy: identification with the other, an entering—as he describes it—into the agent's breast in order to understand, from the inside, her feelings

and actions in each particular situation. This tendency corresponds to some extent to what we now call empathy: a skill we learn in childhood, and which basically consists in re-focusing our egocentric map in order to become, in our imagination, the other person. It's a job actors generally do: a know-how, a habit that we improve by experience, and which Smith characterizes as “changing persons and characters” with the agent (TMS VII.iii.1.4). We bracket out our particularities in order to see the world through the eyes of the other.

However, becoming completely absorbed in the other person doesn't allow us to judge. In order to judge we need a critical distance, a point of comparison, which could very well be our imagined attitude when facing a similar situation. This is in fact the first notion of sympathy that Smith describes, concluding that “[e]very 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 resentment by my resentment” (TMS I.i.3.10). In other words, in exercising this kind of sympathy, frequently emphasized by the relativistic interpreters of the TMS, we make ourselves the measure of propriety.

Nonetheless, for Smith, these are not yet *moral* judgments. Morality is rooted in and supported by this psychological constitution, but isn't reducible to it. Moral judgments are not based on the correspondence of subjective feelings between partial and naturally biased agents. Moral judgments have the same structure, except that they depend on the pleasure of—let's say—mutual *moral* sympathy, which is the correspondence of the agent's feelings with the impartial spectator's. This difference will not be clear until Smith explains the emergence of the moral conscience. Moral sympathy arises when the *appropriate* feelings coincide: the feelings that “the situation deserves” (TMS I.i.3.4). Sympathy—says Weinstein—is “the fellow feeling that guides moral deliberation and empathetic judgment” (p. 17) and “the spectator builds on context rather than on perceived sentiments alone. He or she must create a story that allows for understanding as to why the actor responds in a given way and only then is judgment possible” (p. 184).<sup>2</sup>

The problem is that, given the empirical origin of conscience, each spectator will “create a story”—or try to make sense of other people's attitudes—according to her own experiences, references and values. These references are more or less shared between people of the same culture, but might be quite different from those of distant cultures, separate in space and time. Hence the relativistic interpretations of the

TMS, which claim that in the absence of a common measure for evaluating different practices, there cannot be legitimate cross-cultural judgments.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, Charles Griswold asserts that “[i]n Kant’s terms, Smith’s ethics is at heart ‘empirical’ and [therefore] not appropriately principled”;<sup>4</sup> and that if the impartial spectator is the ultimate source of normativity for Smith “the problem is obvious: how can history yield general normative principles that are everywhere and always the same? Is not the process either circular or inherently impossible?”<sup>5</sup> More directly, Forman-Barzilai asks: “How might [Smith] have sought to generate universality without abstracting morals from their empirical roots?”<sup>6</sup> And: “We need to ask Smith and those persuaded of the trans-cultural significance of his theory: how do spectators overcome cultural bias, detach themselves from their own experiences as agents disciplined in a world of values? How does sympathy avoid speculation and assumption, avoid becoming an arrogant, smothering intrusion?”<sup>7</sup>

A partial solution to this problem was given by Samuel Fleischacker, who interpreted “human nature” in the TMS as “a general sketch to be filled in differently in different cultures and historical circumstances.”<sup>8</sup> This would mean that there is neither complete variation nor dogmatic insistence on a thick human universality. Rather, he says, Smith reasonably “presents cultural variations possible only within a universal human nature,” variations that satisfy the general conditions necessary for any society to survive.<sup>9</sup> Along the same interpretive line, Knud Haakonssen states that there are some areas of morality that are so basic and universal in their humanity, that the impartial spectator needs to know little or nothing about the context in order to judge.<sup>10</sup> He further says that resentment, or the feeling from which justice arises, is one of these cases, and that Smith’s theory of jurisprudence presupposes that the virtue of justice is “natural” in the sense that it is somehow beyond the reach of social change.<sup>11</sup>

Smith himself seems to endorse these claims when he affirms that, unlike other virtues, in the case of justice “the Author of nature has not entrusted to reason to find out that a certain application of punishments is the proper means of attaining this end [i.e. the preservation of society]; 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). Further, he even compares justice with our basic biological desires, such as nutrition and reproduction (cf. TMS II.i.5.10). Accordingly, if Smith is comparing

“justice” to our biological tendencies, he’s clearly relating it *more* to natural principles than to any cultural construction.<sup>12</sup>

However, in discussing Haakonssen’s idea of natural universal justice, Fleischacker changes his mind about his sketch-filling interpretation.<sup>13</sup> He says that if justice is based on resentment, and resentment is the feeling that arises when the spectator sympathizes with the victim of an unjust action, any kind of “natural justice” should be the result of an equally “natural” harm. The problem is that “harm” is a culturally mediated concept, and thus “justice” must also be culturally mediated.<sup>14</sup> In other words, if what counts as harm is essentially a social category, we cannot judge other cultures’ practices using our own conceptions of harm. In the Middle Ages it was entirely appropriate to kill a man for dishonoring the family name. Today that would be a glaring injustice.

However, if we accept that one of Smith’s main concerns was “the necessity of coming to terms with the diversity in the world” (p. 191) and that his moral psychology intended to allow “for communication and judgments amidst differences” (p. 25), we must look closer into his theory before concluding that he failed at one of his main purposes.

## MORAL OBJECTIVITY AND SYMPATHETIC JUDGMENTS

The first step in arguing against moral relativism in the TMS is to explain why context-dependent judgments are objective. Moral justifications are not arbitrary. They depend on reality and may be discovered by any competent spectator. They are objectively justified.

In Smith’s theory, taking the moral point of view is an acquired ability. Morality is a second-order structure that naturally emerges in us, and establishes human equality as the ultimate moral justification. It is a new map with a new standpoint, one from which we no longer consider ourselves as the center of the world, but just as one among a multitude of equals. Hence this impartial standpoint is the same for all human beings. And in spite of its empirical origin, moral conscience has the same formal structure in all human beings. It is as it is because of our humanity, not our culture.

Nevertheless, formal universality does not rule out the question of ethical relativism. As Forman-Barzilai asserts: “We might say that the formal category of propriety is universal for Smith... but its content is necessarily plural.”<sup>15</sup> The relativistic interpretation claims that, since moral judgments

depend on the approval of the impartial spectator after her sympathetic identification with the feelings of *that* agent in *that* situation, moral norms are by definition un-universalizable. Moral judgments are context-dependent; they take into account all the contingent, unpredictable and un-repeatable conditions of each situation, and cannot be thus codified in universal norms.

This is true. But it must not be understood as meaning moral judgments are arbitrary. In Smith's theory every impartial spectator, when faced with the same circumstances, should judge in the same way. In different cultures the standard of propriety might be different, but nonetheless it is the impartial spectator who knows the values of that culture, and it is "her" faculty of judgment that determines the morally right attitude in that context. Such judgments are like the *phronetic* judgments of ancient virtue ethics. They take into account all the contingencies of each situation and cannot be captured in universal rules of conduct. But since they are guided by what Aristotle called *right reason*—and Smith, who in endorsing that theory uses the figure of an *impartial* spectator<sup>16</sup>—, moral judgments always imply some participation of universal reason that precludes them from being arbitrary. For Aristotle—says Weinstein, explaining the consequences of a context-dependent normativity—"there is an objective standard of virtue even given shifts of context. The same is true for Smith" (p. 150).

The objectivity of moral justifications is warranted by "the sympathetic feelings of the impartial and well-informed spectator" (cf. TMS VII.ii.1.49). Impartiality, in the TMS, is not a disengaged, third-person and abstract impartiality, a view from nowhere. If our innate perspective is a first-person perspective, impartiality in Smith is related to what Stephen Darwall calls the second-person perspective, meaning that it regulates our moral judgments by determining how the spectator enters into the agent's feelings.<sup>17</sup> In assessing moral judgments, the spectator must bracket out her partial feelings and biases in order to put herself into an impartial spectator's perspective and to evaluate things as any and every impartial spectator would do. Moral rationality is the process of stepping outside of oneself in order to judge the propriety of—first—our own actions (cf. p. 141). The impartial spectator—as Weinstein affirms—is an attempt to reach an ideal objectivity in moral judgments (cf. p. 201).<sup>18</sup> Obviously, this is limited by human capacities, because it is impossible to be completely outside oneself or to be completely outside one's community (i.e. bracketing out all our socialization and acculturation).<sup>19</sup> However, knowing these limits induces the moral actor to devise methods for overcoming our biases as

much as possible until, ideally, one has acquired the "sympathetic feelings of the impartial and well-informed spectator" that Smith points to as the "precise and distinct measure" for moral judgments.<sup>20</sup>

However, impartiality is not enough for assessing objective judgments. Sympathetic identification is an equally essential requirement—and the most difficult to attain in contexts of diversity or in cross-cultural judgments. Nonetheless, following Weinstein's characterization of the richness of the sympathetic process, I claim that Smithian sympathy, "the fundamental mechanism for human connectedness (... that) bridges the discrete individualism" (p. 184), has the resources to overcome this obstacle.

According to Weinstein, "[s]ympathy' is the term Smith uses to denote the means by which moral actors consider normative rules and empirical facts to determine propriety. It is a complicated process, involving inborn faculties and learned skills" (p. 68). Sympathy involves emotions and can be fostered with new information, reason, argument, reflection and particularly—one of Weinstein's salient points—the creation of narratives. "[S]ympathy organizes the discrete pieces of information regarding moral judgment" (p. 179), and this organization is done through "narratives": "narratives allow for all these disparate elements, [and] organizes them for deliberation... For Smith, understanding requires a narrative structure" (p. 132). Imagination—through the creation of narratives that try to "make sense" of other people's attitudes and actions—"allows individuals to understand the context and motivation of moral actors" (p. 182). And "[w]hen agents are skilled enough [e.g. having a refined ability to sympathize], they use [their] capacities and passions to create narratives that contextually communicate and adjudicate actors' and spectators' sentiments" (p. 195). The better we sympathize, the more accurate our judgments.

This characterization shows the reciprocal dependence and co-operation of reason and emotions in the sympathetic process. Indeed, "[i]n combination with the sympathetic imagination, emotions and rationality create the possibility of entering into the perspective of others and balancing moral judgments on the basis of our commitments, the conviction of others, and a normative ideal..." (p. 267). Emotions are particularly important because they are intentional, "they are responsive to the way the world is" (p. 114) and thereby can be warranted or unwarranted, true or false with respect to the situation at stake. Intentionality enables objectivity.

Sympathy's core element is the affective reaction we experience in our imaginative identification with the respec-

tive other. This reaction is triggered by what Charles Taylor calls the “import” of a situation, or the particular aspect(s) to which we affectively react according to the kind of being we are.<sup>21</sup> Cats, for instance, belong to a species that fears dogs; thus any cat will tend to flee at the sight of a dog. Human beings also react to imports. Some of them are related to our culture, like situations that cause embarrassment, signs of honor, etc. Others are culture-neutral: they produce the same reaction in every human being only because of the kind of being she is.

The importance of “imports” for defining propriety in the TMS is manifest in two atypical cases of sympathy. One is “conditional sympathy,” when the spectator, for whatever reason, cannot identify himself with the agent, but knows “from experience” what the appropriate feelings for those circumstances are and thus approves of them (cf. TMS I.i.3.4). This non-normal situation confirms that, for Smith, the judgment of propriety relies more on context than on an identification with the contingent feelings of the actors. The other case is “illusive sympathy,” as when we sympathize with a dead person who is incapable of feeling what we imagine we would feel if we were consciously “living” in her circumstances (TMS II.i.2.5). Again, there is no actual correspondence of feelings; but the spectator’s affective reaction is triggered by what he imagines are the appropriate feelings for that situation or what “the situation deserves.”

Consequently, the impartial spectator determines the point of propriety according to the relevant import for each particular situation. Her recognition of the morally relevant imports for *that* agent in *that* situation is the clue for her judgment. This is an essential point in the TMS because it reveals that the impartial spectator does not *project* values onto reality but *discovers* them through her affective reactions, according to the kind of natural and cultural being she is. Indeed, despite Smith’s strong commitment to fallibilism he believes that, using the various resources at its disposal for attaining a better perception, a better identification and a more accurate moral judgment, the sympathetic process discovers truth (objective appropriateness) and normative ethics (cf. p. 162).

In sum, Smith’s moral normativity is context-dependent but not relativistic. First, it depends on the import of the specific situation and is thereby objective. Second, moral judgments are validated by the mediation of the impartial spectator, who moderates our innate self-preference in order to provide warrant for treating ourselves as we treat others. This double rapport, the agent with the import through the

impartial spectator, is what allows Smith to propose objectivity amidst variations.

Nevertheless, the “sympathetic foundation of morality functions best in small communities” (p. 69) and “both sympathy’s accuracy and motivational power diminish as cultural and physical distance between individuals increases” (p. 68). Naturally, sympathy works better with those we know better, we understand better and share cultural references with. In these cases it’s easier to identify the imports to which people react because—given our similar acculturation—we would react to the same features of the situation. For this reason Weinstein warns that a lack of *commonalities* is the biggest barrier to sympathy and thus to accurate and objective moral judgments (cf. p. 179). Within the same community it’s easier to find common references than among the immense diversity of human cultures. This poses a problem for intercultural judgments.

## INTERCULTURAL JUDGMENTS AND SYMPATHETIC REFINEMENT

The TMS describes a context-dependent normativity, which relies on the ability to bracket out our particularities and to sympathize or identify ourselves with the respective other to discover the imports to which she reacts. This possibility of identification depends on the commonalities shared by the agent and the spectator. Context-dependent normativity enables Smith’s TMS to account for personal and cultural differences without threatening the objectivity of moral judgments. Smith himself affirms that the impartial spectator’s judgments of propriety vary according to culture, age, profession, etc. (cf. TMS I.ii.introd.2). What is expected from a soldier is different from that which is expected from a priest. Most rules of conduct vary because they depend on a particular culture’s sense of propriety and its ideals of perfection. This means that what is proper and praiseworthy for one person in one culture, may not be—at least to the same extent or in relation to other possible courses of actions—equally proper or praiseworthy for another person in another culture.<sup>22</sup> Normativity depends on contexts, and different cultures represent different (sometimes extremely different) contexts.

The lack of commonalities entails that the spectators of one culture may be incompetent to appropriately judge the practices of others. “The farther removed a spectator is from the actor, the more difficult a true understanding of the situation becomes. [...] The more knowledge one person has about the other, the more capacity he or she has to sympathize” (p.

73). If there are no commonalities, there can be no identification, sympathetic processes or valid moral judgments. Moral judgments depend on proximity, on shared references and the possibility of identification. But “the commonality between people is often made invisible by differences in experiences” (p. 176). Thus Forman-Barzilai may legitimately ask “[H]ow does this process of becoming a more mature, proper and congenial member of *my society* better help me understand someone who has learned [...] what it means *in her world* to be ‘in command’ of herself, sociable, proper, polite, etc.?”<sup>23</sup> As a result, distance seems in principle to impede any possibility of intercultural moral judgments.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps a problem with the TMS is that Smith basically describes “micro-sympathetic processes” (cf. p. 226), i.e. sympathy within roughly homogeneous communities. However, he also provides some clues that allow reconstructing an argument that explains how legitimate intercultural moral judgments may be assessed and even—as I will explain in the next section—to defend certain judgments of universal justice. Following Amartya Sen, I contend that “Smith saw the possibility that the impartial spectator could draw on the understanding of people who are far as well as those who are near”;<sup>25</sup> despite the fact that some sympathetic processes may imply a greater effort and are thus not always equally accurate.<sup>26</sup> My argument is greatly aided by Weinstein’s particularly detailed account of the sympathetic process and the devices human beings have at hand to refine it.

For Smith, “the ability to sympathize rests either in pre-existing commonalities or the ability to create commonalities by learning the contexts and perspectives of others” (p. 96). For this reason the only insurmountable obstacle for sympathizing is fanaticism: “[V]iolence, conflict, factionalism and fanaticism are the impartial spectator’s greatest enemies” (TMS III.3.43). Fanaticism—which at a global level is also expressed in chauvinism, nationalism, fundamentalism, etc.—implies an explicit rejection of the sympathetic process and silences the voice of the impartial spectator. Diversity, the lack of commonalities, is a problem for identification, but if there is *the will to sympathize*, there are then rational ways to enter into the experience of others when sympathy is hindered by wide gaps in experiences, beliefs or actions (cf. p. 162).

“In essence,” says Weinstein, “Smith is trying to create a mechanism through which individuals can become interested in others despite their lack of commonality” (p. 133). Rather than “creating a mechanism,” he tries to identify the resources at our disposal for bridging our discrete natures and cultures. One of these resources is the creation of narra-

tives that help to make sense of others’ reactions. Narratives isolate the elements of the situation that an alien spectator recognizes, organize them in a coherent whole and enable the spectator to reconstruct the rest of the story. In this way they facilitate identification and sympathetic judgments. This is why Smith affirms that “poets and romance writers ... are... much better instructors than Zeno, Chrysippus or Epictetus” (TMS III.3.14). Storytelling—says Weinstein—is “part of the human condition, and the need to resolve these stories is also part of human nature” (p. 236).

Another resource for refining sympathy is argumentation. Reasoning is part of the sympathetic process, and “argumentation is tied to growth of social awareness. To mature is to absorb and modify socially constructed identity and argument procedures. It is also to gather vast amounts of data and to systematize them in such a way that one becomes aware of an objective standard of propriety” (p. 162). Finally, speaking more generally, the main ally of moral sympathy is education. Sympathy can be cultivated by education, and a wide-ranging education resists ignorance and prejudice, and finds commonalities without erasing otherness (cf. p. 107). “Education serves several purposes in moral growth throughout Smith’s corpus. It cultivates our capacity to interpret the sentiments of others; it provides a mechanism by which we cultivate moral judgment; and it offers us standards by which we can temper our own sentiments or suggest to others that they do so” (p. 183). Education helps to bridge differences enabling the spectator to enter into the experiences of others (cf. p. 81).

But why would a spectator “go through the trouble of sympathizing with others, especially in those instances when it requires so much effort[?]” Smith’s answer in the TMS—says Weinstein—“is the same as in HA. One seeks to sympathize with others because it is enjoyable to do so” (p. 183). Smith gives the same sentimentalist account of human motivation for the scientific, political and moral spheres. A lack of understanding produces discomfort, while a coherent, inclusive narrative, in contrast, has a calming effect. Learning soothes anxiety (cf. p. 178).

Consequently, the sympathetic process that Smith describes mainly for limited scenarios may well be extended to a broader scale: the impartial spectator, using these different resources, is able to “adjust its references” to diverse cultures and successfully judge the propriety of alien practices and customs with respect to their own contexts. Distance is an obstacle, but not an absolute impediment for developing objective moral judgments. For instance, before judging the morality of killing another for dishonoring the family name,

a cross-cultural spectator should first “adjust her references” to the context and examine whether dishonoring the family name is or is not considered to be damaging within that culture. If it were damaging, the agent would be acting for appropriate reasons and his action would be punishment, not injustice.

## INTERCULTURAL SYMPATHY AND UNIVERSAL RULES OF JUSTICE

There are ways to overcome an initial cultural incompetence, to understand other cultures and to judge according to their own standards of propriety. However, this still doesn't rule out cultural relativism. A relativist may accept the possibility of sympathizing with different cultures and judging their practices according to their own criteria. However, she would never accept the possibility of judging other cultures' standards of propriety, or to condemn a practice that is considered legitimate in that culture. A typical case is slavery. There must have been multitudes of slave-owners who never suspected they were harming an equal, and if the impartial spectator adjusts her references to that culture, she will conclude that, in that context, these people were not in the wrong. Do we have a right to blame them on the basis of our own criteria and say that they were unjust? Or should we say that a few decades ago, in North America for instance, black people were worthless, had less dignity, were inferior?

In this section I will claim that Smith is a pluralist, in the sense that together with allowing wide room for cultural variations, his ethics also includes a group of moral rules that ought to be the same in all times and places. These are the rules of justice, which are exact, absolute and universally binding. My contention is that Smith's moral psychology is able to give a solid foundation to a central core of norms that, despite being “after the fact” and context-dependent, ought to be respected in any and every particular human culture. It's not just that human beings may make legitimate intercultural judgments; they are also entitled to judge, to condemn or to approve of certain customs and practices that don't belong to their own culture *employing the same norms that apply to their culture*.

Smith explains that the rules of justice arise when the spectator feels resentment and approves of punishment because of her sympathetic identification with the sufferer of an aggression, and the consequent feeling that the injustice was done, so to speak, to her. This is why, for Smith, rules of justice are “sacred” (TMS II.iii.3.4): No spectator would ever accept seeing an equal treated as an inferior when her reason

is constantly telling her that we all are but one in a multitude of equals. Darwall emphasizes that the norms of justice are more vivid and more binding than other norms because they implicitly express our equality as human beings,<sup>27</sup> the ultimate moral justification in this theory. For Smith—says Weinstein—“people are in some sense fundamentally similar”<sup>28</sup>; he “starts with the presumption of natural equality: for him there is no ‘originall difference’ between individuals (LJ (A) vi. 47-48)” (p. 96). Our differences are never so radical as to affect our equal entitlement to justice and rights. Therefore, when the spectator sympathizes with the sufferer she feels the sufferer's worth to be her own and cannot bear such a violation of human equality. This is why judgments of justice are different from other moral judgments: they are the ones that draw the line between what is morally permissible and what is absolutely forbidden.<sup>29</sup>

Recognizing another person as a being of equal worth, an attitude implicitly involved in the feeling of resentment, demands from us what Darwall has called “recognition respect.”<sup>30</sup> This is the proper attitude towards things of intrinsic value; it's a kind of respect we either give or fail to give, and doesn't allow for degrees. My assumption is that Smith's virtue of justice safeguards this “recognition respect,” and that's why these norms are negative, expressing moral constraints (things we cannot do to others). Rules of justice are so important for Smith that he even states: “[n]ature, antecedent to all reflections upon utility of punishment, has ... 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.ii.3.9). Haakonssen also explains that justice involves a stronger feeling than other virtues because it reflects the lack of something that should have been given but was not.<sup>31</sup> According to my interpretation, the “something” that produces this reaction, the “import” of the situation is precisely the lack of recognition respect. And given that we ought to respect all our equals, this is a culture-neutral import: human beings are human beings regardless of the culture to which they belong.<sup>32</sup>

Virtue, for Smith, is having the appropriate degree of all passions (TMS I.ii.introd.2). For the virtue of justice, this means *absolute* respect for the dignity of all our fellow-creatures; anything less is immoral. The context, as for all other virtues, is also important. The difference is that in judgments of justice the only relevant aspect of the context that must be taken into account is whether the one who is being wronged is a human being. Harry Frankfurt says that what is of genuine moral concern is that “every person should be accorded

the rights, the respect, the consideration and the concern to which he is entitled by virtue of what he is and of what he has done.<sup>33</sup> Applied to the Smithian virtue of justice, this entails treating a person according to what she *naturally is*: a human being.

Injustices, for Smith, imply treating an equal as an inferior, or inappropriately doing harm to an equal. Fleischacker's argument against the possibility of universal rules of justice in the TMS was that the concept of "harm," to which we react in cases of injustice, was a culturally mediated concept. He said that Smith's concept of impartiality does not warrant universal rules of justice for it would be perfectly possible to "impartially hurt all children" without turning it into a good practice. This is true; but he is not considering the foundation of moral judgments: the sympathetic process. Sympathetic identification implies that the moral standpoint includes a reversibility test. That is to say, in order for an action to be morally justified the agent must be prepared to be treated in the same way. In the TMS, impartiality is not enough for being moral.

However, like all other moral judgments, judgments of justice are also challenged by distance; and the reversibility test only discriminates where people may indeed identify with each other, i.e. where (a) they see the other as an "equal" and (b) they share the same standards for what is considered "harmful." Thus Fleischacker's objection would still be valid. The only possibility for rejecting cultural relativism would be to demonstrate that there exist at least some *universal injustices*, or injustices that do not depend on culture-relative notions of harm or of who is considered an equal.

Harm is indeed, to a large extent, a cultural-mediated concept. Killing a man for dishonoring the family name, stoning women, putting earrings on little babies, circumcision, etc., are seen as appropriate practices in some cultures and inappropriate in others. In order to judge these practices, the intercultural impartial spectator must try to adjust her references (create narratives, argumentation, etc.) before sympathizing. If she succeeds and these are legitimate practices in their original cultures, she should conclude that, regardless of the scandal that these practices may represent to external spectators, they are perfectly appropriate in their cultures. Or is the spectator allowed to condemn as unjust practices that in their own culture are not considered as such?

If we focus only on the notion of harm, it seems difficult to justify the right to condemn other cultures' practices on the basis of our own criteria. However, if we begin our analysis by focusing on the second element of Smith's concept of justice, the group of equals, we encounter another clue with

which to understand moral judgments in the TMS. Is equality also a culturally mediated concept? Who are our "equals": barbarians, women, blacks, Indians, embryos, whales? Many cultures have not recognized some of these groups as equals. Within our society many exclude unborn people and others include non-human animals as members of the group. Therefore, factually, equality seems to be as culture-relative as harm: moral good and evil in Smith's theory would thus be, unavoidably, conventional.

Nonetheless, unlike the notion of harm, the reality of the group of "equals" does not depend on our recognition of it. Acknowledged or not by their cultures, black slaves have always had the same dignity as free white men. They have now been *recognized* as equals, but they have not been *made* equals. Women did not acquire their dignity as they started to be *considered* equals. Recognizing the equal dignity of *x* does not create or invent that dignity. It has always been there, but we were blind to it. It is a feature of *x* and not of our knowledge of *x*. My proposal, then, is that this essential difference between the concepts of "harm," which up to some point is indeed conventional, and that of "equality as human beings," which has an independent, intrinsic content, may give us a tool to identify some universal injustices and lay the basis for the recognition of universal human rights.

In general, in cross-cultural judgments, after adjusting our references, we can know if that particular practice is appropriate or not in that particular culture. However, in judgments of justice things are different. In assessing justice, the import to which the impartial spectator reacts is an improper harm inflicted on an equal, and given that the group of equals is a culture-neutral import, there are some moral judgments that may legitimately be made. Only "some," since the notion of "harm" is to some extent culturally mediated and there will always be "grey zones" that are open for discussion. Nonetheless, if there is an objective or culture independent group of equals, to treat any of them as an inferior is to commit a *material* injustice, which may and must be condemned by every spectator.

Therefore, setting aside the "interpretable" grey zone of culture-relative harms, we can be sure that any unjustified hurt deliberately inflicted on a human being in *any* culture will be a material injustice in *every* culture. This is why the objective group of equals is so important to identifying the central core of universal norms. These rules have universal authority and also apply when the victim is not recognized as an equal in her culture, even when the victim herself does not resent the harm received. The external spectator, in this

case, sympathizes with *illusive sympathy*. And that culture's specific practice must be condemned.

The immediate objection against this thesis is that there are no culture-neutral or uninterpretable harms, or that there are no harms which must always be condemned. But reality belies this claim. Slavery is an injustice everywhere, as is torturing innocents or trafficking in women. Jerry Evensky, using the same argument, says that for Smith there are some principles that should, it can be persuasively argued, be absolute.<sup>34</sup> If there is an objective group of equals, and if there are also some injuries that don't admit of interpretation, it is plausible to suggest that Smith's empiricist and context-dependent theory does contain a core of absolutely and universally applicable moral norms, even if they are not always recognized.

But can an empiricist ethics convincingly support the claim that there are real though unknown moral norms? Smith believes it can, hence the prominent role of self-deceit in his theory (cf. TMS III.2.32; III.4.3). Moral blindness may be personal or cultural. People can close their ears to the impartial spectator's voice. Moreover, given the weakness and imperfection of our knowledge, we can never be completely certain about our particular moral judgments. And if there are communities that don't see women, black people or children as "equals" it is because justice requires moral sympathy, and sympathy demands *the will* to sympathize. However, when interests or passions are too strong, or traditions too deeply ingrained, self-deception can be difficult to eradicate. Smith notes this when saying that the slave-owner is too far from the daily life of a slave to spontaneously sympathize with a slave's emotions (cf. WN V.2.9). As long as the slave-owner does not care, as long as he is not "attentive" to the other, the conditions for the sympathetic identification are not met, and, unless his impartial spectator is "awakened" from the outside, he will remain in his epistemological error (cf. p. 86 ff).<sup>35</sup> However, if we are certain that an objective group of equals exists, and if we have good reason to believe that our standards are better than others', we might legitimately make cross-cultural judgments regarding this kind of practice.

Once again, Weinstein's illuminating comments regarding the different devices available to our natural drive to sympathize shed light on this topic. The example of slavery is paradigmatic.<sup>36</sup> There had to be a creation of narratives until people could see their "common humanity" (a basic *commonality*) and recognize the respective other as an equal, even in the case of a slave who somehow accepted his condition.<sup>37</sup> Narratives are a fundamental device to strip away per-

sonal or cultural self-deceit. Argumentation increases social awareness. Education, information, diversity of experiences, reflection, comparison, etc., are some of the means we human beings have in order to face the differences regarding our responsibility for political pluralism and for advancing towards global justice.

## CONCLUSION

Smith accepts that in practical matters there are many culture-dependent norms that cannot be validly assessed using alien cultural standards. However, in the case of equals treated as inferiors he immediately calls it injustice. Consequently, even though in Smith's ethics the moral conscience is empirically engendered, the moral standpoint that naturally arises from our first-order psychological constitution allows his theory to affirm certain universally binding culture-neutral moral norms. This small central core of rules of justice is enough to rule out relativistic interpretations of his ethics, setting up a precise and severe limit between the permissible and the immoral. The TMS is a pluralistic theory; not only in Weinstein's terms but also—as it can be shown using his insightful description of the sympathetic process and the conditions for sympathy—at a global level. The universal or "sacred" rules of justice ought to be respected, and their violation condemned, in every human culture.

Respect for the rules of justice requires acknowledging some "commonality" between all cultures in order to enter into sympathetic processes. The sympathetic identification comes from the recognition of the common humanity that any attentive spectator sees, with the help, when necessary, of the resources of our moral psychology. Justice, in the TMS, is the virtue that responds to the import of the "kind of being" that is being wronged. If that being is an equal, the aggression is called "injustice," and spectators from far or near must react against it. This is what happens with the violation of human rights, and what also provides sufficient reason to create institutional devices—such as a universal declaration of human rights and global institutions in charge of enforcing them—to prevent their violation.<sup>38</sup>

The spectators from outside, from different cultures, help to overcome hidden cultural biases and promote global moral progress. "Smithian reasoning," says Amartya Sen, "not only admits, but also requires, the use of impartial spectators at a distance, and the procedure of impartiality to be used open and broad."<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, moral pluralism is possible because the context-dependent normativity of the TMS requires being a human being as the only relevant import for

assessing judgments of justice. And it further shows that justice, for Smith, is not only a means for preserving peace and social unity but, first and foremost, the safeguard of the absolute respect that all human beings deserve, exclusively because of the kind of being we are: it is the natural foundation of universal human rights.<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Weinstein (2013), p. 59.
- 2 “[S]ympathy is dependent on context, and one must be aware of as many facts as possible” (p. 73).
- 3 I develop this topic in Carrasco (2009).
- 4 Griswold (1999), p. 94.
- 5 Griswold (2006), p. 184.
- 6 Forman-Barzilai (2006), p. 100.
- 7 Forman-Barzilai (2006), p. 96.
- 8 Fleischacker (2004), p. 81.
- 9 Cf. Fleischacker (2004), p. 82.
- 10 Cf. Haakonssen (1981), p. 116.
- 11 Cf. Haakonssen (1981), p. 147.
- 12 Weinstein observes that, for Smith, “the rules of nature are not as precise as what we would now call scientific principles, [however] they still accurately describe the human condition and each of our normal tendencies” (p. 337).
- 13 Cf. Fleischacker (2004), 153-161.
- 14 Cf. Fleischacker (2004), p. 158.
- 15 Forman-Barzilai (2006), p. 90.
- 16 Cf. TMS VII.ii.1.12.
- 17 Darwall (1999), p. 142.
- 18 The impartial spectator is “the anthropomorphization of the rational process and incorporates the sentimental foundation into a reasoned analysis” (p. 72). Amartya Sen, in a more pragmatic definition, states that it is a thought-experiment for “reasoned self-scrutiny” that people are capable of (2013, p. 586).
- 19 Cf. Weinstein, p. 163. “By imagining the impartial spectator ... the actor brings the community with herself or himself at all times.”
- 20 Acknowledging human fallibilism enables the creation of different psychological and institutional processes to balance as much as possible human innate partiality (cf. p. 201). Rules are the most evident example of these devices (cf. TMS III.4.7).
- 21 Taylor (1985), pp. 45-76.
- 22 Different cultures interpret different values within a certain range of variations. However, they will usually keep some “family resemblances” as long as they all point to the same human goods. “[W]e expect truth and justice from (everybody)” (TMS V.2.12).
- 23 Forman-Barzilai (2006), p. 97. My emphasis.
- 24 “Distance between the spectator and the agent should be understood both literally and metaphorically; both physical and psychological separations affect sympathetic ability” (p. 74).
- 25 Sen (2002), “Open and Closed Impartiality,” p. 457.
- 26 Sympathy will always be imperfect (pp. 94, 110), but is also refinable (p. 112).
- 27 Darwall (2005), p. 133.
- 28 In WN I.ii.4 Smith argues that “[t]he difference between the most dissimilar characters... seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom and education” (cf. Weinstein, p. 81).
- 29 I develop this topic in Carrasco (2014).
- 30 Cf. Darwall (1977), pp. 36-49.
- 31 Haakonssen (1981), p. 86.
- 32 Indeed, a significant example of a culture-neutral import in the TMS is “the dread of death, the great poison to the happiness, but the main restraint upon the injustice of mankind,” which Smith further qualifies as “one of the most important principles of human nature” (TMS I.i.1.13). This statement is particularly suggestive since it already associates justice with a culture-neutral import.
- 33 Frankfurt (1997), p. 6.
- 34 Evensky (2005), p. 52 n28.
- 35 “Rectifying injustice requires truly seeing and learning from one another. We must, in Smith’s words, be attended to and attend to others” (p. 268).
- 36 Cf. pp. 86-91.
- 37 This is, once more, a case of illusive sympathy, similar to that of a woman who, because of her acculturation, sincerely believes that she is inferior to men and deserves to be treated as such. The intercultural impartial spectator ought to react with resentment and denounce this injustice, regardless of the feelings of those women. She may accept the injustice, but what the impartial spectator claims is that she is really being the victim of an *objective injustice*. Smith’s discussion of infanticide in Greece reinforces this point, calling it “the most dreadful violation of *humanity*” (TMS V.2.15. My emphasis).
- 38 “That broad [Smithian] framework of impartiality makes it particularly clear why considerations of basic

human rights, including the importance of safeguarding elementary civil and political liberties, need not be contingent of citizenship and nationality, and may not be institutionally dependent on a nationally derived social contract” (Sen, 2002, p. 468).

39 Sen (2002), p. 451.

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# “... but one of the multitude”. Justice, Pluralism and Rationality in Smith and Weinstein

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## INTRODUCTION

Jack Russell Weinstein’s *Adam Smith’s Pluralism. Rationality, Education, and the Moral Sentiments* is a rich, and immensely enriching, book, of which I can take up only a few threads in this commentary. Weinstein discusses Smith’s account of human nature, rationality, and the role of education in human life. He presents Smith’s intellectual context in great depth, but also shows the relevance of Smithian themes and arguments for today.

Of the four key terms appearing in the title of the book, I focus on two: pluralism and rationality. I take the liberty of adopting a bird’s eye’s view, discussing the “big picture” that Weinstein offers us, neglecting various details. In addition to the themes of pluralism and rationality I introduce a third one: justice. What Weinstein says is compatible with what I take to be the role of justice in the architecture of Smith’s system. But I would argue that justice plays a role that is more central than Weinstein admits. This also has implications for the relation between TMS and WN. Weinstein is right to prioritize TMS over WN. But the economic dimensions of Smith’s vision of commercial society remain nonetheless central.<sup>1</sup>

In this brief commentary, I first describe, as a foil, the neoliberal cliché of Smith and how rationality and pluralism are related in it. Obviously, Weinstein’s reading presents a more nuanced, and much richer, picture. But I argue that for Smith, the role of justice is more central than it appears in Weinstein’s account, which brings Smith somewhat closer

er to the cliché, without, however, giving up core tenets of Weinstein’s reading. In focussing on the role of justice, I run the risk of anticipating themes that Weinstein might have decided to postpone to a follow-up volume (13), as part of the larger project of building a liberalism on Smithian foundations (see 266-269). Nonetheless, these themes also have implications for the topics of the current volume, pluralism and education. In the conclusion I sketch some of these implications.

## SMITH-THE-CLICHÉ ON RATIONALITY AND PLURALISM

At the risk of constructing a straw man, let me sketch the picture of rationality and pluralism that a person unacquainted with Smith’s writings might assume him to have. According to the cliché, Smith is famous for having defended the single-minded pursuit of self-interest. The form of rationality needed for this purpose is economic rationality, i.e. a kind of rationality that is formal, mechanical, quantitative, and that exclusively aims at maximizing the satisfaction of one’s preferences. Human sentiments or sympathy do not play any role in this picture. Both the preferences and the rationality of market participants are taken as given; markets—or social intercourse more broadly—do not shape individuals (or at least these are not the aspects of markets that economists would explore). In this picture, “pluralism” among individuals can only take the form of different preferences: some people prefer apples, others prefer oranges, and yet

others strawberries. These preferences can all be expressed in elegant mathematical functions. Markets are described as places where individuals with different preference functions meet, each of them trying to achieve an optimal outcome, given their budgets and the availability of goods and services. Markets make possible win-win-situations, with mutually beneficial exchanges. No other forms of mutual understanding are necessary, as long as the agents understand the potential for such mutually beneficial exchanges. Nor would one see, in this picture, what other point encounters between human beings could have: this picture does not take into account the ways in which our preferences, and our rationality, might develop in social interaction.

This is, of course, a caricature. Nonetheless, it has proven to be a powerful picture; powerful enough to support a vision of a society in which markets, in which this form of rationality operates, play a central role. One does not have to deny that there can be other social spheres, in which “exchanges” of other kinds—of sympathy, of opinions, of love and friendship—take place. There may also be “thicker” forms of community, among those with similar preference structures and similar worldviews. But all social relations in the *wider* society are, according to this picture, the instrumental relations of the market; areas such as politics or the arts are often also understood along the lines of the market logic. Weinstein himself sketches a brief account of such a world, which, he argues, would result if one read WN without the moral foundations of TMS. He calls it “a bleak picture of humanity” (65): the accumulation of wealth would dominate all social relations, all other spheres of life would be submitted to the imperative of economic efficiency.

Such a picture, however, is incomplete, even on its own account. Markets need a framework of positive law within which they can function. This picture says nothing about where such a framework would come from and how it would be enforced. Without property rights and contract law—to name just the most crucial aspects of the legal framework of markets—markets can easily degenerate into a Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest. Legal regulation is also needed to address market imperfections and market failures, for example with regard to information asymmetries or public goods. And it is likely, in fact, that positive law is not enough: markets are unlikely to function well if individuals try to get around the law whenever they can, rather than having some intrinsic motivation to avoid illegal—which are often also immoral—actions. It is more plausible to assume that in real-life markets, there are some elements of intrinsic habitual motivation to obey the law. Moreover, the assump-

tion that individuals, their rationality, and their preference structures are “given,” and remain the same during all market interactions, is highly problematic. Many phenomena in economic life—for example advertising or branding—cannot be understood without allowing for the possibility that human preferences can be shaped in markets.

## WEINSTEIN’S SMITH

It is needless to say that the account of Smith that Weinstein draws in *Adam Smith’s Pluralism* is not only much richer and more nuanced, but also more in line with Smith’s oeuvre and the intellectual contexts in which he wrote. For Weinstein’s Smith, human beings are socially formed creatures, whose ability to sympathize with others is a basic precondition for the development of the capacity of reasoning. Their rationality is not limited to formal logic or rational choice theory. Rather, it is narrative in structure. Weinstein admits his indebtedness to MacIntyre (e.g. 15, 161), but the case for reading Smith in this way stands on its own, especially if one takes into account the role of rhetoric for Smith (see chap. 6) or his remarks on the role of literature in education (see 89, 213). Neither syllogistic logic, nor economic rationality in a narrow sense, can fully grasp what human reasoning is. The two are not identical, but they are similar in the way in which they exclude many elements—sentiments, rhetoric, community—in order to focus on clearly definable, formalizable factors. Even readers who would recoil from some of Weinstein’s more drastic formulations, and who might prefer to keep the term “logic” for what it traditionally designates, can agree that human reasoning is broader. It has social and psychological preconditions that the account of Smith-the-cliché is silent about.

Thus, Weinstein provides us with a more plausible picture of human rationality, which he relates to contemporary debates about argumentation theory and critical thinking (chap. 7). This picture implies that pluralism is not just the pluralism of different preferences. The realm of social interactions is much broader than that of the economic exchanges of the market, in which individuals interact as unchangeable monads. Rather, for the development of one’s rationality and one’s preferences, encounters with others are crucial. This picture of human reason thus also offers a richer account of how individuals in a pluralist society interact with one another. They exchange not only goods, but also opinions and sentiments. They can learn from one another, and thus enlarge their perspectives. We do not have to accept the picture according to which the only way in which indi-

viduals can interact is *either* the small community in which individuals with similar preferences and world-views meet, *or* the marketplace in which purely instrumental rationality reigns. There are also other forms of interaction, and hence other forms in which pluralist societies can develop coherence. Their members have reasons to cherish the fact that they live in a pluralist society, not only because it allows for mutually beneficial economic interactions, but also because it offers them opportunities to learn to reason better, because they can sympathetically share a wider range of perspectives.

It is impossible to do justice to the richness of Weinstein's picture in this brief commentary. Instead, let me turn to one element of Smith's system the role of which Weinstein does not discuss in detail, although it has important implications for some of the themes he addresses, and can serve to strengthen his account.

## THE PRIORITY OF JUSTICE

Many commentators have pointed out the centrality of justice for Smith. It is, for him, "the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice" of society (TMS II.II.3.4). It connects TMS and WN in ways that are similar to the many other ways in which these two books are related (see e.g. WN IV.IX.51 on the role of justice in commercial society), and which Weinstein points out. The core of justice is the duty not to violate the rights of other people (see also Weinstein 76-7), which holds in the market place just as in other areas of life. Smith uses the metaphor of a race to describe the importance of justice:

In the race for wealth, and honours, and preferments, [an individual] may run as hard as he can, and strain every nerve and every muscle, in order to outstrip all his competitors. But if he should justle, or throw down any of them, the indulgence of the spectators is entirely at an end. It is a violation of fair play, which they cannot admit of. (TMS II.II.2.1.)

For Smith, individuals internalize the rules of justice. Hence, the individuals who enter the Smithian market follow them. This is a central reason for why these markets work well, and have the efficiency-enhancing features that are emphasized by the cliché account described above. But, importantly, for Smith justice is not only an individual virtue, it is also—or rather, it should be—a "virtue of social institutions," to anachronistically use Rawls's expressions (Rawls 1971,3). In Smith's words:

To hurt in any degree the interest of any one order of citizens, for no other purpose but to promote that of some other, is evidently contrary to that justice and equality of treatment which the sovereign owes to all the different orders of his subjects. (WN IV.VIII.30)

Why is justice so important for Smith? From the perspective of Weinstein's book, there are at least three areas in which it plays a role. The first is, as already mentioned, the market place, in which a framework of just rules and an internalized sense of justice are needed in order to allow the "invisible hand" to do its beneficial work. In the absence of just rules, sub-groups of society—in Smith's time, the "merchants and manufacturers" that benefitted from the "mercantile system" (WN Book IV)—can make profits at the expense of others. Rather than being mutually beneficial, markets can end up being unjust and exploitative, having nothing to do with the benevolent mechanisms Smith envisaged. The parallel between the price mechanism and the impartial spectator mechanism, which Weinstein emphasises (chap. 7), breaks down.

A second way in which justice is relevant for Weinstein's reading of Smith concerns the process in which individuals share sentiments and exchange sympathy. Individuals have different rhetorical abilities, and different abilities to attract sympathy from others.<sup>2</sup> This is part of the pluralist character of society: individuals are different, and economic and social circumstances add to whatever natural differences there may be. Within the very processes that are so important for the formation of rationality and the impartial spectator, there can be inequalities, biases, and historically grown injustices. Some voices are better able to make themselves heard than others, for example because of cultural prejudices against women or non-whites.<sup>3</sup> As Weinstein writes: "Thinking for oneself, or reasoned critical analysis, [Smith] argues, is a group activity" (81). But how is this group constituted? Do their members enjoy equal standing? Who is included, who is excluded? These questions matter for how "impartial" the impartial spectator can become. Justice, for Smith, includes the basic insight that every individual is "but one of the multitude" (TMS III.III.4, cf. similarly I.I.1.5, II.III.1.5), that all voices have an equal right to be heard, and that all individuals have rights that must not be violated. Without the rules of justice in place within a society, the process of the development of rationality, with all the rich social and emotional texture that Weinstein depicts, can easily be corrupted,<sup>4</sup> and lead to one-sided prejudices and unjustified exclusions of certain perspectives.

Finally, justice also plays an important role as a common denominator in a society made up of individuals with different sentiments, different rationalities, and different world-views. Weinstein's rich notion of rationality, plausible as it is, here has an open flank: how can different individuals come to agreements in the view of plurality and diversity? What are the moral minima they can agree on? The attraction of, and arguably one motivation for, formal accounts of rationality, whether in syllogistic logic or in rational choice analysis, is that one can come to clear-cut conclusions that apparently exclude dissent. The answers offered by economic models claim to possess a kind of scientific-ness that puts them beyond the scope of political disagreement. The attraction of a tight logical argument is that once the premises have been accepted, one cannot doubt the conclusion—or so the defenders of logic would say. The alleged objectivity of formal notions of rationality promises ways of finding agreements that everyone who possesses, well, reason, has to concur with.

There is no need to rehearse the various criticisms that have been raised against this alleged objectivity and neutrality, whether at the level of certain understandings of “rationality” or at the level of the scientific nature, or lack thereof, of economics as an academic discipline. But if one accepts these criticisms, one is nonetheless left with the question of how one can find agreement within plurality. Here, justice, in Smith's basic sense, matters: it establishes certain basic rules, such as the rule not to harm others without good reason. The role of justice is similar to Rawls' (1971) model of the “overlapping consensus” (which one can share without having to share his more concrete vision about what justice consists in).<sup>5</sup> I take it that for Smith justice is, in a similar sense, a moral minimum that individuals with different world-views and different rationalities can agree on.

If one asks where the sense of justice comes from, Weinstein's account of how human sentiments and human sympathies function offers rich material for an answer. His discussion of the experience of pain in this process (98-9) is particularly helpful, because a central function of justice is to avoid unnecessary pain. But as argued above, justice is also presupposed in this process, at least in the minimal sense of recognizing that others have an equally valid perspective. Thus, Smith's picture is coherentist: the way in which the impartial spectator develops presupposes justice in a certain sense, but it is also the impartial spectator that helps individuals to develop, and strengthen, their sense of justice.

Arguably, however, this process is one in which not only moral and social, but also *economic* factors play a role, at

least if one considers the long-term, historical development of justice and the moral sentiments (for a detailed discussion see Herzog (2014a)). For if **economic relations are highly unequal**, this makes it harder for individuals to recognize one another as equals—as Smith writes about slave owners, in one place, they “will hardly look on him [the slave] as being of the same kind” because “the disproportion betwixt them ... is so great” (LJ (A) 184).<sup>6</sup> The feudal lords of medieval Europe probably had a hard time putting themselves into the shoes of their poor tenants and feeling sympathy with them. In commercial society, in contrast, there is legal equality, which Smith takes to be crucial for economic development (see e.g. WN III.II.14). The material conditions of individuals become more equal over time—or so Smith hoped (see e.g. Herzog 2013a, 101ff., for a discussion). Whether or not he was correct in this hope is a question that is still hotly debated, with current evidence raising serious doubts (see in particular Piketty 2014). But it is an important element of Smith's vision of commercial society, and of his endorsement of it.

Last but not least, there is another relation between the economy and justice. For Smith, markets have an effect on individuals: they “educate” them, in the broader sense of acculturation or socialization, which Weinstein distinguishes from formal education (e.g. 170). For Smith, an important feature of well-functioning markets is that they reward certain virtues, such as justice and prudence. The reason for this is that in commercial societies, “the road to virtue and that to fortune, [...] are, happily in most cases, very nearly the same,” at least for the “middling and inferior stations” (TMS I.III.3.5). In the markets Smith envisaged, working hard, delivering good quality, being reliable, and building up a good reputation (LJ (B), 538-9), all lead to economic prosperity, thus providing incentives for these virtues, which may not be the highest virtues, but which can be expected from all members of commercial society (for a detailed discussion see Herzog 2013a, 90ff.). But this mechanism only works if the rules of markets are unbiased, and all participants are on an equal footing. This is, again, a matter of justice. Thus, the role of justice in Smith's system is multifaceted and complex; it matters both at the level of individual behaviour and at the level of institutions, and the two levels can reinforce one another in either negative or positive feedback loops.

## IMPLICATIONS

As noted earlier, these—brief and condensed—arguments about the centrality of justice are compatible with Weinstein's

account; in fact, “just” is the very last word of the book: “To paraphrase Smith, every person thus lives by example, or becomes in some measure teacher and student, and the society itself grows to be what is properly called just” (269). Closer attention to the role of justice could strengthen Weinstein’s position, but it also raises new questions. My aim in this commentary is not to pass a final verdict on Smith’s theory of justice, and whether and how it can be a resource for 21<sup>st</sup>-century-liberalism. Rather, let me point out some implications for two of Weinstein’s central themes, namely pluralism and education.

While I share the view that Smith’s account offers powerful resources for thinking about the challenges of contemporary pluralism, I also agree with Weinstein’s warning that Smith did not anticipate the kind of cultural diversity we find in today’s societies, and that his pluralism was “embryonic” (24, see also the discussion on 265f.). Smith seems to have thought that there is a sufficient amount of commonality between individuals to derive common standards of justice.<sup>7</sup> He thus envisioned pluralism within a shared framework of just laws, and with a shared sense of justice. It is within this framework that the experience of pluralism enables individuals to become more rational and to broaden the perspective of their impartial spectator. This raises questions about those who are *not* willing to remain within this framework, and more specifically those who do not accept the fundamental equality of the moral rights of all individuals. Should they be treated as “outcast[s] of human society” (TMS VII.IV.26), as Smith says about the person with whom no rational communication is possible?<sup>8</sup> Or are there ways of integrating them in the community of sympathy and discourse that Smith and Weinstein describe? Which role can education play in this process? Which role does economic inequality play in it? These are hard questions that contemporary pluralism is struggling with, both theoretically and practically. The Smithian themes and arguments that Weinstein so masterfully discusses might help to think about answers.

Justice also matters for education, in ways that, again, show how economic questions and questions of social class can impact on other areas of life. Weinstein makes no attempt to hide the fact that in Smith’s time, education was strongly influenced by social class (esp. 103-8, 191-5). To some degree, this is still—or maybe, again—the case today. The content of education is one thing; the message sent by the ways in which education is organized is another. Who is included, who is excluded, in our schools and universities? Is the equality of opportunity that Western democracies pride themselves on a substantive or a merely formal one?

And, as a consequence, what is the spectrum of perspectives that children and teenagers are exposed to when they start developing their own impartial spectator? Which opportunities do they have to meet individuals from other socio-economic and cultural backgrounds? Weinstein writes that “for Smith, the wider the pluralism, the more rational an individual can be” (83). But in many cases, this pluralism ends in societal silos when it comes to education: different social groups remain among themselves, with the better-off eagerly protecting their privileges. To exaggerate a bit: white middle-class parents certainly want their children to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, but they do not necessarily want them to go to the same schools as Uncle Tom’s descendants, and usually economic factors loom large behind such phenomena. But the organization of the education system influences whose voices children hear, and whom they learn to sympathize with, or fail to do so. Understanding other people’s stories, however, is a “necessary precondition for moral judgment,” as Weinstein rightly points out (143). There are thus serious questions about the ways in which commercial societies organize their education system, and to what degree economic differences should be allowed to impact on the kinds of social relations their members nurture.

Finally, the question about how markets “educate” individuals is also worth reviving. The question about the relation between character and economic conditions has largely gone out of fashion, maybe because the cliché-account of Smith, and mainstream economics, treat preferences structures and rationality as given and unchangeable. It would, of course, be quite naïve to hope for the civilizing forces of *doux commerce* (cf. Hirschman 1977) in the harsh realities of 21<sup>st</sup>-century globalized markets. But so much worse for these markets! If they become places in which unjust behaviour always wins out—as already seems the case in some of them—this is not only a problem for these markets. It is also a problem for wider society, for it is likely to have spill-over effects into other social realms. The nexus is provided by the fact that acting in markets can have an impact on people’s character, and maybe also on their rationality. An impartial spectator cannot endorse markets without a foundation of just laws. Nor are they likely to have the benevolent effects on society, and especially on its poorer members, that Smith hoped for. Rather, they are likely to undermine social cohesion, and the ability of individuals to sympathize with one another, thus also threatening the form of rationality that flourishes in pluralist societies. A Smithian liberalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Weinstein envisions it, needs to take these economic dimensions of Smith’s system into account, even if

it rightly prioritizes TMS over WN. This can only enrich the discussions about rationality, pluralism, education, and their multiple relations.

## NOTES

- 1 Although not in the way in which Otteson's account of the "marketplace of life" (Otteson 2002) presents it, with which I, like Weinstein (2013, 50-67), also disagree in some points.
- 2 On unequal rhetorical abilities as a challenge for Smith's view of commercial society see also Herzog (2013b).
- 3 For a contemporary account see e.g. Fricker (2009).
- 4 Weinstein himself writes that "According to Smith, narratives can be easily corrupted" (133). This holds true in general, not only with regard to specific forms of rhetoric.
- 5 As some commentators have argued, Smith's vision is also quite close to Rawls' substantive account of justice, and more specifically the "difference principle." For a discussion see Herzog (2014b).
- 6 See also WN III.3.8: "The lords despised the burghers, whom they considered not only as of a different order, but as a parcel of emancipated slaves, almost of a different species from themselves."
- 7 For the record, let me note that Weinstein's reference to TMS VI.II.2.7ff., and the way in which he presents Smith's discussion of groups within society, might imply reading a bit too much into Smith, who could also be understood as offering pragmatic advice for political reformers. The passage stands in some tension with Smith's rejection of group privileges in WN. For a discussion see Herzog 2013a, 72f.
- 8 To be precise, Smith says that a person who is never believed would "feel himself the outcast of human society."

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# The Dynamics of Sympathy and the Challenge of Creating New Commonalities

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Jack Russell Weinstein's book is an invaluable source of inspiration. Among its most intriguing insights, I will focus on three interconnected moments of understanding Adam Smith. These are particularly important and central to the author's argumentation.

- 1 The understanding of Smithian sympathy as a theory of *conscience*, continuing and correcting the tradition of Shaftesbury's perception of soliloquy as a process of self-division and internal dialogue.
- 2 The understanding of the interplay between the imagined impartial spectator (see point 1) and the real spectators, as taking place in moral *communities* where individuals preserve their rights.
- 3 The extended understanding of *rationality* as a complex process underlying and conjoining imagination, moral sentiments and judgment in the context of moral communities (see point 2).

## THE PRIORITY OF THE *THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS*

Crucial for Weinstein's understanding of Adam Smith is the prioritization of TMS. The latter is definitely not to be understood as just a "prelude" for WN, but as a pivotal work offering a pattern of theorizing human interaction, socialization, and acculturation. On this basis, the WN cannot provide a market modeled overall pattern for social relations,

but it is rather the other way around: economic relations in Smith's thought should be considered as a sub-case of the TMS understanding of social-moral interaction.

As Weinstein argues, Smith's "theory of rational deliberation is complex and context-dependent, allowing for its usefulness not only in economic circumstances but in the full range of human experiences, including but not limited to the moral, political, familial, aesthetic and personal spheres" (Weinstein, p. 8). Reason is not understood as a device of "rational choice" limited to the so-called *homo economicus*, but following MacIntyre, reason is mainly "a tool of communication" (Weinstein, p. 11).

According to Weinstein:

Smith develops a sophisticated account of otherness that is able to cultivate social unity despite the presence of significant differences. This relies upon socialization and education to maximize the ability of a spectator to enter into the perspective of an agent" (Weinstein, p. 16).

But what is more interesting and promising in Weinstein's approach is that he is not limited to text study and one more reading of Smith's work, but he goes one step further towards questioning the ways we could profit from Smith's thought while addressing our problems of pluralism and education in our contemporary societies. This approach raises the question whether our societies' challenges are identical or

not to Smith's. In this respect, I incline to argue that we are not facing the same problems Smith addressed in his era. Nevertheless, for all the distance separating our era from Smith's, his ideas on conscience may still be of great importance, not just as antiquities, but also as active devices and powers of understanding our societies. This depends upon the approach. It would be pointless to search in the writings of an eighteenth-century thinker for readymade keys to unlock our twenty-first-century society's problems. As far as economics is concerned, it is evident that a post-industrial stage of hedge funds and speculative financial bubbles is a totally different economic environment compared to the manufacture economy of the eighteenth century.

If, however, one chooses to focus on Smith's moral theory (considering economics as a special case and not as the central paradigm to apply in all social relations), to engage with the original texts, interrogating them, asking questions guided by the new interests of an informed reader of our century, the endeavor pays off. This is the way Weinstein takes by prioritizing TMS and Smith's theory of conscience in particular. His reading offers one of the most deep and well-evidenced interpretations of Smith's work. But what is more, he takes one audacious and confident step beyond this.

### SYMPATHY AND RATIONALITY AND THE VARIETY OF MOTIVATIONS

Weinstein rightly identifies Smith's rationality as having its roots in Shaftesbury's account of soliloquy. Soliloquy, as an internal dialogue, is a process of dialogical self-division that anticipates Smith's impartial spectator. By an ingenious movement, the platonic search to "know thyself" is being explored via a modern device—moral sense<sup>1</sup> and later impartial spectator—to address the contemporary question of otherness and pluralism. The intermediary link is the diversity of motives. Smith (following his predecessors Shaftesbury and Hutcheson) recognizes, against Hobbes and Mandeville, that there is more than one single motive to moral action. Smith avoids the trap of explaining eventually nothing by trying to explain everything through self-interest. Even the notion that self-interest is inherently vicious is being challenged. Along with the self-regarding affections there are also other regarding and social affections at work in the moral agent's soul. The agent is aware of this diversity and competition among sentiments during deliberation. The model of the divided self offers an understanding of the management of competing motivations and of moral adjudication, as a rational process. It is a dialogical rationality,

having nothing to do with rational choice theory (Weinstein, p. 49).<sup>2</sup> This is not an abstract calculating reason, which undergoes such rationality, but sympathy. Sympathy is empirical in nature but "it assumes a certain a priori capacity that cultivates the social nature of humanity" (ibid.) and as such it incorporates moral and aesthetic elements. The workings of sympathy and the impartial spectator is developed in the TMS, and Weinstein's answer to the so called Adam Smith Problem consists in prioritizing the TMS over the other works of the Scottish philosopher.

Weinstein argues against the notion that for Smith the marketplace is the overarching pattern of social life. Challenging James Otteson's thesis, Weinstein opposes his conception of the diversity of motivations. Human motivation in Smith is not reduced to self-interest alone. The desire of bettering our condition, a phrase used in both TMS and WN, is not in principle incompatible with other motivations such as altruism, if we don't define the two terms too narrowly. Smith distinguishes between "self-love" and "selfishness," building on Mandeville's distinction between "self-love" and "self-liking." One can interpret "bettering our condition" differently than meaning acting in one's strict self-interest. If Smith defines "that great purpose of human life" as "to be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" (TMS I.iii.2.1), then we can see in this purpose the real betterment of our condition. We really better our condition by trying to be worthy of sympathy, recognition etc. This is expressed in a moral language in TMS, and only elaborated in an economic language in the special case of the WN. Prioritizing "Kirkaldy Smith" over "Chicago Smith"—using the distinction introduced by Jerry Evensky (2005)—Weinstein insists that we can reveal Smith's overall project, "the search for principles that govern human social interaction and deliberation" (55). In TMS, Smith lays down the foundations of this project. Far from misconceiving the TMS as using the language of altruism, and the WN as using the language of self-interest, Weinstein points out that there is an interplay of competing motives in the TMS itself.<sup>3</sup> Such interplay is managed by the workings of sympathy and the impartial spectator. And what is more, the author calls our attention to a distinction not too commonly noticed in Smith scholarship—the distinction between "passive feelings" and "active principles." When Smith, in part III. Ch. III of the TMS, postulates a great disaster in China, and the proper sentimental reaction to this, he explicitly contrasts the selfishness of our passive feelings to the generosity and nobleness of our active principles (TMS III. 3-4). This is a case of juxtaposition between what the agent actually tends

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to feel, and what the agent understands that he/she *should* do to meet the approbation of an imagined impartial spectator. Notably, the title of the chapter in question is “Of the Influence and Authority of the Conscience.”

## IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR AND “ACTIVE PRINCIPLES”

This stress on “active principles” seems to be very significant for the understanding of what the dialogical rationality consists in. What Smith offers in his moral theory is not just an empirical description of passive feelings. What is more important in his theory is the way passive feelings are mitigated, evaluated, and adjudicated in a process of deliberation, in which conscience<sup>4</sup> plays an active part. In Smith’s words: “It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct” (TMS III.3.5). If the impartial spectator is not active, how can he/she be a judge? If there is not a diversity of competing motivations, then what can the arbiter arbitrate on?

I tend to understand this stressing of the active dimension of spectatorship as a formidable critique to those readings of Adam Smith which overemphasize spontaneity.<sup>5</sup> Moral rules are not given *a priori*, but have to be formed gradually on the basis of the corrective activity of the impartial spectator’s adjudications. If we take spontaneity in its strict sense, then we risk reducing moral rules into a passive conformity guidance. This would mean to succumb to the current common opinion. This would compromise the project of understanding ethics as a process of moral development. Gilbert Elliot was the first to touch this problem. As we can presume (as Elliot’s original private letter has not survived) from Smith’s answer (Letter to Gilbert Elliot, October 10, 1759), his old friend’s objection must have been: “if conscience is a reflection of social attitudes, how can it ever differ from, or be superior to, popular opinion?”<sup>6</sup> In his answer Smith exposes (in a note, later incorporated in the 1761 2nd edition of TMS) his idea of what we call “moral development.” After declaring that man is to be considered a moral being because he is regarded as an accountable being, Smith provides a step-by-step account of the ways a moral agent experiences his/her being accountable to some other, from childhood to maturity. Being accountable for its action to some other entails, for a moral being, regulating its behavior according to the likings of this other. Who is this “other”? This can be God and its fellow creatures. Leaving God aside for the moment, the first nearest fellow creatures to a child are his/her parents. Being accountable to his/her parents means to con-

form to their instructions and dictations. Next, we are accustomed to rendering our behavior agreeable to every other person we converse with, to our masters, to our companions. Soon we learn that it is altogether unattainable to be universally pleasing. Then we begin learning to conceive ourselves as acting in the presence of an imagined person who is “candid and equitable,” and who has no relation with nor interest in us or those we converse with, who is neither father, nor brother, nor enemy to us or them. This imagined judge is set up by our minds; he is the product of our self-division into an actor and a spectator; he is not an exterior observer anymore, but he is the “man within.” This is the impartial spectator. The more mature the moral being, the more it feels accountable to this “inmate of the breast,” the “abstract man,” the “representative of mankind and the substitute of God.”<sup>7</sup> This moral development renders us less dependent on the sympathy of the exterior real spectators, and more accountable to our conscience.<sup>8</sup>

## IDEAL AND ACTUAL SPECTATORSHIP AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

But by which standards does the impartial spectator judge? This is a very delicate moment in Smith’s theory. There are no definitively laid down, once and for all, universal standards. But this is not the end of the story. Smith alludes time and again to the principles inscribed by Nature in our hearts. But what those principles consist of is something that is manifested to us as moral development unfolds. Smith’s narrative of moral development, as summarized above, seems to vindicate Weinstein’s hypothesis. It seems that our search for a more impartial judgment starts with the awareness of the *diversity* of interests, motivations and points of view. The development of the internal impartial spectatorship is understood as a reaction to this diversity, fueled by our thirst for a perfect and never to be fully attained perfection of judgment. In this process partake people with very differently and unequally developed consciences. In such a context, the adjudications of the impartial spectator, internalized by wise and virtuous persons as inevitable, is at variance or even at war with what the common opinion concedes to. From Socrates to Dreyfus, via Calas (a case well known to Smith), there are innumerable cases in human history where the opinion of the great majority was very defective in impartiality and equity. In such cases, where “mankind are in the wrong,” the moral judgment of an impartial spectator meets the disapprobation and the condemnation of the common opinion. But the verdict of the “superior court” of our con-

science makes this “appear to be of small moment.” When one is accustomed to have recourse to this inner judge, one avoids being a “slave of the world.”

Consulting our “man within” is the only way to “make a proper comparison between our own interests and those of other men.”<sup>9</sup> Smith explains our correcting false “passive feelings” via “active principles” by an analogy to the way we correct the false impressions of things as they appear to the eye, through our imagination based on the knowledge of their real magnitudes.<sup>10</sup> In Weinstein’s terms, the adjudication of the impartial spectator, by managing and evaluating a diverse and competing motivation, is analogous to the correction of our vision by what we do not actually see, but can imagine on the basis of our knowledge on true proportion, magnitude and dimension.

But more importantly, the perseverance in what our inner arbiter dictates seems to have, in the long run, a corrective influence upon the points of view of others. That’s why today one doesn’t need to be exceptionally wise or righteous to realize that in the Calas case there was a miscarriage of justice. Voltaire or Zola failed to convince their contemporaries, but the opinions of common people did not stay immune in the long run, although they are always much less perfect in comparison to those of the more wise and virtuous, and always prompt to new fallacies. This is a slow, unending, and never satisfactory enough process of moral progress, and the dynamics of competing adjudications of varying degrees of impartiality is the explanation provided by Smith, if we read him this way.

It is not absolutely clear what these ‘active principles’ consist of. Smith does not endorse the stoic normative commitment to overcome the limits of *oikeiosis*. Any crystallization of principles of action entails a set of norms that is social and contextual. We cannot have recourse to any pre-cultural, unsocialized resources of normativity. Nevertheless, all normative arrangements are sensed to be imperfect as new knowledge is introduced and new experience built. In modern societies there is a continuous accumulation of knowledge, and enrichment of experience through encounters with “others” through commerce, social mutations, cultural intercourse and population movements. “Others” is to be understood in terms of gender, race, class and cultures. The notion of the “stranger” has undergone a continuous change. The more sensible the spectator, the more the pressure to enlarge the perspectives of sympathy is sensed. But this pressure does not flow from an explicitly defined substantial maxim. This would engage us in a vicious circle of discussing what would be the *summum bonum*. What really fuels the

progress in the perspective of sympathy is something more humble and not so far-reaching as the idea of a normative universal principle. It is the new common experience (as described above) that challenges the existing standards of normativity. The progress of such standards is a slow, step-by-step one, carried out through the interplay of ideal and actual spectatorship, and through education and socialization. It is a long and non-linear process of maturation that respects the “laws of gravity” of the consolidated opinions, and it is not meant to take big leaps through the circles of sympathy.

#### INDIVIDUALITY, MORAL COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION: CREATING NEW COMMONALITIES

Such interpretation of moral sentiments allows a fresh view of our contemporary problems of liberal individuality and community, of cultural pluralism, and of sympathizing with otherness. In the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment tradition, self is understood as a social self. Given our physical separateness, our understanding of the sentiments of others depends upon our imagination. It is through imagination that we put ourselves in the situation of others. Sympathy does more than produce imperfect “copies” (sympathetic sentiments are always imperfect, as our physical separateness cannot be really overcome). It is not the actual sentiments of others we sympathize with, but the situation in which they take place. The more we are acquainted with such situations, the easier we sympathize with them. How do we become acquainted with such situations? By sharing the same conditions, values and moral standards. That is, by being part of the same commonalities. Even in the simplest and closest relations, these commonalities are based not on blood, but on common conditions. Individuals form commonalities through processes of acculturation, socialization and education. Weinstein introduces on the one hand a subtle and crucial distinction between acculturation and socialization, and on the other education proper. Acculturation and socialization are educational processes in a broader sense. In this sense, even the marketplace relations are educational as well. But education in the strict sense (as it is provided by distinct institutions), is intentional in character. The more the proximity of the agents diminishes (in the process of enlarged “circles of sympathy”), the more difficult it becomes to sympathize with others. The looser the bonds of commonality become, the stronger the imagination is required for the unfolding of the sympathy process. Imagination is cultivated

by education. And when the education provided by everyday acculturation is not enough to trigger imagination and sympathy with unknown conditions, then new knowledge should be brought in, and intentional education must be of assistance to cover the gap.

Imagination is of fundamental importance for the workings of sympathy; and sympathy is indispensable for social interaction “which is itself a component of happiness” (Weinstein, 103). But imagination is an imperfect ground. Imagination is liable to be strongly influenced and limited by culture and custom. Weinstein offers relevant illustrations in cases, such as gender, slavery, intimate experience, and class, where our imagination can be easily misguided by prevalent prejudices. Even our self-image can be deformed by socially misguided imagination, and our “impartial spectator” can be seriously affected in its jurisdictions. The same holds for aesthetics, where fashion and custom heavily influence the impartial spectator. Smith is well aware of this reality (TMS. V.1.8, V.2.2., V.1.9).

In such cases the importance of education is made crucial. Education needs to counterbalance acculturation. Education can provide the corrective mechanism to mitigate the partiality of customary, repetitive usages of imagination. Yet this is not the only possibility. Pertinently, Weinstein sees in this a central difficulty in Smith’s system. This difficulty stems from what seems to me one of the most intriguing characteristics of Smith’s thought, which makes it so compelling even today. Smith, in Weinstein’s words, “implies a universal ethic throughout his work, yet he adopts a context-dependent moral psychology” (101). Moral judgment is being formed as a compromise between real and ideal evaluations. Moral community is present in the actual adjudications of the impartial spectator. At the same time, imagination and impartial spectator possibly tend to transcend the limitations of actual commonalities, by extending sympathy towards what is not yet sympathizable, anticipating standards and values not yet meeting the consensus of the moral community. I’ve tried myself to allude to such a process by depicting the impartial spectator as a personification of idealized moral community in progress.<sup>11</sup> But Weinstein, far more eloquently and persuasively, proceeds in a detailed fleshing out of how all this works. What I found most attractive and familiar at the same time is his idea that “the ability to sympathize rests on either preexisting commonalities or the ability to create new commonalities by learning the contexts and perspective of others” (96). Creating new commonalities is in tension with the inertia of preexisting commonalities. This idea of dynamics between actual and ideal spectatorship, commu-

nal and individual perspectives, may prove very helpful for a modern understanding of Adam Smith’s thought, overcoming the dilemma individualism vs. communitarianism.<sup>12</sup>

In such a dynamic and uncertain compromise, education’s importance is both crucial and equivocal. Education has the potential to unify, and the potential to divide (101). The outcome of this tension could not be securely anticipated. Smith surely prevents us from the drawbacks of relying too much on what he calls “love of system,” that is, the perseverance in consciously shaping society following a preconceived plan. Such “love of system” should be balanced by “public spiritedness,” that is by awareness of circumstances, and readiness to realize in what a good compromise exists, having in mind the achievable public good in a historical context. Both forces in this balance rely on imagination, and imagination, as we have seen, is being built upon knowledge and education. Regardless of the issue of how optimistic Smith can be about the long-run outcome of unintended consequences, what is—or so it seems to me—highly relevant for a twenty-first-century reader, is the clairvoyance of Smith to realize the limits of his own “system.” His allusions on the urgently needed corrective role education had to undertake (WN V i.f.50), prove that Smith wisely avoided falling in love with his own “system.”

Education proper is intentional and endowed with dual possibilities, as stated above, and this opens a field for competing educational policies. The absence of educational policy would have the undesired effect of harming the intellectual and moral capacities of the bulk of mankind, abandoned unaided in the stupefying conditions of a dull and unimaginative work. A conservative policy bolstering preexisting commonalities risks solidifying exclusions and prejudices. A policy of developing and encouraging knowledge of, and acquaintance with, less familiar circumstances, a policy of enhancing the sympathizing potential of people, would tend to enlarge commonalities and create new ones. In this respect, education has an important part to play. “Education must be geared toward encouraging a diversity of shared experiences that allow for communality between those whose own experiences seem farther from those of others” (Weinstein, p.106). Such policies are compatible with, and furthermore indispensable, for the adequate deployment of Smith’s project. Those who are interested in promoting educational policies which aim at the opening of the agents’ knowledge and understanding of otherness, can find substantial supportive Smithian resources. Weinstein’s eye-opening approach seems to allow us to throw some more light on this perspective. Smith’s vision of civilized society

relies heavily on the development of the sympathizing capacities of the individual moral agents. Such development entails finding interest in the knowledge of others. By “others” we are to understand, in our era of globalization and multiculturalism, other cultures, attitudes, customs, faiths, other ways of giving meaning to life, and other not yet open communities. How can we create new commonalities encompassing those new forms of otherness without compromising individual liberty and independence? We cannot find in Smith any readymade recipe. But we can find some useful theorizing instruments and attitudes, as Weinstein carefully shows.

## ILLIBERAL AND OPEN COMMUNITIES

Profiting from Smith’s subtle and balanced understanding of the tension between universal (although vague and imperfectly defined) principle aspirations and contextual pragmatism, we are encouraged to give less trust to market-oriented automatisms, and pay some more attention to the ways we dispose of, or must invent, for developing sympathizing capacities.<sup>13</sup>

We can illustrate the urgent need for this by venturing a counter paradigm. How can we understand sectarianism, consolidating exclusive, closed communitarianism and fanaticism, using Smithian instruments? We can treat such cases as examples of non-liberal exclusive communities. The cohesion of such communities rests on some kind of sympathy among their attending members with enmity towards other communities. Such enmity is foundational for the workings of sympathy in the interior of those communities. What would the quality of such a sympathy look like? It must be considered as a conditional sympathy: we sympathize with the other members of the group on the condition that they are members of the group, i.e. they do not depart from the values determining group identity. Collective identity prevails over individual rights and perspectives. This is reminiscent of premodern societies, where it was easier “for a spectator to sympathize with any agent since he or she will always be familiar with the situation of those whom he she encounters” (Weinstein, p.105). In such cases imagination has a far more restricted part to play, and narrative rationality is seriously refrained from developing. Such communities can be charged with irrationality, but not in the sense of formal rationality deficiency. For Smith, as understood by Weinstein, rationality is “audience focused” and narrative in character. The narrative informing the spectator view in a non-liberal community is focused on restricted and

homogenous audience. This means that the interior spectator is a prisoner of a cyclical narrative. Moral conscience is prompted to comply with the judgments of the exterior spectators, conformable to the standards of collective identity, and insofar that it does, the agent feels more self-assured as a group member. And this is attended with an agreeable feeling, consolidating self-approval. In such a context, any judgment that departs from the judgments of the exterior spectators (exterior to the individual agent but interior to the group) is disapproved, and endangers the very community membership of the individual.<sup>14</sup> Such communities are built on the exclusion of any extension of commonality beyond their borders. But this is tantamount to thwarting imagination and frustrating sympathy.<sup>15</sup> The sympathetic feelings consolidating the group are mutilated in their potential and partial by definition. This is quite the contrary to what Smith aspires to. Such an attitude would be “natural” in premodern societies, but in societies where the spectator faces differences and gaps in experience, beliefs and customs, it is an outright denial to sympathize with otherness, perpetuating prejudices and intolerance. The danger is the enclosure into a restricted circle of actor-spectator interaction, addressing a particular sectarian audience providing recognition and approbation, and motivating unsocial and even evil acting.<sup>16</sup> Such a kind of conformism freezes imagination and detains sympathy. Conformism prompts individual agents to understand themselves not as persons, but as community members, and consequently to treat others not as persons but as members of other communities.

We could perhaps establish a parallel between this stagnation of sympathy and the effects of dull repetitive movements of hand workers, as depicted by Smith in his “alienation passage.” Just as in the case of the workers, the members of exclusive communities face a closed horizon in their socialization, determined by the unchanged repetition of the same sentimental experiences, leading to an analogous mental stiltedness (torpor), blocking imagination, inhibiting their mental and moral capacities, and perpetuating ignorance and fear of otherness.

When enclosed in a uniform community, facing an undiversified audience, we are deprived of incentives to see ourselves in a critical light. As we conform to what the others (the others of the same community) are expecting from us to do and to be, we experience no discordance between our real and our ideal image of ourselves. In this context, inner moral deliberation is paralyzed. This is a case of self-deception; we are assured we are doing the right thing. Our “present” impartial spectator prevails over our “past” impartial spectator

(the spectator of our cool hours). In common cases of self-deception, the moral voice challenging our actions comes from outside; it is the external spectators who derange our easy conscience and invite us to realize our self-deception.<sup>17</sup> But in our case, where there is no discordance between our actions and the standards of the community, this corrective process does not work. In this case, the challenge could come only from outsiders; from voices coming from spectators not belonging to the community. The outcome is not predictable; it may be an open conflict or a moral crisis affecting the cohesion of the community; in any case the external voices cannot be internalized and inform the impartial spectator, before a new normativity has been established.

Nevertheless, there is an issue on which I tend to be more skeptical than Weinstein. To tell the truth, it is an issue concerning Adam Smith himself and not Weinstein's reading. In Smith's project sympathy has a twofold function. First, sympathy plays the part of imaginatively putting oneself in the place of another person, and so inferring his/her motives and entering their feelings and thoughts. This is what nowadays psychologists call *empathy*. Secondly, through sympathy we grasp the way our own motives, feelings, emotions, thoughts are received and estimated by others. In this case we anticipate other persons' not real, but potential and probable, reactions. How can we soundly expect that such reaction are probable? We can rationally predict others' reactions on the basis of two premises: a) the hypothesis of the homogeneity of human nature; and b) the sharing of the same set of values and standards in the commonality we share. By anticipating others' sympathetic sentiments, we tend to respond by mitigating our unsocial, too much self-focused attitudes, and we eventually come up with a non-preconceived, non-imposed conformity to the rules and manners the moral community consents to. This is what is supposed to take place in a civilized society. But what happens when such a civilization process is disrupted? This is not a speculative hypothesis. The twentieth-century's bitter experience has severely damaged both our ethical optimistic progressivism and our self-congratulating image of human nature. We are at least obliged not to leave unquestionable our received ideas, inherited from the eighteenth-century's innocence and optimism.

More precisely, the workings of sympathy seem to change dramatically as the prerequisites of a civilized society are challenged. What is such a thing as a civilized society? Trying to reconstruct this crucial Smithian concept we can enumerate four indispensable traits: a) a society of independent *commerçants*, bonded together through exchange, in a context of a social division of labor and under the rule of

law; b) the inequalities must be big enough to incite emulation and ambition, but not so great as to cause unsocial sentiments such as envy and resentment; c) a moral community of peers, persons of equal moral value, interdependent upon each other's free recognition, without being subjected to a hierarchical moral order of personal dependency; and d) each member should have access to minimal wealth and education, enough to enable them to enter each others' feelings, so that the above mentioned sympathy procedure building the social bonds works properly.

Now let us imagine a case of society affected by a serious disruption (a natural disaster, a massive migration, a devastating war, an invasion, an economic crisis or a "shock therapy" policy). In such a case, all the three first prerequisites of a civilized society would be subverted, and consequently the fourth one would be seriously jeopardized. In such circumstances we have the phenomenon Simon Baron-Cohen calls "empathy erosion."<sup>18</sup> Individuals tormented by hunger and terrorized by anxiety, violent oppression, and the fear of imminent death, become too focused on themselves only. Sympathy dysfunctions in both its operations: a) to sympathize with others becomes a hard and rare accomplishment; and b) the interest in how we appear to our peers, and how our image is appreciated by them, is replaced by our concern just to survive. This means that to develop sympathetic sentiments ceases to be the vehicle of social conformity through alleviation of selfishness, and now tantamount rather with an act of resistance against the distorted conformity and "normality" of the new established order. Under such "abnormal normality" conformity is gained against individual independence, and via a vicious circle of empathic mimicry which replaces the virtuous circle of empathic mimicry through sympathy, as understood in Smith's idea of normality. In other words, "civilized," "commercial" moral sentiments could not work anymore as social bonds, and even elementary sympathy could not stay alive, unless strongly supported by what Smith calls the "great, the respectable, the awful virtues," the virtues of self-denial and self-sacrifice. But the emergence of such virtues brings out discord and conflict. Sympathy and solidarity pave their way against the established moral order, prefiguring the establishment of an alternative one. As we move away from Smith's ideal civilized world, the set of moderate virtues proposed by him seems to lack the auto-corrective mechanisms which would get us back to the desired point of equilibrium. In such a case, civilized arrangements and concurring sentiments are out of work, and they could not be restored without the civic vigilance and the martial spirit, on the importance of which

Adam Ferguson so much insists, in his variant of the Scottish Enlightenment. When the empathic ability is eroded, no invisible-hand remedy seems plausible. The author might consider casting more light on this direction.

If I am not misled, Weinstein's book brings out, among other things, the very crucial issue of understanding the interplay of individual and communal moral judgments and standards, and their formation in Adam Smith's theory of conscience.<sup>19</sup> If the impartial spectator is understood as a theory of conscience that negotiates personal and community judgment (Weinstein, p.169), this understanding is very helpful for modern theory, helping to overcome an overly rigid distinction between liberal individualism on the one hand and communitarianism on the other. And this provides a pertinent criterion to distinguish between pre-modern and modern conceptions of moral community. We are looking forward to seeing the next step in the deployment of Weinstein's ambitious project as announced in the Introduction of this fascinating book.

## NOTES

1 Moral sense for Shaftesbury does not have the meaning of a sixth sense (Uehlein, 1976, pp. 248-249.) The notion of sense is related to reason [the *Hegemonikon*] (*Regimen, Rand I*, p. 175). Moral sense is not to be understood as an immediate instinctive reaction, but as a product of rational cultivation of natural sensibility (Larthomas, 1985, p. 384). This process is inseparable from the life of the community. Gadamer stressed the relevance of the notion of *Bildung* for understanding Shaftesbury's conception of socially cultivated moral sense (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 10-27). What Shaftesbury calls "heart" is not a passive feeling but reason in action, a *sensorium actif* as Larthomas calls it (Larthomas, 1985, p. 383). And this is not just an inner form, but through informing *sensus communis*, it becomes the "intersubjective sense of the unity of human genre" (Larthomas, 1985, p. 384). This reflective, active and social character of moral sense by Shaftesbury seems to have escaped the attention of his Scottish followers, according to Ernst Cassirer (1979, p. 315). Weinstein helps us see how more attentive Smith has been. Against this background, we can appreciate the criticism of Smith against Shaftesbury, pointing to the failures of the latter to accomplish such a project, by distorting communication with his linguistic choices, and thus impairing the sym-

- pathetic process and weakening the capacity to make moral judgments.
- 2 Shaftesbury, challenging the mechanical understanding of rationality (*Regimen, Rand I*, pp. 114, 139), juxtaposes the notion of the living subject. (Bl. Uehlein, 1976, p. 136- fn. 4). In this perspective, the idea of the good cannot find a form irrespective of the inner form of conscience. The same holds for the idea of God. (Larthomas, 1985, p. 183).
  - 3 The case of the economic implications of prudence in WN is very telling. Smith juxtaposes two motivations: the passion for present enjoyment, and the principle which prompts us to save (WN I.viii.44). This discussion is carried out in a non-moral language. This is evidence of interplay and judgment between diverse motivations, notably between two different aspects of self-interest. The moral value of each is discussed in TMS (VII. ii.3.16). As Weinstein dexterously remarks, "TMS tells us that attending to one's own economic self-interest is an act of propriety, and WN tells us how we are supposed to do it. TMS alludes to the economic discussion but never completes it; WN assumes moral discussion but doesn't quite acknowledge it" (p. 58).
  - 4 The impartial spectator, acting as an "anthropomorphization of duty" (p. 75).
  - 5 Weinstein, relying on Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (i.144), invites us to understand "moral observation" as incorporating much more than feelings and reactions, signifying "the complete package of observation, reflections, deliberations, and conclusions" (p. 136).
  - 6 As formulated by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, editors of the TMS, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, p. 16.
  - 7 Adam Smith, "Letter to Gilbert Elliot," op.cit., p. 55.
  - 8 Smith does not go so far, of course, but we might perhaps conjecture that his analysis leaves open the possibility to extend this moral development to the point where we can conceive even the deity as a higher internal, and no more as an external superintendent of our sentiments and actions.
  - 9 Adam Smith, "Letter to Gilbert Elliot," op.cit., p. 55.
  - 10 Adam Smith, "Letter to Gilbert Elliot," op.cit., p. 56.
  - 11 Drosos (2014), passim.
  - 12 "TMS has strong *communitarian* elements where 'communitarian' is understood as acknowledging some priority of the community or society, and '*liberal*' is understood as commitment of the priority of the individual and his or her identity" (Weinstein, pp. 68-69).

- 13 As Weinstein put it: “The ‘self-correcting’ aspects of the market (...) function only if actors are *self-consciously* correcting” (p. 226, emphasis in the original). The term “*spontanéité réfléchie*,” coined by Larthomas, (Larthomas, 1985, p. 349) for Shaftesbury’s “lovely system” seems even more appropriate for Smith.
- 14 This is another way to address the problem that Kant understood as “moral heteronomy.”
- 15 “The barrier to sympathy in both scientific and moral contexts is *the lack of commonality* between the individuals who are engaged in the acts of either sympathizing or being sympathized with” (Weinstein, p. 169, emphasis added).
- 16 This eclipse of sympathy lies at the core of the phenomenon Hanna Arendt describes as the “banality of evil.”
- 17 Fleischacker explains this perfectly (Fleischacker, 2011).
- 18 Simon Baron-Cohen, 2011, *passim*.
- 19 As Weinstein comprehensively defines it, “the impartial spectator is the aggregate of a person’s experience balanced with what he or she knows of the moderating power of community (...); it is an anthropomorphization of the rational process and incorporates the sentimental foundation into the reasoned analysis” (Weinstein, p. 72).

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## The “Spectator” and the Impartial Spectator in *Adam Smith’s Pluralism*

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**Bio-Sketch:** Spiros Tegos is Lecturer of Early Modern Philosophy at The University of Crete. He is preparing a book on the political relevance of Adam Smith’s doctrine of manners and its reception by French moderate republicans 1750-1830.

Amidst the recent flourishing of Adam Smith scholarship, Jack Russell Weinstein’s book stands apart for more than one reason. The main ground of originality lies in his relentless effort to reclaim vital Smithian concepts in order to rethink controversial contemporary issues in moral philosophy and public discourse. In the forefront of such efforts, this book fills in an important gap in recent scholarship regarding Adam Smith’s place within the liberal tradition. The prominence of pluralism as a landmark of any liberal society makes the relative lack of consistent study regarding this issue within Adam Smith’s philosophy even more blatant. Weinstein’s book finally brings this issue to center-stage. Yet it cuts even deeper. He explicitly strikes a balance between a novel contextual interpretation of Adam Smith within 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy and the history of ideas *and* contemporary currents of thought apparently very distant from the liberal tradition—no matter how we may define the latter. He thus goes far beyond standard narratives about unexpected affiliations or potential anticipations of Smith’s crucial concepts. On the one hand he thoroughly explores Smith’s place in the genealogy of rationality in order to make clear not only the priority of rhetoric over formal logic but also Smith’s argumentation theory as a “psychological account of inference” within which understanding always requires a “narrative structure.” Indeed these are not commonplaces within Adam Smith studies. By the same token Weinstein does not refrain from the daring task of engaging Smith in the apparently alien tradition of French “postmodernism,” unveiling possible linkages with Foucault’s archaeological project. With

the partial exception of education that has been studied but not to the extent discussed in this book, Weinstein offers a synthetic view of controversial issues within Smith scholarship resting on the simultaneous analysis of reason and sentiments, thus casting new light on liberal sentimentalism of a Smithian stripe. His methodological baseline consists in robustly contextualizing each theme before explicitly sketching the genealogy of major philosophical issues in question.

Within this extremely rich text, I pause on the somewhat standard Smithian theme of the impartial spectator, but which looks quite different once viewed through Weinstein’s theoretical lens. My approach will be threefold: first I examine the narrative nature of the impartial spectator, then following Weinstein’s line I scrutinize Smith’s debt to Mandeville regarding styles of moral discourse. However, I shall move beyond Mandeville, and, filling a gap I detect in Weinstein’s analysis, I develop Smith’s original complex account of character building in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS IV); finally, I briefly elaborate on a seemingly odd outgrowth of a psychoanalytic interpretation of authority in Smith, completing the portrait of the impartial spectator regarding *auctoritas*.

### 1. THE STYLE OF MORAL PROSE AND THE IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR

Regarding the moving of rhetoric to center-stage within Smith’s philosophy and the replacement of logic by rhetoric and informal logic, the core of Weinstein’s reflections

lies in chapters five and six, “Finding rationality in reason” and “Reason and the sentiments.” This evidently moves *The Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (LRBL) to the forefront while preserving a priority of the TMS over the other works throughout the book. After having sketched the genealogy of the multiple forms of “rationality in reason” from Hobbes to Shaftesbury via Locke (ch. 5), Weinstein focuses on the intertwining between reason and emotions, a sometime neglected feature of classic sentimentalism. The latter is often conflated with a mere negation or downgrading of reason, often following the Humean dictum “reason is a slave to the passions.” Yet reality is more complex and the “rhetoric as reasoning” seems to be a crucial component of Smith’s system, important to understanding both his moral theory and his economics. Thus Weinstein reclaims Adam Smith’s rhetoric as a “theory of communication” exceeding and completing the conventional understanding of rhetoric as an argumentation theory. He then gives a strikingly original account of Smith’s notion of the rhetorical nature of human reason:

First, logic and rhetoric are intertwined; as descriptions of inference and argument analyses and construction, they are necessary elements in mapping human thought. Second, given the centrality of language in Smith’s system, and given the importance of spectator-based sympathy, an individual’s role as audience member and as moral actor is an essential part of what it means to be a human being. Therefore, rhetoric becomes a capacity for Smith in the same way that reason does, or, rather, the faculty of reason is a compound faculty containing both the natural rhetorical perspective and natural reason. The faculty of reason is the foundation of narrative rationality because the faculty of reason is itself rhetorical (pp. 135-6).

The importance of narrative structure appears to be Smith’s remedy in order to secure a multi-linear “script,” the “multiple motivations that inspire a complex character” against Hobbesian determinism relying on a single motivational center of human behavior. This partly recalls McIntyre’s understanding of “tradition-bound rationality,” the fact that a reasoning tradition “infuses what individuals understand as reason itself” (p. 113) jointly with a *telos* to human activities. Overall, “rationality demands a narrative” (p. 166), or “a plot to the metanarrative,” a bold statement yet necessary to make sense of the complex argumentation theory that Weinstein suggests Adam Smith puts in place. In this context, logical

and nonlogical elements are intertwined. The invisible hand pattern is a component of a broader system transforming the function of rhetoric and logic within sentimental morality in the sense of a complex theory of a narrative of progress with moments of optimism and pessimism, visions of prosperity and fears of backwardness.

By the same token, one has to bear in mind though that this argumentation theory is oriented towards intersubjectivity, moral conscience involves a gradual immersion in the social tissue of argument procedures: “For Smith, argumentation is tied to growth in social awareness. To mature is to absorb and modify social constructed identity and argument procedures (p. 162).” Thus the key concept of sympathy can only be understood against a background of a “wide theory of argumentation” involving rational deliberation, emotions, reflection and normative criteria (p. 165). The “communicative aspect of sympathy” and the “working of the imagination” are both central themes in the TMS and the LRBL. Therefore Weinstein draws the conclusion that “...The purpose of rhetoric is, in part, the cultivation of sympathy. The proper function of the imagination is based in part on how we make information available to ourselves and others (p. 145).” Evoking this cluster of concepts, Weinstein reclaims the somehow neglected “rhetorical” status of rationality and its vital role alongside education (in the twofold sense of education and socialization/acclulturation), for a sympathetic pluralism within the Enlightenment.

Within this original frame of reference, I shall focus on the figure of the impartial spectator. Following his abovementioned line of thought, Weinstein revisits in his turn Smith’s most widely known concept, giving his own twist on the interpretation of this controversial idea in Smith scholarship. Fonna Forman (2010) in her insightful study offers a useful summary of the positions adopted in scholarship regarding the nature of conventionalism attributed to the impartial spectator. She categorizes them in three classes: those who considered the impartial spectator as an internalized convention, “a mere *reflection* of prevalent social norms” (Berry, 2003), those who place themselves on the other extreme of the spectrum postulating a robust independence of moral conscience, and finally scholars that endorse a more moderate stance, midway between the two extremes. Weinstein sketches a brief genealogy of the origins of the impartial spectator. Accordingly he locates Smith’s pluralism—eloquently defined in the title of chapter 2, One system, many motivations—in the transformation of Hutcheson’s and particularly Shaftesbury’s conception of personal deliberation and aesthetics within moral deliberation. As he states suc-

cinctly at some point “the impartial spectator—Smith’s version of the soliloquy (p. 59),” the “dialogical element found in the *Female Tatler* and other philosophers” (p. 40) leads to Smith’s rationality, and consequently to his conception of the impartial spectator. So far so good.

As shrewdly noticed by Weinstein, Smith is very much interested in the form and style of moral conversation and deliberation. In fact, Smith did not only lecture on rhetoric but on rhetoric *and* belles lettres, defining his research project as an inquiry into “the principles of those literary compositions which contribute to persuasion or entertainment.” Communication and persuasion through language seems to be the main concern for Smith, but Weinstein perceptively remarks that “Persuasion is, in some sense, beautiful for Smith (p. 136). Taking his cues from Shaftesbury’s style, Smith claims in LRBL, according to Weinstein, that “...character affects logical consequence. Smith can challenge inferential connections because he is making both a psychological point and an empirical one. The psychological point is that since the individual makes inferences justified by their own impartial spectator, the nature of their spectators determine the viability of the inferences....In contrast, Smith’s empirical point is that spectators make moral determinations on the basis of observations, and inaccurate or distorted information about an actor or his or her context necessarily leads to inaccurate moral judgments” (p. 139).

## 2. SOCIAL SATIRE AND MORAL PORTRAITS

Weinstein’s interpretation of Mandeville’s role in Smith is extremely fine-tuned. However, I claim that in emphasizing the role of dialogical elements, especially Shaftesbury’s soliloquy, Weinstein downplays a crucial aspect of Mandeville’s influence on the formation of the concept of impartial spectator, while he touches upon an equally crucial feature of Mandeville’s influence regarding the role of satire in the formation of the impartial spectator.

Steele castigates the separation of style and manners from reason, virtue and religion—“the most polite Age is in danger of being the most vicious” (1711)—while he is endorsing the thesis of manners and politeness as being a modern phenomenon that marks a progress of civil society in the age of civility. It can be plausibly claimed that Mandeville does not conform to the basic requirements of polite satire as he sheds light on the trivial, “minute” aspect, or the dark side of the allegedly venerable moral, literary or socio-political authorities.<sup>1</sup> His style consists in lampooning, instead of gently accommodating, the old aristocracy, while cynically manag-

ing, instead of castigating, the nouveau riche, and, broadly, new forms of commercial wealth. In his work, including the understudied *Female Tatler*, Mandeville aims to rescue politeness from the polite moralists, and familiarize the public with the artificial yet necessary function of manners as a social lubricant. Adam Smith seriously confronts this challenge to moral philosophy, and grapples with Mandeville’s corrosive view in a number of ways. It is the second hypothesis of this paper that Smith appropriates, though with qualifications, Mandeville’s satire of modern moralizing while rehabilitating the importance of anxiety in commercial society that Mandeville lightheartedly downplays. Therefore he amends Mandeville’s satire with his own satiric-ironic style in dealing simultaneously with the ridiculous and dramatic aspects of modern urban life. In order to achieve this goal, he sketches characters, a gallery of virtuous, vicious but most importantly ambiguous character portraits: the “coxcomb,” the vain, the ambitious “poor man’s son”—probably the first sketch of the American dream—but also the enigmatic “lover of systems.” Therefore he endorses the role of the moral portraitist in order to capture modern life’s tragi-comic complexity and contradictions while cultivating the reader’s skills to seize moral ambivalence.

To what extent is the genre of ridicule tolerated in a polite age? How is it linked to moral life? Following Addison, Steele endorses the thesis of manners and politeness as being a modern phenomenon that marks a progress of civil society in the age of civility. Smith did not follow Hume in his conception of politeness as artificial virtues, and thus his stance on manners and politeness is more ambiguous. He also disapproves of Shaftesbury, as well as of Addison and Steele, in their praise of “true politeness.”

Smith built up a satire on the character of the nouveau riche, a case of a ruinous attitude of living following material standards beyond one’s means and, concomitantly, the illusion that his obsessive imitation of aristocratic manners, “the frivolous accomplishments of ordinary behavior,” is the subject of as much sympathetic attention as is received by true elites.<sup>2</sup> Imitation of courtly politeness fosters moral corruption (as the title of the chapter added to the ultimate edition of TMS notably indicates).<sup>3</sup> Thus it replicates aristocratic shallowness within the circle of moderate virtues. Most importantly it corrupts the moral sentiments of middling ranks as they conflate moderate virtues with immoderate aristocratic manners, and modesty with the flaunting of wealth, *both* legitimate if properly constrained within clear social borders. This constitutes a plea for social stability (TMS VI.ii.1.20).

Before rushing to dismiss this portrait of the *nouveau riche* as a second-order moral subject, I claim that this is a major issue for the functioning of the impartial spectator. In reality, this ridiculous imitation of aristocratic manners relies on the moral *autism* of the “coxcomb,” the term to denote the *nouveau riche* individual (TMS I.iii.3). The *nouveau riche* is blind to other spectators’ gaze because he is so vain that he cannot realize how ridiculous his social image remains. As a result, this character puts the function of the impartial spectator in serious trouble because he is deaf to social stigma even in the most conventional sense of the term. It seems therefore highly unlikely for him to transgress conventional morality. At the same time, Smith is moving beyond standard opponents such as moral fanatics and other sociopaths. This seemingly innocuous figure of the *nouveau riche* proves extremely helpful to identify hypocrisy, the standard target of moral theory. Moving beyond classic theology or even moderate approaches within the Church of Scotland, Smith develops an original analysis of the nature of hypocrisy in commercial society. Clearly rejecting any form of casuistic or essentially repressive attitude as inefficient, he is spotting a consensually dismissive class of people: *nouveaux riches*, people that show off their wealth and status. The type of character that pretends to be socially superior compared to real social identity is more than obvious to any “bystander.” This was an apparently very common phenomenon in Scotland of his time. But then how to awake this deeply problematic character and make him aware of his deeply “sociopathic” self-destructiveness? Moral autism prevents the comparison with what is normally achieved in society and consequently any possibility of self-judgment against an ideal standard that transgresses conventional morality. The style of moral discourse is crucial in order for moral discourse to be audible. The spectators should find the situation appealing in order to mobilize their sympathetic imagination, “interesting enough in order for people to attend to them.” “Impartiality is a process of comparing standards...the virtue of impartial spectator is itself the result of continual perspective change” (p. 142). In this sense, the above-mentioned role of moral imagination is crucial: “Rhetoric either cultivates or hinders the imagination and thus allows for the creation and regulation of the impartial spectator” (p. 145). Weinstein consistently pauses on Smith’s critique of Shaftesbury’s style in the LRBL:

For Smith this style of writing leads to problems because the florid prose inaccurately communicates Shaftesbury’s character, when communication is dis-

torted, either intentionally or not...it interferes with the capacity to sympathize. This impairs the sympathetic process and weakens the capacity to make moral judgments (pp. 138-39).

Therefore sympathy and the impartial spectator are much depending on the medium of prose and style of moral discourse, in order to appropriately and efficiently address the audience.

Thus moral prose is a genre that needs stylistic elaboration. In this context I think that Smith develops the tragic but also, predominantly, the ridiculous aspect of actual social characters and the appropriate style of communicating a clear image of them to the public. Smith assumes in the LRBL that the problem of sympathy is a problem of clarity (LRBL i.v.57); Weinstein emphatically pauses on the “communication of ethical cases and judgments. Under Smith’s system good writing is both descriptive and prescriptive” (p. 143). In a more anthropological vein, Smith asserts elsewhere that “Men always endeavor to persuade others...everyone is practicing oratory on others thro the whole of his life” *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ A.vi.56). This is one of the building blocks of commercial psychology read through the lens of traditional rhetoric. TMS paired with LRBL follow a different path. The style of moral prose puts in relief the tragic and ridiculous dimensions of social behavior, sending a wave of shock to both the autistic actor and spectator of moral actions. Those genres are the ultimate refuge of moral discourse in order to become effective.

Smith detects tragic traces in commercial vanity. He underlines the aspect of anxiety that pervades the vain man’s life and most particularly the *nouveau riche*. There is a dark side of sympathy (Dickie, 2011) the insecurity towards the possibility of negative sympathy or antipathy from the real or hypothetical spectator of one’s conduct.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, Smith focuses on the insecurity inherent in commercial vanity. Finally the vain counterfeiter of status is tormented by fear of disrespect. The “empty coxcomb...solicits with the most anxious importunity all external marks of respect...of being taken notice of in public places with the appearance of deference and attention.” He is “anxious to obtain new expressions of esteem, and cannot be kept in temper but by continual attention and adulation” (TMS, VII.ii.4.8-9). Becoming the “proper object of honour and esteem,” being immune to public acclamation and respect, conduce to tranquility and fall within the jurisdiction of the impartial spectator. On balance, hypocrisy carries along manifold tor-

ments, and Smith as a moralist reclaims for a modern context the ancient moral ideal of being able to live with oneself.

Turning now to the status of ridicule, Smith mobilizes some moral caricatures, in partly appropriating Mandeville's sardonic style (p. 140). This is a crucial moment because my core claim is that Smith finds a novel way to awaken some moral sensibility in those who seem impervious to any other form of didactic discourse or callous moral conventions. In line with Weinstein, who argues that in the *LRBL*, Smith presents his critique of Shaftesbury as an instance of a broader theory about "argument, inference and character" (ibid). Ridicule is an epideictic genre in rhetoric within which Adam Smith primarily theorizes the moral status of ridicule.<sup>5</sup> It defines it as suitable to what is "in most respects Grand or pretends to be or is expected to be so, [yet] has something mean or little in it or when we find something that is really mean with some pretensions and marks of grandeur" (1.108). Jonathan Swift is declared to be an expert in the former kind of ridicule whereas Lucian is an exemplar of the latter. One could object that these are trifling matters with respect to the issues of "hard-core" moral philosophy, but Smith notes rather astonishingly that:

both together form a System of morality from whence more sound and just rules of life for all various characters of men may be drawn than form most set systems of Morality (1.125).

In cases where "real foibles and blemishes" of a character are castigated instead of accidental ones, to satirize "is altogether consistent with the character of a Gentleman as it tends to the reformation of manners and the benefit of mankind" (1.88), through the efficient medium of laughter and sarcasm constrained within borders of propriety. As Weinstein succinctly argues: "For Smith then, pathos does a good portion of the work that in classical rhetoric is more typically assigned to logos" (ibid).

The reference to Swift is crucial<sup>6</sup>: Smith sketches a flattering portrait of Swift who targets at least partly the same flaws in his contemporary society that Smith does, the vulgarity of the upstarts (ibid). Swift "ridicules some of the prevailing follies of his Time... chiefly levelled against Coxcombs, Beaus, Belles and other characters where gay follies than the graver ones prevail" (1.119). Indeed, in chapter 4 of part VII of the TMS, on the "licentious system" of Mandeville, depicted as a case apart "of the different accounts which have been given of the nature of virtue," the figure of the vain coxcomb looms large:

...who sets his character upon the frivolous ornaments of dress and equipage, or upon the equally frivolous accomplishments of ordinary behaviour. He is guilty of vanity who desires praise for what indeed very well deserves it, but what he perfectly knows does not belong to him. The empty coxcomb who gives himself airs of importance which he has no title to... (TMS VII.ii.4.8).

Weinstein observes that "Smith shows how intertwined class is with the rhetorical and artistic structure of the society" (p. 145). This insight is confirmed through a different angle here. The socially high and the socially low "stations," the "Grand" and the "little" are simultaneously social and moral notions and invoke a specific style of moral prose to be expressed in line with *LRBL*'s dictum that "Prose is naturally the Language of business; as poetry is of pleasure and amusement" (ii.115). Smith seems to be fully aware of the necessity of a novel moral language and a moral prose that reflects unprecedented commercial realities. In this section I have discussed the epideictic genre of ridicule in Smith and its role in moral improvement. By the same token I have emphasized, in line with Weinstein's insights, the interplay between commercial vanity, rhetoric, "belles lettres" and moral prose. In a nutshell, I suggest that it is crucial for Smith to develop a novel ironic style of writing concerning manners and morals, in order to highlight commercial flaws that traditional moral discourse standardly castigates without much efficiency. To this end, I argue that he primarily sketches original portraits of characters, his main category of moral prose, that match the complexity of motivations to wealth getting in commercial context.

### 3. THE "LOVER OF TOYS," THE "POOR MAN'S SON" AND THE LOVER OF SCIENTIFIC SYSTEMS: ADAM SMITH'S FABLE OF HUMAN OBSESSION

By and large, Adam Smith's appropriation of Mandeville cuts even deeper. There are other instances in the TMS where Mandevillean themes loom large. I suggest that such a case is TMS IV.i, clearly an intriguing discussion of the multiple motivations of wealth getting in commercial society. In this context I would like to challenge Weinstein's recurring critique of the alleged conflation of vanity with moderate ambition about "bettering condition" (TMS I.iii.2). By the same token I shall notice an omission that could possibly enrich Weinstein's line of thought: the lack of consistent study of TMS IV and its main character, the poor man's son. I now

discuss the interconnectedness of Smith's theory of systems and systemized knowledge and the gallery of characters emerging in TMS IV.

In the TMS, the striving for social recognition is attributed to sympathy, while the deference to the socially powerful has been interpreted—as I shall examine in due course here—as an apotheosis of high status from the low status agents, due to the generalized “sympathy from the whole of mankind” that high status unexceptionally gains (cf. Tegos, 2014). On this score, I subscribe to the interpretation of vanity as a *corruption* of the natural tendency to “bettering condition.” However, Smith quite clearly presents alternative, multiple centers of motivations, and a variety of characters that ranges from major to minor yet significant moral portraits, from the vain to the prudent, through figures such as the poor man's son that go beyond vanity and moderate ambition. The poor man's son's love of luxury is doomed to remain unsatisfied and is conceived in a non-hedonistic manner by the poor man's son himself. Thus we need to dissect more carefully this odd character.

In TMS IV, the novelty as regards the analysis of utility is based on reclaiming the notion of system (Cooper, 1999).<sup>7</sup> In a bold move, Smith straightforwardly links desire for gain and admiration of “beautiful and orderly systems,” vanity and aesthetic admiration of the “palaces and the oeconomy of the great” (TMS IV.i.9). Earlier in the TMS, the striving for social recognition is attributed to vanity, while the deference to the socially powerful has been interpreted as an apotheosis of high status from the low status agents due to the generalized “sympathy from the whole of mankind” that high status unexceptionally gains (cf. Tegos, 2014).

In TMS IV, 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 on account of vanity or the superior ease or pleasure which they are supposed to enjoy, as of the numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting ease and 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 *admiration* (TMS IV.i.8, emphasis added).

The poor man's parable in the TMS IV.i is one of the most striking and discussed parts of the TMS. More specifically there has been a certain amount of discussion regarding the interpretation of the “poor man's son” fable and its place within Adam Smith's *oeuvre*. In this context, Mandeville's shadow looms large. I'm bound to think that there is a smok-

ing gun in Smith's overall construction of the poor man's character as a *lover of system*. I would then shift the focus from the routinely debated moral status of luxury to the status of the love of system.

Smith seeks to palliate the coxcomb's excessive ambition by highlighting his ridiculous obsession of imitating aristocratic manners and the poor man's son's ordinary obsession with wealth, by putting forward the latter's ambiguous tragic-ironic status. His generic character of “lover of system” depicted ironically as a “lover of toys” constitutes a key component of his gallery of characters. In fact, an important aspect of the poor man's son often passes unnoticed; the poor man's anxiety and restlessness recalls a kind of manic-depressive personality in the non-technical and widely popularized sense of the medical term.<sup>8</sup> The main reason for this oversight resides in a more serious oversight: the poor man's son's character is a species of a broader genre, and his obsessions are species of obsessions proper to a broader family of characters, the “lovers of toys.” And for those who rush to overlook these thoughts as overstatements, Smith issues a warning as he often does; minute things contain important messages. The style and the content of the passage are strongly reminiscent of Mandeville:

How many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility? What pleases these lovers of toys is not so much the utility, as the aptness of the machines which are fitted to promote it. All their pockets are stuffed with little conveniences. They contrive new pockets, unknown in the clothes of other people, in order to carry a greater number...Nor is it only with regard to such frivolous objects that our conduct is influenced by this principle; it is often the secret motive of the most serious and important pursuits of both private and public life (TMS IV.i.6).

The particularly striking aspect of this passage is the emphasis on the universality *and* the triviality of this obsession: “the secret motive of the most serious and important pursuits” such as politics, or science and philosophy, is this love of system that can be encountered in its most elementary form in the “lover of toys,” a gadget junkie in today's parlance. Note that the lover of toys, apparently the most ridiculous case of love of system that Smith provides, displays self-destructive features—“how many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility”—that strongly recall the language Smith uses in his narrative of the demise of feudal lords in *Wealth of Nations* (WN III.

iv.15) (The feudal lords ruined themselves consuming “baubles and trinkets of frivolous utility”). In the case of the lover of toys and the lover of science, both share the same love of system, the same obsession with order, instead of regard to utility or functionality of the orderly system. It is their prime albeit secret motivation. Furthermore, the inventiveness of this ordinary obsession strongly recalls the spontaneous inventive power attributed to the division of labour (WN I, i.8) but also Hume’s natural inventiveness with which the human species is endowed in *Treatise*, III. At this juncture, Smith’s prose parallels Mandeville’s in the most unexpected way. Indeed, it suffices to pick up any description of avarice, greed or prodigality from the *Fable of the Bees* (FB), and the similarity is striking: “Prodigality has a thousand inventions to keep people from sitting still, that frugality would never think of; and as this must consume a prodigious wealth, so avarice again knows innumerable tricks to rake it together, which frugality would scorn to make use of” (FB I, 105).

Yet the anxiety inherent even in the slightest form of the trivial lover of toys, takes on a particularly disquieting form in the context of the ambitious poor man’s son. This semi-tragicomic, semi manic-depressive figure shares the same obsessive anxiety with all path-breaking scientists or social reformers (TMS IV.i.11), not to mention that this obsession has civilized Planet Earth through hard labor and finds itself behind the spirit of capital accumulation of entrepreneurs in commercial society (TMS IV.i.9). In TMS IV, Smith seems to imply that a universal trait of human imagination—the love of system—gains new life in commercial contexts where, in contrast to earlier socio-economic stages, opportunities for the acquisition of wealth are more abundant, and synonymous with social ascent for larger strata of the population. Thus the poor man’s son as a case of the love of system destined to flourish in commercial society, entails an ambiguous assessment—a blend of surprise, admiration, laughter and sadness—and demands the finest ironic skills to be fairly gauged that go beyond Mandeville’s satire.

#### 4. INTERNALIZATION OF SOCIAL AUTHORITY: A CHALLENGE TO THE IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR’S AUTHORITY?

In line with Weinstein’s spirit of updating Smithian sentimentalism by mobilizing the language and terminology of contemporary discourses, there are potentially interesting links to establish between central Freudian psychoanalytic concepts and the figure of the impartial spectator. As noted, Weinstein discusses the impartial spectator’s multi-layered

status throughout his book. Yet there is no significant attention paid to the psychoanalytic implications of the Smithian impartial spectator. Initially, D.D. Raphael noticed similarities between Smith’s conception of conscience as internalized social regard and Freud super-ego. He then dismisses any further analogies because, according to him, Smith’s analysis involves the internalization of both “favorable and unfavorable attitudes” (Raphael, 2007), while Freud’s emphasis is predominantly placed on fear and broadly on internalized repression. Fonna Forman in her aforementioned book clearly thinks that there is some analogy between the Freudian concepts revolving around the idea and practice of internalization (including super-ego) and the Smithian “psychological processes by which an individual internalizes and then reproduces her world” (Forman, 2010, p. 91) Smithian self-command, in this view, is considered far more optimistically, or in a more conservative perspective, as insensibly internalizing social norms without major psychological costs to be feared for a culture as a whole. Then she remarks that this internalized social conscience has raised worries in Smith himself, due to its excessive conformism ranging from the first to the last edition of the TMS, as he witnesses the unpredictable, rapid progress of the commercial society of his time. The figure of the impartial spectator sketched in the TMS’s first editions appears largely inadequate to account for the corrupting potential of advanced commercial societies.

I think we could complete this picture by spotting a quite unexpected potential anticipation of another Freudian concept, the concept of idealization, sketched in “Mass psychology and Analysis of the ‘I’” ego. Quite interestingly, this analysis is to be found in Smith’s account of the internalization of social distinction, a reminder of the centrality of divers processes of internalization for Smith’s moral psychology. In his chapter on ambition and the origin of distinction of ranks, adopting an ironic tone, Adam Smith emphasizes the quasi-idolatrous attitude of ordinary men toward greatness:

A stranger to human nature, who saw the indifference of men about the misery of their inferiors, and the regret and indignation which they feel for the misfortunes and sufferings of those above them, would be apt to imagine, that pain must be more agonizing, and the convulsions of death more terrible to persons of higher rank, than to those of meaner stations (TMS I.iii.2.30).

On this head, Smith’s account of the “natural disposition to respect”<sup>10</sup> controversial kings such as Charles I is striking. He lucidly recalls that there is no utilitarian motivation

behind our tendency to worship the great, “Neither is our deference to their inclinations founded chiefly or altogether, upon a regard to the utility of such submission and to the order of society, which is best supported by it” (TMS I.iii.2.3). “The kings are the servants of the people. To be obeyed, resisted, deposed or punished, as the public conveniency may require, is the doctrine of reason and philosophy; but it is not the doctrine of Nature” (TMS I.iii.2.3). Oddly enough Smith’s main thesis is that crowd psychology is fundamentally similar to the superstitious factional spirit of intimidated believers, let alone those mentally mutilated by the woes of commercial life among the modern crowd. Therefore it is doomed to fluctuate between a “habitual state of deference,” the most deep-rooted affection towards authority in human psychology of common people, and rare uprisings against royalty when, exceptionally, the “most furious passions fear, hatred and resentment” seize the “bulk of the people.” In other words, the rare enthusiastic transgressions of the respect due to authority are followed by long periods of superstitious reverence of greatness. Resuming the theme of the style of philosophical prose, at this point one can see the anticipation of a novel style of moral discourse that will account for complex moral and socio-psychological realities in a more adequate way than traditional accounts of moral and social authority.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I shall conclude by stating the extreme synthetic value of Jack Weinstein’s book, that succeeds in moving forward Adam Smith studies in the sense of a lively dialogue between contemporary scholarship, history of ideas, and the philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This dynamic move enables scholarship, among other things, to reclaim the legacy of classic rhetoric for the understanding of socio-economic, political and moral early modern issues. In this paper I do not discuss all aspects of Weinstein’s contribution, although I found intriguing his comparative account of Smith’s project and method with Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge. I rather focus on the conceptual genealogy of the impartial spectator, that leads me to a shift of attention from Shaftesbury/Hutcheson to Mandeville’s legacy in Smith. In line with two crucial insights regarding Smith’s project found in this book, the complex motivation/one system thesis, and the emphasis on rhetorical narrative for a pluralistic, commercial society, I further develop two points: the importance of satire in moral prose and consequently the twin tragi-comic status of ridiculous nouveau riche in the formation of an efficient

moral prose matching complex commercial realities. Filling in a gap in Weinstein’s narrative, according to my interpretation, I elaborate on the theme of complex commercial motivations, focusing on the enigmatic portrait of the poor man’s son found in TMS IV.i. Finally, I complete the discussion of socialization/accluturation of moral sentiments developed by Weinstein, with a psychoanalytic addendum regarding the internalization of authority, a rather visionary Smithian anticipation of contemporary debates in social sciences and political theory on the relationship between the mental and the social. This parallels and possibly extends Weinstein’s sense of Smith’s relevance for problems of our times.

This book is emblematic in respecting current Adam Smith scholarship by meticulously quoting and discussing major as well as minor works, while being iconoclastic in mobilizing Adam Smith’s thought to interact with formal logic and French post-structuralism. Being iconoclastic is definitely a Smithian virtue, as Weinstein’s mode of inquiry plainly reminds us.

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## NOTES

- 1 A helpful synthesis of the critique of "free thinkers" sketched by figures such as Joseph Steele or Berkeley, who coined the term "minute philosophers" is found in Castiglione (1986).
- 2 "Politeness is so much the virtue of the great that it will do little honour to any body but themselves. The coxcomb, who imitates their manner, and affects to be eminent by the superior propriety of his ordinary behavior, is rewarded with a double share of contempt for his folly and presumption. Why should the man whom nobody thinks it worth while to look at, be very anxious about the manner in which he holds up his head, or disposes his arms while he walks through a room?" (TMS I.iii.2.5/54-5).
- 3 "This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and the most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments." (TMS I.iii.2.3).
- 4 Kerkhof's (1995, pp. 230-31) insightful paper sheds light on the underrated aspect of sympathy related to insecurity and anxiety, and reads it as a Mandevillean response to the omnipresence of pride: the conscience that we "constantly overvalue ourselves" makes most of the people nervous. Yet he does not pay particular attention to the fact that anxiety is almost constantly tied to commercial vanity.
- 5 LRBL, 92: "Ridicule is appropriate when it issues from an appropriate sentiment and communicates clearly the nature of the object that gave rise to the sentiment."
- 6 Regarding the relationship between Smith and Swift and, broadly, for the importance of style in the prose of moral philosophy and in practical moralizing in Smith, see Hanley, 2008.
- 7 See especially II.1.3, III.3.3, where the universe is conceived as a "set of interlocking, co-dependent 'systems.'" On other notions of system of which Smith was probably aware, see Mitchell, 2006, pp. 63-7.
- 8 For helpful insights about nervousness in early consumer society, see Porter, 1992.
- 9 TMS III.3.3: "Habit and experience have taught us..."
- 10 In this context, the appeal to eastern adulation is telling: "Great King, live for ever! is the compliment which, after the manner of eastern adulation, we should readily make them, if the experience did not teach us its absurdity...His air, his manner, his deportment, all mark that elegant and graceful sense of his own superiority, which those who are born to inferior station can hardly even arrive at" (TMS I.iii.2.2, 4).

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# Was Adam Smith an Optimist?

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Jack Russell Weinstein claims “Adam Smith was a man of his time, an Enlightened scholar with the optimism that came from a scientific belief in progress and moral betterment” (2013, p. 239). Claims like this are spread across Weinstein’s volume and are not supported by textual evidence.

I fear that this lack of textual evidence may not just be because of the adoption of a more narrative approach, but because evidence for this “inevitable” progress that Weinstein claims to see in Smith may not be as clear as Weinstein wants it to be.

One can read Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* ([1776] 1981) not as a declaration of the inevitable march of history toward a better future, but as a scream of fear that the future may be bleak and worse than the present.

Smith attacks the mercantile system as a parasitical system which may cause the stagnation of the British economy. The British economy, like any other economy, is not subject to perpetual improvements, but may become more stationary, or regressive. China was an expanding economy for centuries, but then it became stationary for centuries, with little hope for improvement. “China had been long one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous countries in the world. It seems however, to have been long stationary” (WN i.viii.24). Smith goes as far as to say that there does not seem to be much difference between the description of Marco Polo and the ones by Smith’s contemporaries (WN i.viii.24). Bengal

was an expanding economy and had all the potential to remain such, given the fertility of its land, yet it turned into a regressing economy. In Bengal “notwithstanding [subsistence should not be very difficult] three or four hundred thousand people die of hunger every year” (WN I.viii.26). The American colonies were a growing economy, but Britain was no longer one. In Smith’s view there was more growth in North America than in England (WN i.viii.23). Only America has a growing population, testified to by the fact that a widow with children will remarry immediately since the children are considered an asset. In Britain on the other hand, the same widow with the same amount of children would not be able to remarry because her children would be considered a liability:

[A] young widow with four or five young children, who, among the middling or inferior ranks of people in Europe, would have so little chance for a second husband, is there [in North America] frequently courted as a sort of fortune. The value of children is the greatest of all encouragements to marriage. [...] [T] here is a continual complaint of the scarcity of hands in North America. The demand for labourers, the funds destined for maintaining them, increase, it seems, still faster than they can find labourers to employ (WN I.viii.23).

Smith is afraid that if Britain succumbs to lobbyists and mercantilists, it may go the way of Bengal rather than its North-American colonies. The “optimism that comes from a scientific belief in progress” is not evident.

In addition, it is difficult to see optimism or progress when Smith speaks of an economic system as a living body, with economic privileges granted by the government functioning like diseases. Privileges granted by the government make a body sick. They can even kill it:

The whole system of her industry and commerce has thereby been rendered less secure [by the monopoly of the colony trade]; the whole state of her body politick less healthful, than it otherwise would have been. In her present condition, Great Britain resembles one of those unwholesome bodies in which some of the vital parts are *overgrown*, and which, upon that account, are liable to many dangerous disorders scarce incident to those in which all the parts are more properly proportioned. A small stop in that great blood-vessel, which has been artificially swelled beyond its natural dimensions, and through which an unnatural proportion of the industry and commerce of the country has been forced to circulate, is very likely to bring on the most dangerous disorders upon the whole body politick. The expectation of a rupture with the colonies, accordingly, has struck the people of Great Britain with more terror than they ever felt for a Spanish armada, or a French invasion. ... The blood, of which the circulation is stopt in some of the smaller vessels, easily disgorges itself into the greater, without occasioning any dangerous disorder; but, when it is stopt in any of the greater vessels, convulsions, apoplexy, or death, are the immediate and unavoidable consequences (WN IV.vii.c.43).

And while it is true that a poor worker in Britain is better housed than a savage king (WN I.i.11), those accommodations come at a dear price, the atrophy of the minds (V.i.f.50) and the “drowsy stupidity” (V.i.f.51) of the great masses of people. “Mental mutilation, deformity and wretchedness” is an epidemic as serious and as damaging as leprosy: they “deserve the most serious attention of government; in the same manner as it would deserve its most serious attention to prevent a leprosy or any other loathsome and offensive disease, though neither mortal nor dangerous, from spreading itself among them; though, perhaps, no other publick good might result from such attention besides the prevention of so great

a publick evil” (WN V.i.f.60). If there is progress in Smith, it is not necessarily inevitable or something to take for granted.

The moral betterment that Smith allegedly promotes may also be questioned. Smith does say that time changes morals, but it is difficult to say that that change is inevitably for the better.

After all, this “progress” brought about by the inexorable march of time transforms men from brave and courageous warriors to weak and fearful soldiers, which is not necessarily an improvement in Smith’s eyes (LJ 1766, pp. 538-541). The change in attitude of people toward war also challenges an alleged moral betterment. The prosperity that goes with what Weinstein calls “Smith’s commitment to the natural spread of universal opulence” (p. 245) allows government to rely on public debt rather than on taxes to finance wars. So wars will become both longer and more numerous. And this is just to satisfy the mean rapacity of big merchants and manufacturers and the deluded dreams of empire of lazy citizens who enjoy reading war news in the comfort of their living rooms. Smith tells us indeed that the self-interest of great merchants and manufacturers causes the system of justice to degenerate into a system of lobbies, and the system of lobbies becomes a source of the most severe injustices. The government grants favors to organized interests at the expense of the majority of the members of society, and the laws become so unjust that “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 may be said to be all written in blood” (WN IV.viii.17).

The blood Smith refers to is not just a colorful image of the lack of moral restraint of merchants’ manufactures, but it is a condemnation of their immoral conduct which results in their willingness and ability to bring the country into wars “for the sake of that little enhancement of price which this monopoly might afford our producers” (WN IV.viii.53). And as mentioned, their fellow-citizens do not display high moral standards or significant moral betterment either: they “live in the capital, and in the provinces remote from the scene of action...enjoy, at their ease, the amusement of reading in the newspapers the exploits of their own fleets and armies, enjoying their dreams of empire” (WN V.iii.37).

Smith also analyzes how the alleged “natural spread of universal opulence” brings about a sovereign’s morally irresponsible spending. Smith explains that the sovereign will squander his revenues on frivolous trinkets (WN V.iii.2-3)

during times of peace. When war comes, debt will be incurred, which “will in the long run probably ruin all the great nations of Europe” (WN V.iii.10). Not the most optimistic view of the world’s future.

This universal opulence to which Smith is allegedly committed also unleashes sordid and childish passions, rather than moral betterment. When opulence started spreading, the “most childish, the meanest and the most sordid of all vanities” (WN III.iv.10) of barons and great landlords hopelessly attracted them to the glitter of a “pair of diamond buckles perhaps, or [...] something as frivolous and useless” (WN III.iv.10). So that “As soon, therefore, as they could find a method of consuming the whole value of their rents themselves, they had no disposition to share them with any other person” (WN III.iv.10). In addition to these accusations, Smith repeats the point five paragraphs later. The lords run after “trinkets and baubles, fitter to be the play-things of children than the serious pursuit of men” (WN III.iv.15). This language does not describe what I would think of as moral betterment. There may be unintentionally a betterment of society as a whole, but it is difficult to see any moral improvement in a vanity which can now bloom almost without limits.

Weinstein’s claims of Smith’s optimism and belief in progress seem therefore weak and partial, more like straw-men built to make a different point, rather than a genuine description of Adam Smith. Smith may be optimistic, but his optimism is a very complex one, with awareness of nuances and problematic issues. Ignoring the sophistications and the shades of Smith’s analysis in a book on Smith is, to this reader, writing a book about something other than Smith.

Weinstein’s agenda is terrific and interesting on its own terms. It therefore leaves the question of why he uses Smith in such a deformed way when he could have made the argument without Smith. As much as I praise Weinstein for his interest in exploring pluralism, I wish he had portrayed Adam Smith more realistically and with textual evidence.

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## The Political Hypotheses of *Adam Smith's Pluralism*: A response to my commentators

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*Adam Smith's Pluralism* (ASP) develops a framework to connect Smith's eighteenth-century discourse with twenty-first century debate about the nature of liberal democracy. It is the first in a series of three volumes, the second of which will present a modernized account of Smithian justice. The third will offer a theory of democratic political participation.

The first, the subject of this special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis*, establishes the rules of engagement, so to speak. It outlines my theory of interpretation and modernizes the vocabulary required for Smith to authentically engage Rawls, Nozick, Nussbaum, and other contemporary liberal thinkers. While there are some historians of ideas who might find this project inherently corrupt—some might argue that epochs cannot be bridged—most philosophers would hold that the past is material to the present and future. Our history not only reveals our assumptions, but it helps illuminate our mistakes. Sometimes our ancestors were wrong, sometimes not, but the challenge of the history of ideas is as much in the exploration as the conclusion. Textual exegesis is scientific inquiry and sport; it is the pursuit of truth and the celebration of ideas. There is no *a priori* reason why philosophers of a previous age cannot help advance today's investigations.

The devil, of course, is in the details. Discourse simultaneously cannot presume that all texts are *prima facie* compatible.

Words, assumptions, metaphysics, and historical context may be significantly different, so one must do significant prep work to make texts talk to one another. Historical settings might be bracketed when teaching Descartes's *Meditations* in Philosophy 101, but they cannot be ignored for any serious scholarship. Thus, readers of *Adam Smith's Pluralism* can rightly ask both whether my interpretations are persuasive and whether I managed to convincingly connect Smith with what most concerns political philosophers today.

My interest in contemporary issues directed me towards the first three topics named in the title: pluralism, rationality, and education. My focus on interpretation led me to the last: the moral sentiments. But as I articulate throughout the book, each of these ideas have histories as well as contemporary lives. All of them bridge the centuries.

Furthermore, no matter how much we want to read the "historically accurate" Adam Smith, it is virtually impossible to read *The Wealth of Nations* (WN) without considering Mill, Marx, Rawls, and others on some level. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) cannot be encountered without the more recent disciplinary additions of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, the Freudian subconscious especially. No matter how much we try to immerse ourselves in the his-

tory of ideas, our current understandings shape our imaginations.

Smith also cannot be considered without attending to capitalism, even though the term was not coined until one hundred years after he wrote. His impartial spectator cannot be evaluated without one eye on Kantian autonomy and the liberal/communitarian discourse that debates its coherence. In other words, my attempt to write with one foot in the past and one in the present is really an attempt to be intellectually honest. Many authors who claim to be doing history of ideas are not really being forthcoming about their political and intellectual motivations, because all the history of ideas can ever be is *today's* history of ideas.

On the other hand, pretending that we can read Smith as a contemporary is also intellectually dishonest. Consider, for example, how different Smith's reading experience was. Any book he bought would have been a very limited run by our standards, but read by a much wider percentage of his educated interlocutors.<sup>1</sup> He would have received the book with a simple board cover and then hired his own binder to cover it with leather of his choice. He would have read it by candlelight, holding a book knife, cutting each page apart as he turned it. How much difference this makes to the intellectual experience of reading, I can't say, but it suggests that reading was a slower, more active process than what we experience today. In Smith's time, the book was much more an object of wealth and status than the mass-produced object of today, but it still wasn't as rare as in the Middle Ages.

Smith didn't have electric lights or recorded music. Most of the oldest major museums we recognize today didn't appear until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after Smith was done writing.<sup>2</sup> He probably never saw works of art by Rembrandt, Titian, Michelangelo, or Da Vinci. Western democratic standards of gender equity were embryonic, if they existed at all, as were gay rights, regardless of how relatively egalitarian Smith might have been. Modern notions of race were established in Germany a hundred years after Smith died, created around the same time as the nation state and the modern academic professionalized disciplinary divisions. And, the recognized length of childhood in Smith's time is incomparable with our own – Smith would have had no notion of the extended adolescence that marks the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Apprentices started as young as ten.

Fashion, rules regarding nudity and sexual propriety, and notions of formality and informality all differed significantly from today. In other words, Smith's experience and his understanding of the everyday world is so much removed from the modern liberal democratic experience that it seems al-

most absurd that American politicians refer to its founders with reverence and that we look towards Hume, Smith, and Kant for such fundamental guidance as we do.

Yet, Smith wrote about almost all of those topics: art, music, and theater, gender equity and race, ethnicity and national identity, childhood, fashion and propriety. He made empirical observations and normative claims. He commented on cultural norms and made grand claims about what would eventually be called the world-historical level. He thought human nature was a constant and that "an hour's toil and trouble" remained the same through the ages.<sup>3</sup>

We also have to recognize Smith's political motivations in addition to his philosophical interests. He was a pamphleteer as much as he was a scholar, even though at over 1,000 pages and comprising two quarto volumes, WN seems as far from a pamphlet as one can get. A political advocate has a different relationship with an audience than a philosopher or historian, and he or she must rely on different rhetoric and utilize other forms of persuasion to explicate evidence. As Nathaniel Wolloch points out in his introduction to this volume, the scholarly world is still undecided as to how to balance Smith's context with his cross-temporal, cross-cultural, multi-contextual comments.

My remarks so far should be seen as a preamble to my responses to the authors in this volume, each of whom I am grateful to. Their comments belie the tension they inherited from my book. All of them have one foot in contemporary times and one in interpretation; all of them improve my work. And, while there are a few moments of disagreement (including one extended argument), my rebuttals should not be read as dismissive in any way. The contributors to the volume are top-notch scholars whom I have learned a great deal from, and I sincerely hope that I do not return the kindness of their labor with the kind of hostility and condescension that so often mar academic philosophy.

My commentators inherited another tension from my book. Like Smith's corpus, *Adam Smith's Pluralism* is an unfinished work, the first, as I already noted, of a three-volume series. I have therefore chosen to read these essays, not as oppositional, but as guidance for my future endeavors. This point will be repeated several times when I emphasize a particularly cogent contribution.

## JUSTICE

I begin my comments addressing Lisa Herzog's observation that Smith's account of justice is "more central than it appears" in my account. She is correct; I didn't concern myself

with it as much as I might have. The first reason was strategic. As she notes, I plan to discuss it in ASP's sequel. The second reason, however, is more philosophical. Justice may be central for the state, but it is not psychologically primary for individuals. Justice creates the *conditions* for capabilities, not the capabilities themselves. My work in ASP was more focused on the processes of rationality, sympathy, and judgment than the political circumstances that cultivate them.

Smith did not share the classical Greek notion of justice as a *character* virtue. He did not regard it as a balance of the soul in the Platonic sense. Instead, justice represents a person refraining from harming others. It may result in "very little positive merit" since a person may "often fulfill all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing" (*TMS* II.ii.1.9).<sup>4</sup> This is not to suggest that justice isn't relevant to ASP, only that it is a secondary focus. Justice is an elaboration on my other comments.

As Herzog points out, "markets need a framework of positive law with which they can function," including "property rights and contract law," but Smith wrote almost nothing about legislation (if he did, he burnt these comments shortly before his death). His description of the limited role of the sovereign in *WN IV* provides very few specifics, and Smith offers us no democratic or republican theory. His readers are even left guessing as to whether he was a Whig, Tory, or something else entirely.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, whatever moral foundation Smith did offer for such legislation can only be discussed in combination with his account of progress and the normative value of history, issues I address in the final two chapters of the book but which are beyond the scope of Herzog's paper.

Herzog focuses on two areas: pluralism and economic inequality. Obviously, class difference is a form of diversity in and of itself, and it fits into many discussions of plurality, including holding a prominent place in ASP. But there is something unique about economic difference that deserves special attention; it is more than just sociological and cultural. As Smith reminds us, basic economic needs are the first concern, which is why (as Herzog illustrates) no society can be just that is not universally opulent.

This was also the case for Marx and the early Rawls, but in Rawls's later work, economic disparity was eclipsed by cultural questions, especially those revolving around liberty. Most liberal theorists followed his lead, a reversal of the several centuries before him.<sup>6</sup> But the last few decades have seen various attempts to pull liberal theory back to real-world economic discussions, especially from Sen, Nussbaum, and the development ethicists; the most powerful pull has

come from the economic historian Thomas Piketty (2014). Herzog's comments are representative of this debate, fluctuating back and forth between identity politics and economic consideration, but her point is inarguable: economic disparity interferes with individuals' abilities to cultivate their capabilities, and justice is the mechanism by which we equal the playing field. As she writes: "without the rules of justice in place within a society, the process of the development of rationality, with all [its] rich social and emotional texture... can easily be corrupted."

My choice not to address economic inequality is, for Herzog, an "open flank" because justice, in general, acts as a "common denominator in a society made up of individuals with different sentiments, different rationalities, and different worldviews." However, she explains my motivations a few paragraphs later when she writes, "justice is also presupposed in the process, at least in the minimal sense of recognizing that others have an equally valid perspective." I do, in fact, presuppose a minimal economic justice in my discussion of the cultural and experiential diversity that leads to individuals having different sentiments, rationalities and worldviews, but I do not clarify what that economic justice looks like. I offer many educational prescriptions, but I do not address the role of economic disparity in schooling, such as the immense inequality that results in the United States from funding schools based on property taxes. I also consider the role of choice in curriculum, but I do not remark on the parental protection of privilege as illustrated by Herzog's use of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Her agenda is a useful one to follow. She is adroitly nudging me where I need to go next.

In short, her critique is as much one of contemporary liberal theory as of ASP. As I articulate in the introduction, my organizational scheme is based on the four dominant discourse threads in liberalism: differences in personal motivations and aims, differences in group identification, differences in experience and education, and differences in rationality and ways of thought (pp. 13-14). Economic considerations are not there. They should be, and this discussion must begin with understanding better what Herzog calls the common denominator of justice. She is most certainly correct that in the Rawlsian model, the overlapping consensus allows people to talk using a common vocabulary and political conception of justice. It is a suitable location for debate.

But what does her phrase "common denominator" mean economically? It can't mean common experience. People are raised in different circumstances and as Smith illustrates better than most, as the means of production changes, and as history progresses towards commercial society, employment

diversifies daily experience. Common denominator in this case is cultural, not commercial. Does common denominator mean instead that every culture establishes common standards of minimal goods and possessions? Smith suggests this, pointing to the importance of linen shirts and leather shoes (WN V.ii.k.3), although he makes no claim as to who should supply these goods to the needy. The United States saw a form of this debate recently when political pundits and The Heritage Foundation suggested that anyone who owns a refrigerator ought not be considered poor (Thompson, 2011).

Calling for a minimal economic standard is, of course, the path that Marx took, and Marx was probably the best Smithian who ever lived. But in the end, the discussion must revolve around the exact nature of universal opulence, not the general call that I emphasize in ASP. As it does today, this discourse may involve broad questions such as whether the state has an obligation to provide food, shelter, and clothing, but it may also dive deeper into asking what kind of food, shelter, and clothing people are entitled to.<sup>7</sup> In either case, Herzog's call for attending to the economic conditions that underpin sympathy, the impartial spectator, and social unity cannot be ignored.

Herzog's call for more attention to the economic should not overshadow Maria Carrasco's analysis of justice. In her insightful essay, she shows that Smith's pluralism is not just a theory of diversity management, but a moral pluralism in and of itself. This pluralism, she writes, is defensible precisely because of its context-dependency.

Carrasco is, in a certain sense, elaborating on Herzog's attempt to find a common denominator, postulating an embryonic, but Smithian version of Rawls's overlapping consensus. She writes:

Smith's empiricist moral psychology...has sufficient resources to overcome moral incommensurability and cultural relativism. There is a small group of norms that are simultaneously context-dependent *and* universal. These are the rules of justice: a core set of rules with absolute authority that precludes relativistic interpretations of the TMS and lay the ground for an empiricist justification of universal human rights.

The problem in TMS, she explains, is "the empirical origin of the moral conscience." Many of our moral terms, she reports, are culturally bound; even harm is contextual. But, she insists, the fact that these ideas are local does not mean they are arbitrary:

Smith's moral normativity is context-dependent but not relativistic. First, it depends on the import of the specific situation and is thereby objective. Second, moral judgments are validated by the mediation of the impartial spectator, who moderates our innate self-preference in order to provide warrant for treating ourselves as we treat others. This double rapport, the agent with the import through the impartial spectator, is what allows Smith to propose objectivity amidst variations.

This insight recalls my emphasis on Alasdair MacIntyre's tradition-bound rationality and Toulmin's field-variant argument standards. While MacIntyre is often labeled a communitarian and a conservative, his work on multiple rationalities is a form of deep respect. It is his way of recognizing that even those moral traditions that one profoundly disagrees with can be understood as rational, and that humans have a drive towards reason that even our religious history bears out. Recognition of multiple rationalities, I would suggest, is a prerequisite for mutual respect in a diverse society, because it doesn't exclude any tradition as animalistic or sub-human in the classical sense, where rationality is a solely human character trait.

Ultimately, Carrasco writes, Smith's ethics "includes a group of moral rules that ought to be the same in all times and places. These are the rules of justice, which are exact, absolute and universally binding." Smith's justice safeguards "recognition respect," or "equality as human beings," which has an independent, intrinsic content, [and] may give us a tool to identify some universal injustices and lay the basis for the recognition of universal human rights."

Smith's pluralism, Carrasco offers, has both pluralistic and universalist elements, but the universalism isn't always apparent because culture has epistemological consequences that may obfuscate the moral truths that all societies ought to recognize. Nevertheless, there are truths independent of recognition, a point that echoes my claim that moral progress aims towards discovering morality as opposed to creating it. As she writes, for Smith, "moral justifications are not arbitrary. They depend on reality and may be discovered by any competent spectator. They are objectively justified."

Here, Carrasco's focus on pluralism overshadows the obvious realism implicit in her account. The impartial spectator is a solution to an epistemological problem; it aims towards discovery, first as an individual but then as a society. As she explains it:

Acknowledged or not by their cultures, black slaves have always had the same dignity as free white men. They have now been *recognized* as equals, but they have not been *made* equals. Women did not acquire their dignity as they started to be *considered* equals. Recognizing the equal dignity of *x* does not create or invent that dignity. It has always been there, but we were blind to it.

I am honored that Carrasco credits my book for inspiring her meditation; an author can ask for little more than to help contribute to such sophisticated work. In particular, what Carrasco does is illustrate how moral epistemology necessitates the discussion of progress laid out in the final chapters. If she is correct that lack of recognition-respect does not eradicate Smith's faith in the fundamental equality of all people (and I think she is), then the question of how to force such knowledge upon an ignorant or unwilling populace moves front and center.

Here again we move from the moral realm to the political one. How does one cultivate a state that makes people not just *act* morally but *understand* morally as well? How does justice differ from the other virtues? For Smith, as mentioned above, justice is a negative virtue, but this isn't enough of a distinction. Neither is his claim, as Carrasco phrases it, that justice is "exact, absolute and universally binding." What is special is Smith's emphasis on the equality implicit in justice, which is, she argues, "a culturally-neutral import." As she writes, "any unjustified hurt deliberately inflicted on a human being in *any* culture will be a material justice in *every* culture." This is why, as she points out, I claim that slavery is paradigmatic. Any case of "equals treated as inferiors" are "immediately" called injustice.

Carrasco leaves us in two helpful places. The first is that we now have a sophisticated rejoinder against those who claim Smith is a relativist. I argue in ASP that Smith does, in fact, derive "an ought from an is" (pp. 139, 231). Carrasco in turn gives us a clear mapping of how this works in the realm of justice. Second, Carrasco provides a clear terminological bridge between Smith's psychological theory of discovery and argumentation, and contemporary accounts of pluralistic justice that depend on some common denominator (in Herzog's words). If Smith is going to be a contender, we have to highlight the normative core of his prescriptions.

In ASP, I emphasize normativity in two ways, first by arguing that "central to the human understanding is an undeniable experience" of pain in the face of inequality or oppression (p. 98) and second, by showing how, in the long

run, human moral knowledge progresses. Carrasco supplements this by showing that in the case of justice, experience and progress presuppose the fundamental equality in humanness. With this established, Smith can be used to provide an even stronger alternative to Kantian liberalism.

## CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Dionysis Drosos illustrates just how intimately connected interpretation is to contemporary debate. He begins by calling attention to my discussion of "active principles," distinguishing them from the passive feelings that inspire apathetic responses to, among other things, a devastating earthquake in China (TMS III.3.4). He also observes how important they are to dialogical rationality, asking: "if the impartial spectator is not active, how can he/she be a judge?" This is not a rhetorical question. An impartial spectator is active by definition, and dialogical rationality presumes agency that descriptions of economic agents as preference-seeking overlook.

But Drosos's emphasis on the complex intentionality of the judging mind has a more crucial target than simple interpretation. He is taking aim at contemporary debate. He writes: "I tend to understand this stressing of the active dimension of spectatorship as a formidable critique to those readings of Adam Smith which overemphasize spontaneity."

Drosos is inarguably correct. Active principles are central to deemphasizing spontaneity, and even though he is elaborating on my book and ascribing this motivation to me, I must credit him with getting to this insight first. I did not see it, and wish that I had, because just a few additional pages of explication in ASP would have helped forestall Craig Smith's condemnation that "more troubling still is Weinstein's argument that for Smith the rules of morality are not spontaneous but rather are progressive and the product of rational inquiry" (Smith, 2014, p. 163).

I will not respond to Craig Smith in detail here other than to record that Drosos starts the rebuttal for me. Drosos is yet another contributor who has guided me to where I need to be for the second volume. He explains: "If we take spontaneity in its strict sense, then we risk reducing moral rules into a passive conformity.... This would mean to succumb to the current common opinion. This would compromise the project of understanding ethics as a process of moral development."

Drosos is pointing out that understanding the moral process as spontaneous precludes the possibility of distinguishing oneself from the crowd. The self-critical analysis that

cultivates the impartial spectator requires deliberation and personal growth, especially since, as I argue, the impartial spectator is a form of conscience. A spontaneous conscience is nothing more than blind faith to the status quo; Adam Smith clearly wants more than that.

An analogy to Kant is useful here. As he describes it, the manifold of understanding organizes sense data according to their appropriate category. The process is precognitive in the sense that agents do not consciously choose to understand an object as having quantity, quality, modality, relation, and modality. The categories are part of the structure of the mind. As a result, the understanding *feels* both intimate and spontaneous. But, just because the understanding feels this way, does not make it so. For Kant, a great deal of organizational work goes into sorting sense data into a form that the human mind can grasp. To see the manifold as spontaneous because it is automatic (or structural) is to confuse epistemology and phenomenology and conflate spontaneity with instantaneity.

Sympathy feels similarly spontaneous. Our shock at experiencing someone's impropriety is immediate and natural, but it is more often than not (as Herzog tells us) a cultural by-product. Further, we can change this reaction, although sometime this takes a great deal of effort. Individuals learn from new experiences. We are self-critical. We grow. To reduce Smithian moral judgment to a spontaneous action is to both erase human agency and to abdicate individual responsibility. Spontaneity makes the question "why be moral?" irrelevant because it is a form of determinism in disguise.

Let me put this in a completely different way. Imagine a jazz pianist who has spent three decades playing the instrument, who has developed impressive aural skills, and who has superior command of music theory. One day during a performance, an accompanying guitarist plays an Asus4 chord. The pianist, in response and without forethought or reflection, improvises on the Dorian scale in the key of D. Only the most disrespectful listener would call this spontaneous. Doing so would erase the pianist's decades of practice and study. It would eradicate the musician's expertise and agency. Spontaneity, in this case, is the product of decades of preparation and critical thought. It is not really spontaneous in any Hayekian sense.

The same is true of moral judgments on the political level. No one does a better job than Foucault of showing how ideas such as madness or sexuality are the very opposite of spontaneous. They are intersubjective and the product of an unmappable network of cultural micro-judgments growing out of, of course, the texts, rituals, and practices that MacIntyre

highlights. As I showed in the final two chapters, in many respects, Foucault and Smith are quite compatible. If moral development were truly spontaneous, TMS would have been one paragraph long.

The attempt to make Smith an advocate of spontaneity is yet another layer in the seemingly endless libertarian cooption of Adam Smith. It is, as I allude to above, more evidence that one never reads Smith on his own terms but always through one's own contemporaries. In the next volume, I'm simply going to have to tackle this issue head on.<sup>8</sup> I thought I might be done arguing against the libertarian Smith. I was wrong.

Drosos anticipates another concern for the second volume: the roles of shock and civilization in commercial societies. To illustrate them, he postulates a believable scenario in which a natural or human-created disaster disrupts a society to such an extent that the four criteria of civilization break down. They are:

- a) a society of independent *commerçants*, bonded together through exchange, in a context of a social division of labor and under the rule of law; b) the inequalities must be big enough to incite emulation and ambition, but not so great as to cause unsocial sentiments such as envy and resentment; c) a moral community of peers, persons of equal moral value, interdependent upon each other's free recognition, without being subjected to a hierarchical moral order of personal dependency; and d) each member should have access to minimal wealth and education, enough to enable them to enter each others' feelings, so that the above mentioned sympathy procedure building the social bonds works properly.

Drosos is doubtful that Smithian sympathy is strong enough to withstand such chaotic conditions, and, as such, he questions whether social bonds would continue to work effectively. Smith's response to his scenario, I suspect, would emphasize the circles of sympathy. He would likely argue that those farthest from our hearts and our everyday experiences would be trusted the least, and those closest to us would be trusted the most. In other words, the strongest social bonds would be the ones most likely continuing past the disaster. This would also probably result in the return to a clan-based society in which small familiar groups rely upon each other for their basic needs and long-term planning.

But then scarcity would arise (not to mention the inevitable adventurous human spirit).<sup>9</sup> The clans would be forced

to trade with one another, first tentatively with many explicit safeguards and then, eventually, once the trustworthy have been identified, with a comfort level that would allow for intermingling and the enlarging of the clan society.<sup>10</sup>

In a certain sense, this seems like Nozick's societal genealogy in *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, giving *prima facie* credence to, yet again, a more libertarian interpretation of Smith. But giving too much attention to the similarities would be misleading, since Drosos's scenario necessarily divorces the social evolution from Smith's stadial theory.

Smith's point in WN is that human progress is integrated with discovery—the very first pages of WN present an account of specialized innovation. Government structures naturally change as the means of production changes, which is why agricultural and feudal societies have different types of governance than commercial societies. But in the wake of a disaster, human learning does not go backward. Certain technologies may be unavailable, but the populace knows they existed and would strive to reinvent them as quickly as possible. They are restoring society, not inventing it. This means, ultimately, reestablishing law and order, as well as social bonds, as quickly as possible. Thus, however libertarian-like the response to a disaster might appear, the Smithian goal is always to move away from libertarian structures towards a more robust and orderly society as quickly as possible. Smith's libertarian genealogy, if it exists at all, is only a way station on the way to a thick polity.

We are once again back to the political questions I put aside for the first volume. We are asking about the social foundation of justice, and the relative power of laws over character and inclination. Smith understands that personal commitment is the greatest threat to political stability and sees religion as the surest road to factions. I will address this further in the next volume, especially since religion fanaticism is such a pervasive problem today.<sup>11</sup> But a recent study by the journalist Naomi Klein suggests that there is an even greater threat, the use of shock to manipulate markets (Klein, 2008). She outlines the ways in which neoconservatives have created or exploited disasters to make real economies into laboratories, and the horrendous economic circumstances that result.

Klein's claims are controversial to say the least, but they must be addressed and I am currently working on postulating a Smithian response to her work that will also find its way into the next volume. However, an abridged version of my anticipated response might be as follows: markets are managed by legislation and government maintenance to a much larger extent than most people like to admit. The term “free

market” is a misnomer; a civilized society houses a “well-managed” market at best. For Smith, the term free market refers to global trade, not completely unfettered trade. In fact, while Smith uses the terms free competition (and free and universal competition), free commerce, free circulation (particularly the free circulation of labor), free trade and freedom of trade, and free importation many times, he only uses the term free market once (WN IV.viii.26). Those who seek to create free markets within communities either over-emphasize or misunderstand Smith's point.

What a free market actually is unclear. On the global scale, Smith offers a clearer blueprint—no tariffs or regulations that limit trade or promote bootlegging, for example, or no monopolization of trade routes—but what would such a market look like within a given society? Whatever it is, it promotes the ability for people to change trades as often as they please; it brings the market price in as much alignment with the natural price as possible; it necessitates a reasonable form of informed consent, and it probably does not permit much price fixing.<sup>12</sup> But other questions abound. Are all products permissible? Does sales tax have to be evenly applied? What forms of consumer protections are acceptable or required? As we saw with Herzog's economic comments, we are used to dealing with these questions on the general level, but much more needs to be said.

These are tentative conclusions at best; significantly more work needs to be done on the interpretive level, let alone prescriptively. But I am confident of my basic point: free markets exist within government structures, and are necessarily guided by regulation and intervention to a significant extent. This is a fact that should be celebrated, not lamented. A rejection of the governmental role in managing the economy is a form of anarchy, not free commerce.

## MORAL EDUCATION THROUGH SATIRE

Returning to Drosos's disaster, it is worth noting that the chaos that he describes does more than create a breakdown of laws and practices. It also destroys the mechanism of social recognition that Spiros Tegos addresses in such detail. First off, what is easy to forget about Drosos's scenario is that the first breakdown is that of conversation. In times of crisis, there is little leisure and little attention to the more rhetorical aspects of day to day life. There is also little attention to satire as public engagement.<sup>13</sup> Without satire, there are fewer ways with which to socialize individuals. It is, as Tegos points out, harder to temper hypocrisy.

Echoing Freud, Tegos maps out the process by which the impartial spectator internalizes social standards and identity cues. Following D. D. Raphael and Fonna Forman, he sees Smith's account of the internalization of favorable and unfavorable attitudes as anticipating Freud's super ego. He then adds Smith's foreshadowing of the role of Freudian idealization in establishing both the "I" (ego) and identifying those whom the moral agent should emulate (even when worshipping "the great" has no utilitarian value). This is useful because it reminds us that society chooses whom to advertise as virtuous. Role models are culturally defined, and as society changes or breaks down, those who stand out change. This is related to Carrasco's point that harm and its concomitant categories are socially defined as well.

But this breakdown is not solely a product of large-scale disasters. It also happens in instances of significant personal change. To illustrate this, Tegos highlights Smith's suspicion of the "coxcomb" or the nouveau riche. As he summarizes it:

The nouveau riche is blind to other spectators' gaze because he is so vain that he cannot realize how ridiculous his social image remains. As a result, this character puts the function of the impartial spectator in serious trouble because he is deaf to social stigma even in the most conventional sense of the term. It seems therefore highly unlikely for him to transgress conventional morality.

Vanity, Tegos claims, prevents the coxcomb from hearing the tempering voices of others, but I would suggest that this is only possible because the nouveau riche have, for lack of a better phrase, lost their way. They have little life experience evaluating the virtuous and the vicious among the aristocracy, and they are uncertain whom to emulate. Like those faced with a new and unprecedented crisis, they find their old ways eclipsed. Perhaps this is why ridicule works so well. Humor is cutting and is almost always more effective in countering vanity than persuasion is. But also, the coxcomb, as Tegos explains, has trouble distinguishing between vanity and bettering his or her own condition.

Tegos is no doubt correct that vanity is a "corruption of the natural tendency to 'bettering condition.'" He is also wise to emphasize Smith's poor man's son. But he must remember that for Smith, the lie that the poor man's son tells himself is a lie that drives economic advancement. As Mandeville points out before Smith, the profligate, the "sensual Courtier" and "Fickle Strumpet that invents new Fashions every Week" are the agents that "procure an honest Livelihood to the vast

Multitudes of working poor" (Mandeville and Kaye 1988, p. 355). However immoral or misguided the poor man's son is, he has significant utilitarian purpose.

So, there is a tension between Smith's optimism and the poor man's son who is a "lover of system." On the one hand, as Tegos writes:

the poor man's anxiety and restlessness recalls a kind of manic-depressive personality in the non-technical and widely popularized sense of the medical term. The main reason for this oversight resides in a more serious oversight: the poor man's son's character is a species of a broader genre, and his obsessions are species of obsessions proper to a broader family of characters, the "lovers of toys." And for those who rush to overlook these thoughts as overstatements, Smith issues a warning as he often does; minute things contain important messages.

The poor man's son misunderstands his true economic goals. He confuses bettering oneself with amassing toys and prestige. Yet on the other hand, the

universal trait of human imagination—the love of system—gains new life in commercial contexts where, in contrast to earlier socio-economic stages, opportunities for the acquisition of wealth are more abundant, and synonymous with social ascent for larger strata of the population. Thus the poor man's son as a case of the love of system destined to flourish in commercial society, entails an ambiguous assessment—a blend of surprise, admiration, laughter and sadness—and demands the finest ironic skills to be fairly gauged that go beyond Mandeville's satire.

Tegos's point, I think, is that commercial success is both so powerful and so desirable that ordinary moral education will not overpower its negative side effects. As such, only satire and ridicule can tame the famous and powerful. But, at the same time, one can't walk away from the inherent optimism present in Smith's fable. The poor man's son's qualified success and his walk away from virtue make us all better off.

This, as Tegos reminds us, is Mandeville's influence on Smith. But it is also indicative of the book's two Smithian themes that I announce in the introduction:

First, as already noted in his philosophy of history, Smith's work assumes a constant interaction between

an ideal that acts as evaluative criteria for human thought, motivation, and moral inquiry and an actual but imperfect process of discovery that illustrates well the limitations of the human project. Smith's agents always aim for perfection but never achieve it; progress and comparison must always be the standard of betterment.

A second theme is that that which divides people also unites them. Perhaps one of the most problematic aspects of Smith's work is that the very factors that help unify people in the face of diversity are the same ones that cause them to understand one another as different in the first place. This is an empiricist's dilemma and an accurate account of the human condition; Smith's philosophical problem is everyone's existential one. As we shall see, natural tendencies make individuals want to domineer, but these same tendencies motivate people toward mutual sympathy. Lived experience results in agents' having different perspectives, but this same root empiricism (however limited it may turn out to be) allows people to imagine themselves in another person's circumstance. The division of labor creates political divisions just as it creates universal opulence. How Smith manages these factors and how he overcomes the divisive forces that may also be used to cement society are important questions that guide my investigation (p. 18).

In other words, the poor man's son, like the slave, as Carrasco has pointed out, is paradigmatic. He sets himself an ideal and fails to achieve it, and he does so because the ideals that make us a closer community can also push us farther apart. We strive to do the right thing and even though we act appropriately, we cannot avoid the possibility that it will all end up negatively. I don't believe one can grasp the accuracy of Smith's work without attention to these two themes. I also think, if I can speculate, that being inattentive to them has led to the greatest miscommunication in this volume: Maria Pia Paganelli's misunderstanding of my use of optimism and progress.

## OPTIMISM

Paganelli's analysis makes two different points. The first is that I do not provide enough textual evidence to claim that Smith is an optimist and the second is that Smith should not be read as one. Obviously, the second is more philosophi-

cally interesting than the first, and while I do not believe that my evidence was as spare as she suggests, to the first point I will respond simply that if she, as a reader, walked away unconvinced, then I probably did not do the job I needed to do.

However, it is important to recognize, as Nathaniel Wolloch remarks in the introduction, that Paganelli's conclusion "goes against the grain of mainstream Smith scholarship, which tends to see him as an example of general Enlightenment optimism." This doesn't mean she's wrong, of course, but it speaks to why my defense was less vociferous than she would have liked. I, like many scholars, simply take Smith's optimism for granted.

Is Smith an optimist? The contributors to this volume certainly seem to think so. Maria Carrasco writes: "Indeed, despite Smith's strong commitment to fallibilism he believes that, using the various resources at its disposal for attaining a better perception, a better identification and a more accurate moral judgment, the sympathetic process discovers truth (objective appropriateness) and normative ethics." Lisa Herzog, quoting Smith himself, explains:

...in commercial societies, 'the road to virtue and that to fortune, [...] are, happily in most cases, very nearly the same,' at least for the 'middling and inferior stations' (TMS I.III.3.5). In the markets Smith envisaged, working hard, delivering good quality, being reliable, and building up a good reputation (LJ (B), 538-9), all lead to economic prosperity, thus providing incentives for these virtues, which may not be the highest virtues, but which can be expected from all members of commercial society.

Spiros Tegos keenly calls Smith's parable of the poor man's son as "probably the first sketch of the American dream" and quotes him as believing that satire "is altogether consistent with the character of a Gentleman as it tends to the reformation of manners and the benefit of mankind" (1.88). And, as we have seen, Dionysis Drosos sees enough optimism in Smith as to suggest excess on his part. I will add that even the first line of TMS is optimistic, suggesting that people do care about the happiness of others, despite having no real interest in it, and, as we have seen with our discussion of the poor man's son, Smith is profoundly optimistic that people's personal betterment, even the attempts that go awry, can make the whole better off. The invisible hand is an optimistic story, as is Smith's stadial theory, his faith in the expertise of the worker, and his belief implicit in all of his work that we can learn from history.

But perhaps I am being unfair. Showing optimistic elements in Smith does not prove he is an optimist, and there is no doubt that Smith is, at times, mean, suspicious, critical, and even dark. There also seems to be little fruit in asking how many optimistic beliefs a person must have in order to be considered an optimist; I don't want to engage in casuistry. Instead, I would suggest that Paganelli and I differ in that I consider Smith's role as a pamphleteer, emphasizing what I call elsewhere the educative nature of his texts (Weinstein, forthcoming). I see his work as calls to action—calls that demand comparisons of what is to what might be.

Notice, for example, that all of the quotes Paganelli cites involve his present-day circumstances: China wasn't stagnant, but it is now, and Marco Polo is not much different than his contemporaries; Bengal was booming but it is now regressive; there isn't enough demand for laborers in Europe to match the birthrate; in its present condition, Great Britain resembles a diseased body; the workers face lives of torpor and "drowsy stupidity"; progress has made great warriors into weak men; government can now use public debt to finance war, leading to ruin; organized interests get governmental favors, especially the merchants and manufacturers; citizens are entertained by the news of wars and dream of empire for amusement; the sovereign squanders public monies on trinkets; and the barons and landlords spent their money on trinkets with no disposition to share. Each of these observations are descriptive not prescriptive.

I left a few out, not because they don't fit my thesis, but because they are posed as conditionals or prescriptions: "if Britain succumbs to lobbyists and mercantilists, it may go the way of Bengal rather than its North-American colonies"; the diseased body of England "deserves the most serious attention of government" otherwise it will spread like a leprosy; and, when war comes, it will "probably" ruin the nations of Europe. These quotes clearly point to a fork in the road. They are advisory in nature. They show that Smith is giving us both a pessimistic warning and an optimistic alternative.

The one quote I have passed over is Smith's observation that North America has more potential for growth than England, but, of course, this is neither pessimism nor optimism, it is simply fact. An unexplored continent of uncultivated and largely unpopulated land does indeed have more growth potential than the crowded, exploited lands of Europe that are buried in history and politics. Nevertheless, this is why trade is so important for Smith. Commercial interaction can bring these opportunities to Europe, revitalizing the economies of countries that are on the brink of ruin. This sounds optimistic to me.

Smith wrote his "very violent attack . . . upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain" because he wanted to change policy and he did (Corr. 208). He wanted to show us how bad things are under mercantilism and then project the positivity of free trade. He is doing what any sophisticated pamphleteer would do. He is gathering evidence for his advice and explaining all the good that will come from it.

Insofar as we can know anything about his mind, I'm confident that Smith was optimistic enough to believe that his works could influence policy. This is the same kind of optimism he revealed when he observed that students will learn what is worth learning without compulsion: "No discipline is ever requisite to force attendance upon lectures which are really worth the attending, as is well known wherever any such lectures are given" (WN V.i.f.15). In this, he is certainly more optimistic about student enthusiasm than I am. And regarding the impact of WN, he was correct. His book changed the world.

In the midst of her criticism, though, Paganelli changes tone. She starts off by suggesting that Smith wasn't an optimist at all, but then remarks: "If there is progress in Smith, it is not necessarily inevitable or something to take for granted." Regarding this, she and I couldn't agree more. There is nothing *inevitable* about progress at all. As I state in ASP:

...whether there has or has not been progress in opulence is not arbitrary. This is an empirical matter depending on the definitions of progress and opulence, accepting the fact that no single meaning may be definitive. Certainly, there might have been progress for some people and regress or stasis for others...As Maureen Harkin suggests, in addition to Smith's recognizing that progress does come with some loss, he seems to suggest that his own narratives are "local to a time and place, neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain." For Smith, this is yet again the tension between the actual epistemological limitations of inquirers who create the narratives and the ideal theoretical constructs they use to investigate nature (ASP 258-259).

As I go to great pains to detail, Smith's notion of progress is an ideal by which he measures actual history, just as the impartial spectator is an ideal moral standard by which one evaluates actual activity, and natural price is an ideal measure of comparative worth that one strives for when evaluating market price. Smith is interested in asking why actual events do not conform to the way they should be; if he was as

optimistic as Paganelli claims I think he is, then his project would be nonsensical because there wouldn't be any variation between the ideal and the actual.

It is unclear what Paganelli means by “an optimist”, but I suspect I have seen this debate before. In a serious misreading of Jerry Evensky's *Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy*, Samuel Fleischacker casts doubt on Smith's progressivism. He writes:

If Smith really did think every jot and tittle of human history could be accounted for by the design of a benevolent deity, we might expect a cheerful story about progress to run through his work, telling us that we can be sure that our societies today – the more “advanced” ones, at any rate – are better off in every respect than past societies were, and that we will continue to progress until we reach some ideal utopian state...But one of the most striking features of Smith's work...is the way that he complicates the easy story of progress that dominated the Enlightenment (Evensky, 2007, pp. 196–197).

Fleischacker then lists many pessimistic moments in Smith's writing and concludes, “No cheerful progressivism here! Rather we have a story every bit as much about ‘corruption and degeneracy’...as about improvement.” (ibid).

Fleischacker's misreading is not of Smith; everything he writes is a reasonable interpretation. It is, however, deeply unfair to Evensky, who offers no such Pollyannaish interpretation. Thankfully, Evensky had his say. In his response, after pointing out that Fleischacker has “done to Evensky just what he claims Evensky has done to Smith, grossly oversimplify[ing] his work,” he summarizes his position as follows: “the reality of human history is primarily pain and struggle as individual societies emerge, progress, stagnate, and decline.” The stories of China and Bengal, for example, he explains as “each a story of unbridled self-interest and absurd institutional structures leading to human exploitation, immiseration, and starvation.” (Evensky, p. 199). His description of history is similar to mine and Evensky's book included all of this information, but his reviewer simply didn't recognize it.<sup>14</sup>

Now, let me be clear: Paganelli is not as egregious as Fleischacker. We disagree, but she has not misread my book. We may differ on how much evidence counts as enough, but I fully accept that she herself was not persuaded, and I appreciate her being so forthcoming. I also agree that her understanding of Smith is defensible—there are many ways

to read Smith. But there is no “straw man” in ASP and my interpretation of Smith, however it differs from hers, is not “deformed.” If the evidence for Smith's optimism, in her words, “may not be as clear as Weinstein wants it to be,” then all she has established is that there is ambiguity, not that my interpretation is off. She has overstated her points for effect and not engaged my whole argument.

She is not alone. There is something about the idea of progress that drives many people to rhetorical apoplexy.<sup>15</sup> They seem to think that if someone suggests there has been progress, then he or she is suggesting that there has never been suffering, or that they are using a means-ends justification to excuse the suffering there was. Yet, I explicitly reject the notion that pain is necessary for goodness, writing, “by victims, I mean those whose cultures, economic or moral lives, or institutions did not survive the vast historical change, or who endured more suffering because of the successes of others. I do not claim that these tragedies are necessary for progress” (256 n. 97). I also write:

Furthermore, Smith never claims that suffering is required for progress. While he does think that lessons come from tragedy and suffering—the experiments of history yield results—he never makes an argument for the necessity of oppression. As a result, his philosophy of history is not susceptible to the postcolonial critique that any notion of progress justifies historical injustice. To use Kipling's phrase, there is no “White Man's Burden” in any of Smith's work (p. 259).

There is always suffering; I never claim Smith is utopian. There are always stops and starts; progress is not perfectly linear. I was as explicit about that as Evensky was. I am disappointed that Paganelli didn't see it.

I must admit that I anticipated this reaction to a certain extent, which is why I spent the final chapters presenting Smith's philosophy of history and arguing against Foucault, the person who most powerfully argued against the concept of progress itself. If Paganelli had addressed these chapters as well, I am sure I would have learnt a great deal from her analysis.

## CONCLUSION

I fear that it may be unsatisfying to read an author respond “I'm getting to that,” over and over to his commentators. I have tried to include many substantive arguments in this essay and to anticipate many of my coming conclusions. But

the fact of the matter is that my project is too long for one book, and were I to wait until it was all completed, the result probably wouldn't be available to the public for another decade.

More importantly, though, I cannot complete my research without engaging the community of scholars along the way. There is no point in writing if one does not address the audience and learn from their experience. Adam Smith had the luxury of living in a scholarly culture that permitted a person to revise the same work year after year until he or she died. We do not. Instead, the best we can do is present our findings and immerse ourselves in the discourse that results. This is the opportunity that this issue of *Cosmos and Taxic* has given me, and I am thankful for every moment of it. The sequel to *Adam Smith's Pluralism* will be better because of the commentary included here. I look forward to the time when the contributors read that next volume and help teach me where I need to go after that.<sup>16</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 To illustrate, while TMS was successful enough to warrant six editions in Smith's lifetime the total print run during the life of it copyright was 7750 copies (Ross, 2010, p. 188).
- 2 The British Museum opened to the public in 1759; the Louvre opened to the public in 1793.
- 3 Here we face a compelling interpretive issue. While Smith's basic point is understood, an hour has not been a consistent measure throughout the ages. As Joel Kraemer explains: "It is important to realize that the hours of the day for Maimonides' contemporaries had different lengths depending on the seasons. As the earth revolves around the sun, the length of the period of daylight changes. The ancients divided a day into twelve equal parts of daytime and nighttime, so the length of their hours called seasonal hours, actually varied. In Maimonides' milieu, people counted twelve hours of nighttime and twelve hours of daytime, whatever the length of daylight. If daylight was long, each hour would be correspondingly long, and if short, the hour would be correspondingly short. An hour was one-twelfth of the length of daylight or nighttime. Instead of our sixty-minute hour, then, the ancient hour could be from forty to eighty minutes. For astronomical calculations, the hours known as equinoctial were one twenty-fourth of a day, or equal to the length of a seasonal hour at equinox" (Kraemer, 2010, p. 78). It is worth asking, then, whether the Smith interpreter should address the fact that an

hour's toil and trouble could not be the same because an hour had such fluctuation, or is it better to think of Smith's point as he intended it: physiologically, basic human labor capabilities have not varied in recorded history.

- 4 As I point out in the book, Smith does find Plato's account of justice compatible with his own (TMS VII. ii.1.11; ASP 56).
- 5 For more on Smith's politics and the attempt to determine his legislative perspective, see: Haakonssen, 1989; Winch, 1978.
- 6 As Istvan Hont astutely observes, Hobbes's theory was purely political with no economic consideration at all, but by the time the tradition got to Marx, these characteristics were reversed: "Marx had no use for politics at all" (Hont, 2005, p. 2).
- 7 Such a discussion might involve asking questions such as: Should countries equalize access to meat or other forms of protein? Should each person be entitled to a specific range of square footage? Is culturally-appropriate clothing a reasonable government benefit for those receiving assistance?
- 8 A primer on this spontaneous order tradition can be found in Hamowy and Ross, 1987.
- 9 Smith sees the desire to trade as innate, although while he suggests that it is a unique human trait, nothing rests on his claim of uniqueness. See, Weinstein, 2014, pp. 447-65.
- 10 My description of the breakdown is as speculative as Smith's and I make no attempt to root it in the sociological research of social activity during disasters. I do this because Drosos asks a question about the text, not about the real world, so to speak.
- 11 See also Weinstein, 2012, pp. 223-36.
- 12 This list is not intended to be exhaustive.
- 13 I do not mean to suggest that people don't insult one another in times of crisis. Instead, I mean that satire changes its rhetorical purpose. Its goal is to motivate allies against a common enemy and not to inspire social change through education of the object of satire.
- 14 For more on Evensky, see: Weinstein, 2007, pp. 61-69.
- 15 Consider the critical reaction to Stephen Pinker's argument that the world is less violent now than it has ever been. Many of his critics refuse his position on principal and avoid debating the content of his very sophisticated argument (Pinker, 2011).
- 16 I am deeply honored to have my work attended to by such wonderful scholars. In today's academic world,

research time is probably the most valuable commodity. That all the participants thought my book worthy of their efforts is an immeasurable compliment. I was humbled by Leslie Marsh's invitation to this special volume and overwhelmed by Nathaniel Wolloch's willingness to devote such time to the editorial process. Finally, I hope that my respect for Maria Alejandra Carrasco, Denis Drosos, Lisa Herzog, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Spiros Tegos permeates every sentence. I thank them all for their kindness and thoughtful attention.



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