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**The Love of One's Self**

The *Adam Smith Problem* Explained to  
Myself

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# The Love of One's Self

## The Adam Smith Problem Explained to Myself

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### Résumé

Le *Adam Smith Problem* a jusqu'à présent été considéré comme résolu en précisant le sens de *sympathy*. Le but de cet article est avant tout de montrer qu'une autre solution possible réside dans une interprétation différente de *self-love*. Cette nouvelle interprétation du *self-love* nous permet de tenir compte de la prédisposition humaine à l'accord, qui est au cœur de l'œuvre de Smith. *Self-love* est non seulement le motif de l'échange, mais également ce qui le rend possible. Ce n'est pas un sentiment égoïste tempéré par la tentative de gagner la *sympathy* des autres, mais la volonté de parvenir à un état de *sympathy* mutuelle entre soi et soi-même. En effet, la *sympathy* est constitutive du *self-love*. Ce dernier n'est pas l'amour *pour* soi mais l'amour *de* soi-même : l'*amour du soi*. L'accord intérieur, possible grâce à une spatialisation du soi, rend possible l'accord avec les autres. L'idée d'une dimension intérieure nous rapproche de la nature de la société que Smith décrivait: pas la société future, idéale et harmonieuse, mais une société harmonique, la société véritablement humaine, comme elle l'a toujours été, basée sur la poursuite continuelle d'harmonies et d'accords. Lire Smith de ce point de vue nous permet d'être en mesure de discuter l'origine de la possibilité de l'échange. La tierce dimension du spectateur impartial est considérée ici comme un domaine où équilibrer les intérêts réciproques et trouver un accord. C'est grâce à ça que l'individu, guidé par le *self-love*, est en mesure de s'adresser au *self-love* des autres. Pour que l'harmonie de la société soit accomplie, il n'est pas nécessaire d'attendre que chaque individu aime tout le monde. Heureusement, il suffit que chacun cherche l'amour de soi-même, cherche à être aimable à ses propres yeux, cherche le respect de soi. C'est le message de Smith qui ressort de l'interprétation proposée dans l'article. Ainsi, il n'est pas nécessaire de compter sur la bonté des autres, mais sur leur capacité de jugement autonome et leur capacité réciproque d'entrer en accord. Aucun accord entre êtres humains n'est nécessaire ni obligatoire : ce qui compte c'est qu'il peut, en étant désiré, être atteint. Smith renverse donc l'argument sur l'origine de la société : elle ne naît pas en raison d'un avantage commun, mais grâce à une prédisposition à s'accorder avec soi-même et donc avec les autres.

Mots-clefs : Smith, sympathy, self-love, accord, libéralisme.

### Abstract

The *Adam Smith Problem* has so far been considered resolved by clarifying the meaning of sympathy. The aim of this paper is first to show that another possible solution lies in a different interpretation of self-love. This new interpretation of self-love allows us to account for the human predisposition to accord, which lies at the heart of Smith's work. Self-love is not only the motive for exchange, but it constitutes what makes it possible. It is not the *selfish sentiment* tempered by the

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effort to win the *sympathy* of others, but the will to achieve *mutual sympathy* between self and oneself. Indeed, sympathy is the essential constituent of self-love, which is not love *for* oneself, but love *of* one's self. The interior accord, possible thanks to a spatialization of the self, makes possible the accord with the others. The idea of an interior dimension brings us closer to the kind of society Smith was describing – not the harmonious, ideal future society, but a harmonic society, the truly human society as it has always been, based on continual pursuit of attunement and accord. Reading Smith from this viewpoint, we are able to address the origin of the possibility of exchange. The third dimension of the impartial spectator is seen here as an area for reciprocal interests to come into the balance and find accord. And it is thanks to this that the individual, driven by self-love, is able to address the others' self-love. Smith's message as derived from this interpretation is that for harmony in society there is no need to wait for everyone to love everyone. It does, however, suffice if each seeks self-love, seeks to be lovable to his own eyes, seeks self-respect. Thus it is not necessary to rely on the goodwill of the others, but on their capacity for autonomous judgement and their reciprocal capacity to enter into accord. No accord among human beings is necessary or obligatory; what counts is that it can, in being desired, be achieved. Smith thus reverses the argument on the origin of society; it is not due to common advantage, but to predisposition to accord with one's self and with the others.

Keywords : Smith, sympathy, self-love, accord, liberalism.

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*L'amour est à réinventer, on le sait.*

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

*Self-love, too.*

## Introduction

Exchange is the very keystone of the *Wealth of Nations* (1776), and yet Smith states that the question of its origin is not a subject for this inquiry. It is, however, the subject of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), a work which brings the focus on the *possibility* of accord between human beings.

Approached thus, as is my intention in this paper, the connection between the two works emerges in a new light, offering a new solution to the debate on their essential nature, known as *Das Adam Smith Problem*<sup>2</sup>.

Actually, all the solutions proposed leave open the issue that concludes one text to open the other, namely the human predisposition towards accord and exchange.

The crucial element that links the two works is *self-love*. The pivot about which the opening pages of the *Wealth of Nations* revolve, in this paper self-love is conceived as the point at which the considerations arrived at in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* find their way into economic research.

Self-love is not only the motive for exchange, but it constitutes what makes it possible.

It is not the *selfish sentiment* tempered by the effort to win the *sympathy* of others, but the will to achieve *mutual sympathy* between self and oneself. Indeed, sympathy is the essential constituent of self-love, which is not love *for* oneself, but love *of* one's self.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how, with this new interpretation of self-love, we can account for the human predisposition to accord, which lies at the heart of Smith's work.

To make this position clearer, I will begin with a reconstruction by themes of the various solutions that have been proposed to the *Adam Smith Problem*. The most

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<sup>2</sup> For a historical reconstruction of this issue, see: Montes (2003), Raphael and Macfie (1976).

recent solutions have concentrated on clarifying the sense of *sympathy*. It is not, in fact, a sense of benevolence, as argued by those who first addressed the problem of its compatibility with self-love, but a principal associated with judgement of sentiments. With this point clarified, the concept of self-love is open to adjustment. It can be seen not as a purely selfish sentiment, but rather as the right and proper attention paid to our own interests and the interests of those dear to us. The idea is that, although by nature it is a violent, antisocial passion, it is tempered by the common desire to win over the other's sympathy. Thus socialisation of the individual, accomplished by seeking the neighbours' approval, leads to self-control and prudence.

In short, this recent interpretation sees sympathy as *moderating* self-love. The pursuit of the sympathy of others thus plays a role of coordination amongst individuals, allowing for respect of those general rules that ensure the harmony of society. The task of the imaginary impartial spectator that Smith refers to in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* should, then, be to keep this coordination mechanism working even with the physical absence of other people. In fact, it should represent the interiorisation of social norms.

However, this idea of a moderate self-love, which seems to be able to account for the motivation for exchange amongst humans, leaves open the issue as to how it comes about. (Section I).

Later on I will consider the plausibility of interpretation along these lines, and the pre-requisites for a new solution. Here, in fact, I will argue that the presence of others is not essential because it socialises, influencing judgements, but because it induces individuals to discover the ability to judge. Smith does not in fact see in the general rules standards to judge one's own or others' actions, but rather the outcome of an *autonomous judgement process*. Rather than interiorisation of social norms, the imaginary impartial spectator evokes the capacity for autonomous judgement which the individual acquires on the way to maturity. This transition is achieved with *division* of the self and the opening up of an interior dimension which allows for self-discovery and self judgement.

If the strongest desire is for the *merited* approval of the others, their merited sympathy, then all must wish, to begin with, to gain the approval of their own impartial spectator, or in other words their interior mutual sympathy. The pursuit of interior accord is the prerequisite for accord with others. The pleasure of this interior accord is the pleasure of self-approbation, or in other words self-love. Smith's self-love is neither *amour de soi* nor *amour-propre*, but *amour du soi* (Section II).

The solution to the *Adam Smith Problem* proposed in this paper is based on the idea that self-love does not precede sympathy, to be tempered, subsequently, by the pursuit of the sympathy of others, but rather *consists in inner mutual sympathy*, between the self and the self's impartial spectator. Driving the individual to pursue interior accord and equilibrium, self-love and sympathy combine to function as *regulatory principles of human sentiments*.

The idea of an interior dimension and accord necessary for accord with the others brings us closer to the kind of society Smith was describing – not the harmonious, ideal future society, but a harmonic society, a place conducive for people to become predisposed to accord first with themselves, and then with the others. It is truly human society as it has always been, based on continual pursuit of attunement and accord (Section III).

Reading Smith from this viewpoint, we are able to address the origin of the possibility of exchange. The third dimension of the impartial spectator is seen here as an area for reciprocal interests to come into the balance and find accord. And it

is thanks to this that the individual, driven by self-love, is able to address the others' self-love. Conditions are created to be able to persuade the others. According to Smith, just as sentimental accord gives pleasure, so does accord in opinions. Associated with the pursuit of sentimental sympathy is the pursuit of sympathy at the level of reason. Much as we wish to be worthy of the love and praise of others, which means being lovable and praiseworthy to our own eyes to start with, so, Smith argues, we wish to be worthy of credit – credible to ourselves, in the first place, i.e. credible to the eyes of our impartial spectator. In order to be credible, each must be able to appeal to the other's sense of dignity, his self-respect, or in other words his self-love. This implies that each must be able to identify with the other, and from that position bring his impartial spectator into dialogue with that of the other. When the other does likewise, then they can meet in what is a third dimension to both of them, which makes accord and thus exchange possible (Section IV).

In conclusion, Smith's message as derived from this interpretation is that for harmony in society there is no need to wait for everyone to love everyone; it is not thinkable that all seek the approval of all, nor does it suffice to rely on pure and simple common pursuit of personal selfish interest, prudent as it may be. It does, however, suffice if each seeks self-love, seeks to be lovable to his own eyes, seeks self-respect. This is in everyone's interest. Thus it is not necessary to rely on the goodwill of the others, but on their capacity for autonomous judgement. What counts for the harmony of society is not the goodwill of the others or the – albeit moderate – selfishness of each, but the reciprocal capacity to enter into accord. This is what each of us can rely on. No accord is necessary or obligatory; what counts is that it can, in being desired, be achieved.

Smith thus reverses the argument on the origin of society; it is not due to common advantage, but to predisposition to accord with one's self and with the others.

Here we have the possibility of a new approach to the origins of liberalism.

## **1. The current solutions to the *Adam Smith Problem***

Before describing the *nature* and *causes* of the wealth of nations, Smith describes "the nature and origin of our moral sentiments" (*TMS*, VII.i.1).

This *description* begins with what for Smith is self-evident. In fact, there being no need to demonstrate it, it can serve as the point of departure:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it. (I.i.i.1)

The evidence shows that the suffering of others brings suffering to us. This accounts for the instinct to rescue, the impulse to rush out in aid of persons in danger.

Later in the text Smith refers to this sentiment in terms of an "exquisite sympathy", which is that "humanity" that corresponds to *benevolence*, and the sense of a motive to act in the interests of others. Or to take Smith's example in the *Wealth of Nations*, it is the sentiment that leads us to grant charity to someone in dire need (*WN*, II.ii.2).

If, however, we can rely to some extent on this instinct when we are in danger of life, we cannot, Smith observes in the *Wealth of Nations*, rely on it when it comes to our daily meals:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. (II.ii.2)

It is from this description of how exchange takes place that Smith's economic research takes off.

Between this beginning and that of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* a problem of coherence seemed to arise: how can we reconcile the idea of a man naturally driven by *exquisite sympathy*, i.e. *benevolence*, with that of a man moved primarily by *self-love*, in the sense of a selfish sentiment? This is the problem came to be known as *Das Adam Smith Problem*.

The *first solution* is what we might call the "supplement" solution. In this interpretation Smith's two lines of research focus on *two distinct motives for action*, sympathy and self-love, which reciprocally complete one another.<sup>3</sup>

This implies that there is no contradiction between Smith's two works: one supplements the other, which means that both must be studied for a full understanding of them. The latter consideration fits in with the successive solutions, and in particular the fourth.

The *second solution* is known as the "cutout". In this interpretation, in the first text Smith approaches the variety of human sentiments through sympathy, while in the second he deals solely with that sentiment that has to do with the desire to improve one's own conditions of life, i.e. self-love.<sup>4</sup>

This solution comes as the fruit of a closer reading of sympathy which, rather than a motive for action, denotes a *fellow-sentiment*, a feeling of *sharing* in others' passions. Thus Smith's moral work is not seen to focus on a single passion, but on the multiplicity of human sentiments that we can share with our fellows. In this way Smith's two works can be seen to be consistent.

The *third solution* is "incomparability". In this interpretation the *Adam Smith Problem* is actually a false problem; there would in fact be no point in comparing self-love and sympathy.<sup>5</sup> While the former is a sentiment and motive for action, the latter is what allows us to judge the sentiments and motives for action.<sup>6</sup>

This position takes into account the fact that with this work by Smith we are in reality faced with a *theory of moral judgement*.

Sympathy is not, in fact, simply exquisite sympathy extended to all the sentiments. It is not what allows us to share in all the sentiments of the others, just as through compassion we are moved by the suffering of others. If it were so, we would have

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<sup>3</sup> This solution dates back to Buckle (1861, 437). For a critique, see: Raphael and Macfie (1976, 20-25). In this interpretation, the sympathy that Smith refers to recurrently in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is confined to that exquisite sympathy of its beginning which, effectively, is a motive for action.

<sup>4</sup> See, on this position, Hirschman (1977, 99-100), Winch (1978, 10), Macfie (1967, 75-77).

<sup>5</sup> See, on this position, Raphael and Macfie (1976).

<sup>6</sup> The discussion between Montes and Raphael on the nature of sympathy, whether or not, that is, it is a motive to act (see: Montes 2003, 2004, Raphael 2007), can be clarified by distinguishing between sympathy and exquisite sympathy. What Montes sees as motive for action is exquisite sympathy.

to understand sympathy as a mechanism of “emotional contagion”.<sup>7</sup> The sentiments experienced by the others, especially those closest to us, would act upon us as a force able to influence us and thus make us feel similar sentiments. However, in Smith's conception *sympathy* does not belong together with all the passions.<sup>8</sup> It starts from the imagination, by virtue of which we can identify with another. From this particular point of view, the individual can imagine the sentiments he would experience and the reactions he would have faced with a certain situation. If there is correspondence between these feelings and those of the person identified with, then there is sympathy. If, on the other hand, there is no accord between these feelings, there is no sympathy. Sympathising with someone means approving of these sentiments and reactions, whereas failing to sympathise means disapproving of them.

The *fourth solution* is that of “moderation”. This position is based on the idea that self-love can be interpreted as a sentiment *moderated* by sympathy.<sup>9</sup>

The idea is that sympathy corresponds to the desire to deserve the approval of others. This is supposed to lead the individual to moderate the natural and violent impulses of *self-love*, which otherwise would make him excessively selfish and antisocial. Thus *sympathy* should have the function of *socialisation* of *self-love*. This could, in fact, account for a possible coordination amongst individuals, brought about by the tendency of each to respect the rules of society in order to gain favourable judgement from the others.

The solution is based in the first place on the description Smith gives of sympathy. As he sees it, we all experience a certain pleasure in finding accord between our own imaginary sentiments and those of the person we identify with. This pleasurable emotion corresponds to the sentiment of approval. When there is accord, there is sympathy, and there is approval.

Furthermore, according to Smith, on judging the others we soon realise that they are doing likewise with us, they are constantly judging us. Just as we find pleasure in sympathising with someone else, so we wish to kindle the same pleasure in others. Knowing that we can arouse the pleasure of sympathy in someone else is, in turn, pleasurable and gratifying, and so desired.

In this interpretation of Smith, it is *prudence* that drives the representative individual in the *Wealth of Nations* to moderate his natural self-love, to make it more acceptable to the others, and so gain their favourable judgement.<sup>10</sup>

The prudent individual should forego immediate pleasure for greater enjoyment in the future, paying due attention to himself and those dear to him, seeking to improve his and their conditions of life.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise his fellows would disapprove of him. In fact, in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Very similar to the idea of sympathy proposed by Hume (*Treatise*, 2.1.11).

<sup>8</sup> According to Hume, sympathy has to do with *entering into resonance*: “We may begin considering a new nature and force of *sympathy*. [...] As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature.” (*Treatise*, 3.3.1). For Smith, on the other hand, it is a matter of verifying the possibility to *be in accord*.

<sup>9</sup> See, on this position, among others, Macfie (1967), Pack (1991), Brown (1994), Griswold (1999), Montes (2004), Hanley (2009), Forman-Barzilai (2011).

<sup>10</sup> See: Macfie (1967, 71-81), Brown, (1994, 43), Griswold (1999, 209-210), Montes (2004, 88). Hanley (2009), too, in his normative interpretation of TMS, associates *self-love* with prudence.

<sup>11</sup> See, among others: Fleischacker (2004, 98), Macfie (1967, 71-75).

Carelessness and want of oeconomy are universally disapproved of, not, however, as proceeding from a want of benevolence, but from a want of the proper attention to the objects of self-interest. (VII.ii.3.16)

But, as we know, Smith does not refer to the pursuit of the approval of others at all costs, for receiving the undeserved approval of others can actually prove mortifying (III.2.4).<sup>12</sup>

Rather, he points out, the greatest wish is to receive the merited approval of others:

The desire of becoming the proper objects of this respect, of deserving and obtaining this credit and rank among our equals, is, perhaps, the strongest of all our desires. (VI.i.3)

This is why Smith introduces the idea of an imaginary impartial spectator. According to the interpretation compatible with this fourth solution, this spectator represents the interiorisation of social norms – those general rules that each of us are supposed to assimilate through experience whenever we heed the *judgements of others*.<sup>13</sup> Even unseen, Smith's representative individual tends to respect the rules of fair play, having the constant sensation of being under the eyes of the others through the proxy of the imaginary interior spectator.

In this interpretation Smith's individual would in any case be driven to respect the rules generally applied in society, even when all the others, unaware of all the circumstances, misguidedly failed to show the approval he would have merited on the basis of the rules. In fact, his imaginary impartial spectator, having a better knowledge of his situation than anyone else, and well aware of the rules of society, is best qualified to weigh things up.

This, then, should be why Smith states in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

Man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love. He naturally dreads, not only to be hated, but to be hateful; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of hatred. He desires, not only praise, but praise-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of praise. He dreads, not only blame, but blame-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be blamed by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of blame. (III.2.1-2)

Every one of us wishes not only to be praised, but also to be praiseworthy, or, in terms of this interpretation, worthy of praise *according to the general rules of social relations*.

Thus the pursuit of the merited approval of the others brings about a constant self-control on the part of the individual, and so respect of the general rules of community life, and with them of the harmony of society.

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<sup>12</sup> On this point Smith clearly takes a distance from Mandeville: "Dr. Mandeville considers whatever is done from a sense of propriety, from a regard to what is commendable and praiseworthy, as being done from a love of praise and commendation, or as he calls it from vanity" (TMS, VII.ii.4.7). In his letter to Elliot, Smith writes that only the most frivolous of human beings can find satisfaction in the approval while others even when it is unfounded (1759b, 52).

<sup>13</sup> See: Macfie (1967, 66-67, 82-100), Young (1986), Donald (1997, 299), Forman-Barzilai (2011, 85-93). Grinswold (1999) disagrees about this point.

The pursuit of the merited approval of the others remains as such even when we are not before their eyes, or amongst strangers<sup>14</sup>, or at any rate in an extended and more impersonal society.

Thus the love of praise lies at the origin of love of praise-worthiness.<sup>15</sup>

For Smith, however, it was the other way round. To begin with, love of praise-worthiness is to be distinguished between two distinct desires: the love of true glory and the love of virtue. It is, then, a matter of distinguishing between the approval of others, the merited approval of others and self-approbation in their reciprocal and distinct relations. This means seeing in what terms the impartial spectator does not represent the interiorisation of general rules, but is the very source of it, or in other words that inner distance that gives rise to the possibility for autonomous self judgement, corresponding to self-approbation, upon which may rest the desire for the merited approval of the others. Thus it is, rather, love of praise-worthiness that lies at the origin of love of praise.

Here, then, the groundwork comes to light for a new solution to the *Adam Smith Problem*, clearing the way to a new interpretation of self-love and explanation of what could not be explained with the previous solutions, namely the human predisposition to accord and exchange, which is the vital essence of Smith's entire work.

## 2. Groundwork for a new solution

### 2.1 Self-approbation underlying the principle of merit

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes:

So far is the love of praise-worthiness from being derived altogether from that of praise; that the love of praise seems, at least in a great measure, to be derived from that of praise-worthiness. (III.2.3)

If the love of praise-worthiness does not derive from the love of praise, it follows that it cannot be seen as an interiorisation of it.

The task, then, is to explain how the love of praise can derive from the love of praise-worthiness.

Actually, it is only possible if we make a clear distinction between both of these, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the merited approval of the others. The individual seeks the approval of the others only when he knows it is merited, for otherwise it would yield no satisfaction. However, to know whether it is merited, the individual must be able to arrive at a self-judgement independent of the judgement of the others. The need, then, is to distinguish not only the approval of the others from merited approval, but also the latter from self-approbation.

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<sup>14</sup> See Paganelli (2010).

<sup>15</sup> On the basis of this, called the "moderation" solution, Smith appears critical of Mandeville: moderate self-love is no vice, and pursuit of the approval of others is not persevered in at all costs, but only when it is deserved. What, however, remains in common with these two positions is that human beings are guided by the judgements of their fellows. Significantly, a line was traced from Smith's thought back to the author of the *Fable of the Bees*. See in this connection: Hirschman (1977). However, as I will seek to demonstrate, the difference between Smith and Mandeville is far more profound.

Only in this way is it possible to explain in what sense the love of praise-worthiness can be at the origin of the love of praise, or in other words the sense in which self-approbation is independent of the approval of the others and is at the origin of the merited approval of the others.

In the first place, therefore, distinction is to be made between the desire to achieve self-approbation, the desire to gain the merited approval of the others, and the desire to gain their approval regardless of any merit.

These three desires correspond to the three passions that Smith makes a point of distinguishing between when he comes to level his criticism at Mandeville:<sup>16</sup>

The first is the love of virtue, the noblest and the best passion in human nature. The second is the love of true glory, a passion inferior no doubt to the former, but which in dignity appears to come immediately after it. He is guilty of vanity who desires praise for qualities which are either not praise-worthy in any degree, or not in that degree in which he expects to be praised for them. (VII.ii.4.8)

On the strength of these distinctions Smith is able to make the point he tells his friend Elliot he has succeeded in making in the well-known letter (1759b, 49):

I would likewise beg of you to read what I say upon Mandeville's system and then consider whether upon the whole I do not make virtue sufficiently independent of popular opinion.

*Love of virtue* is "the desire of rendering ourselves the proper object of honour, esteem, or of becoming what is honourable and estimable" (TMS, VII.ii.4.9). This passion corresponds to the desire to *merit* approbation *on one's own terms*, the desire to be lovable in one's own eyes and achieve *self-approbation*.

*Love of true glory* is "the desire of acquiring honour and esteem by really deserving those sentiments" (VII.ii.4.9). This passion corresponds to the desire to gain the merited approval of the others.

*Vanity* is "the frivolous desire of the praise at any rate" (VII.ii.4.9). This passion corresponds to the desire to gain the approval of the others *at all costs*.

Actually there is a clear distinction between *love of true glory* and *vanity* (VII.ii.4.9), just as there is between *love of virtue* and *love of true glory* (VII.ii.4.10).<sup>17</sup>

Smith states that only "the weakest and most worthless of mankind are much delighted with false glory", i.e. vanity (VII.ii.4.10). Unlike Mandeville, then, Smith does not associate this trait with the majority of humanity. At the same time, those who are able to act solely from a regard to what is the proper object of esteem and approbation, though these sentiments should never be bestowed upon him, act "from the most sublime and godlike motive which human nature is even capable of conceiving" (VII.ii.4.10).

Most people are not motivated by the pursuit of the approval of the others *tout court*, i.e. *vanity*, but only the most frivolous. After all, we can hardly expect every member of society to be wise, driven solely by the *love of virtue*, or in other words satisfied with their self judgement, having no need for it to be confirmed by the others.

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<sup>16</sup> Albeit on normative positions, see on this point Hanley (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Smith points out that these three passions, distinct as they are, nevertheless have some affinities thanks to which Mandeville was able to confuse his readers with his humorous eloquence (VII. ii.4.6)

In fact, Smith observes, the strongest of all our desires is to become the *proper objects* of the respect of others, which is *love of true glory*, the desire to obtain the merited approval of the others.

This is not, however, to say that only the wise are able to act virtuously, for those who are moved by love of true glory can also do so. And, to understand whether their action is virtuous, their criterion is again self-approbation – and not the approval of the others – as in the case of the wisest. All that distinguishes them from the latter is that, at the same time, they seek *confirmation* in the judgement of the others.

The fact that wisdom is not granted to all does not imply that few are able, by themselves, to judge themselves.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, it is only the most frivolous who take no heed of their impartial spectator. In his letter to Elliot (1759b, 55), Smith writes in relation to the weak, the vain and the frivolous, pointing out that “such persons are not accustomed to consult the judge within concerning the opinion which they ought to form of their own conduct”. We are all able, by ourselves, to judge ourselves, and it is precisely this ability that makes the approbation of the others desirable, as being merited. Otherwise, there would be no real satisfaction.

Smith, in fact, writes that the approbation of the others can give a certain satisfaction “but, in order to attain this satisfaction we must become the impartial spectators of our own character and conduct” (III.2.3). And so “when seen in this light, if they appear to us as we wish, we are happy and contented” (III.2.3).

The approbation of the others serves to confirm our self-approbation, which is why we seek it when we know it is merited:

It greatly confirms this happiness and contentment when we find that other people, viewing them with those very eyes with which we, in imagination only, were endeavouring to view them, see them precisely in the same light in which we ourselves had seen them. Their approbation necessarily confirms our own self-approbation. (III.2.3)

Nevertheless, it is still a matter of *confirmation*, and not the basis of our own satisfaction.

Indeed, the approbation of the others can always be questioned by the impartial spectator. This is the point that Smith made to Elliot when he wrote (1759b, 52): “The applause of the whole world will avail but little if our own conscience condemns us”. Merit rests on the capacity for autonomous self judgement.

If the greatest desire is to gain the merited approbation of the others, behind this desire is the wish to receive an approbation from the others that corresponds to the self-approbation. The strongest desire that moves human beings, therefore, corresponds to the desire to gain the approbation of their imaginary impartial spectator, and consequently the corresponding approval of their fellows.

Having elucidated the distinction between self-approbation, the merited approbation of the others and the plain approbation of the others *tout court* in their reciprocal relations, the next point to examine is in what terms the impartial

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<sup>18</sup> In support, however, of the idea that only the wise are able to judge properly, see, instead, the entire work of Hanley (2009), who argues that for Smith there are three ascending levels of self judgment linked to these three desires. On a similar position to that of Hanley, see also Brown (1994, 40-43, 58). Hanley says that love of praiseworthiness is prior to love of praise “both logically and temporally” based on his normative reading of Smith's, different from the one proposed here. In fact, he says, “the former being necessary to mitigate the excess of the latter” (Hanley, 2009, 140).

spectator does not represent for Smith the interiorisation of the approbation of the others by adapting to the general rules, but the possibility to accomplish autonomous self-judgement.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 The divisibility of the self that underlies autonomy of judgement

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith observes that when we judge the sentiments of the others, verifying possible accord with ours, we do not follow general rules, for they are, rather, a consequence of this continual verification. This is what happens when we are faced with a real event; for example, finding oneself confronted with a crime:

His detestation of this crime, it is evident, would arise *instantaneously* and *antecedent* to his having formed to himself any such general rule. The general rule, on the contrary, which he might afterwards form, would be founded upon the detestation which he felt necessarily *arise in his own breast*, at the thought of this, and every other particular action of the same kind. (III.4.8)

Or when we read a novel:

When we read in history or romance, the account of actions either of generosity or of baseness, the admiration which we conceive for the one, and the contempt which we feel for the other, neither of them arise from reflecting that there are certain general rules which declare all actions of the one kind admirable, and all actions of the other contemptible. Those general rules, on the contrary, are all formed from the experience we have had of the effects which actions of all different kinds naturally produce upon us. (III.4.9)

According to Smith, no one approves of an action because it conforms to general rules. Rather, the rules are a consequence of our original judgements, based on "our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety":

It is thus that the general rules of morality are formed. They are ultimately founded upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve, or disapprove of. We do not originally approve or condemn particular actions; because, upon examination, they appear to be agreeable or inconsistent with a certain general rule. The general rule, on the contrary, is formed, by finding from experience, that all actions of a certain kind, or circumstanced in a certain manner, are approved or disapproved of. (III.4.8)

The general rules serve above all to prevent situations arousing excessive or insufficient passion, inducing us to pay little heed to our impartial spectator. Usually, in fact, Smith explains, our impartial spectator judges better at a certain distance in time from the action we are concerned with (III.4.4). Once attained dispassionately, this judgement can be taken as a possible general rule for situations of the sort. Similarly, when we have to judge a person of whom we know little and find it difficult to identify with, awareness of his situation can in any case enable reference to the general rules, affording general orientation.

This implies that the general rules emerge only after we have formed our judgements, and that when we take reference from them it is because we have already autonomously judged a situation of the sort. In other words, they do not

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<sup>19</sup> This position is consistent with that of Haakonssen (1981).

determine our judgement and do not constitute a medium through which the judgement of the others plays a part in the formation of our own.<sup>20</sup>

The judgement of the others can, however, be decisive in the formulation of general rules insofar as it serves to *confirm* our judgement, which however can only be autonomously formulated:

Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided. Some of their actions shock all our natural sentiments. We hear every body about us express the like detestation against them. This still further *confirms*, and even exasperates our natural sense of their deformity. It satisfies us that we view them in the proper light, when we see other people view them in the same light. We resolve never to be guilty of the like, nor ever, upon any account, to render ourselves in this manner the objects of universal disapprobation. (III.4.7, my italics)

It is for this very reason that, even when they are “universally acknowledged and established, by the concurring sentiments of mankind” the judge can never take reference from them “as the ultimate foundations of what is just and unjust in human conduct” (III.4.11).

Towards the closing pages of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith writes, for example, that the “systems of positive law, therefore, though they deserve the greatest authority, as the records of the sentiments of mankind in different ages and nations, yet can never be regarded as accurate systems of the rules of natural justice”. (VII.iv.36).

The judge can therefore only rely on consideration of the sentiments that the actions to judge produce in him:

When these general rules, indeed, have been formed, when they are universally acknowledged and established, by the concurring sentiments of mankind, we frequently appeal to them as to the standards of judgment in debating concerning the degree of praise or blame that is due to certain actions of a complicated and dubious nature. They are upon these occasions commonly cited as the ultimate foundations of what is just and unjust in human conduct; and this circumstance seems to have misled several very eminent authors, to draw up their systems in such a manner, as if they had supposed that the original judgments of mankind with regard to right and wrong, were formed like the decisions of a court of judicatory, by considering first the general rule, and then, secondly, whether the particular action under consideration fell properly within its comprehension. (III.4.11)

If, then, it is true that the judgement of the others can serve to confirm our own, we must not lose sight of the fact that Smith sees the initial stage of judgement as being within each of us: it has to do with accord between our sentiments, the true starting point, and those of the person mainly concerned.

Nor could it be otherwise for Smith, given that each of us can judge the others only beginning from ourselves, from that of which we can have true knowledge:

Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by

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<sup>20</sup> Those who think it suffices to follow the general rules behave like those who decide to follow the books of casuistry: “the man who had the most frequent occasion to consult them, was the man of equivocation and mental reservation, the man who seriously and deliberately meant to deceive, but who, at the same time, wished to flatter him self that he had really told the truth.” (VII.iv.31). The books of casuistry, Smith goes on to observe, “are generally as useless as they are commonly tiresome” (VII.iv.33).

my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them. (I.i.3.10)

In observing that we all prefer to be "lovable" rather than simply "loved", Smith is making at least two implications.

The first is that this desire is always connected "to the sentiment of some *other being*".<sup>21</sup> We could not be lovable if there were no one else besides ourselves. However, what counts is the *possibility* to inspire love in another person, and not necessarily to do so in practice. For our own *self-satisfaction* it will in fact suffice to kindle that sentiment in that *other* imaginary *being*, the impartial spectator.

Secondly, to be able to judge oneself lovable or detestable through one's impartial spectator, it is necessary to have previously judged someone else as lovable or detestable. Starting from this single autonomous judgement, it is then possible to go on to judge oneself in this way. Thus autonomous judgement always needs the presence of others, not because it needs to appropriate the judgement of others as one's own, but in the sense that the presence of another is necessary to become aware of experiencing sentiments, which are excited by sympathy but have their origin within the self.

The desire to be lovable does not correspond to the desire to be loved by others, but rather to be like those persons that we judge to be lovable:

The love and admiration which we naturally conceive for those whose character and conduct we approve of, necessarily dispose us to desire to become ourselves the objects of the like agreeable sentiments, and to be as amiable and as admirable as those whom we love and admire the most. (TMS, III.ii.3)

Just as certain people appear lovable *to our eyes*, so we wish to be lovable *to our eyes*.

The presence of the others, then, is important not because it influences our judgements, thereby making us sociable and compatible with the others, but because it leads us to discover the possibility of judging.

When Smith states that society is the mirror of the individual, he means that only by living in society is man able to judge himself (III.I.3). Smith is not saying that the individual becomes a mirror of society, reflecting within himself the rules he sees being reproduced in society, but, on the contrary, that it is he who looks into society as in a mirror: through society he can find himself.

Without society, the individual would be *caught up* by his passions, without being aware of their presence. It is only thanks to society that they become *present* to him and he is able to judge them (III.I.3). His participation in society affords him a view of himself, which is not only the view taken by the others, but above all his view of himself. Through this participation he recognises himself as a sentient being.

The imaginary impartial spectator that Smith describes as being within each of us does not represent interiorisation of social rules, but the ability to arrive at autonomous judgement of ourselves thanks to living with the others.

In the well-known letter to Elliot in which Smith explains to his friend – but also to himself – the relationship between self judgement and common opinion, he observes that the impartial spectator can approve of us even in the face of the disapprobation of the whole of mankind (1759b, 54):

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<sup>21</sup> Smith (1759b, 49 my italics). See, also: (TMS, III.i.6).

The disapprobation of all mankind is not capable of oppressing us when we are absolved by the tribunal within our own breast, and when our own mind tells us that mankind are in the wrong.

This can come about not only when all the others are ill-informed about us, but also and indeed above all, when our impartial spectator feels *in his own breast* that he is judging rightly, regardless of the judgement of the others, even if well-informed. In fact, the judgement of the others serves solely as possible confirmation and reinforcement of our own original judgement, and not as its basis.

As we grow up, Smith observes, individuals realise how *fondly, impossible* and *absurd* it is to render ourselves "universally agreeable" (1759b, 54):

When we first come into the world, being desirous to please those we live with, we are accustomed to Consider what behaviour is likely to be agreeable to every person we converse with, to our parents, to our masters, to our companions. We address ourselves to individuals, and for some time fondly pursue the impossible and absurd project of rendering ourselves universally agreeable, and of gaining the good will and approbation of every body. We soon learn, however, from experience, that this universal approbation is altogether unattainable.

Experience soon teaches us that we cannot all be friends, and it is impossible to win over the sympathy of everyone.

We soon learn, therefore, to set up in our own minds a judge between ourselves and those we live with. (1759b, 54)

Thus rather than "address ourselves to *individuals*", we appeal to a particular *individual*, "a judge" between us and the others, "a man in general, an impartial Spectator" (1759b, 54).

The impartial spectator's judgement is not a rational judgement, but comes about in the same way that we judge the others (1759b, 49): it is a matter of verifying whether the *sympathy* of our imaginary spectator is awakened, or, in other words, whether sentimental accord is brought about.

For this to be possible, the need is for an *internal division* produced within the human being during the transition to maturity (Vi.iii.46).<sup>22</sup>

Again in the letter to Elliot, and subsequently in the first and major revision of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith explains that it is this division that gives origin to the impartial spectator:

I divide myself, as it were, into two persons, and that I, the examiner and Judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. (Lettera a Elliot, 52; III.I.6)

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<sup>22</sup> Brown has focused her work on dialogism of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which seems to support her thesis (Brown 1994, 55). This interpretation is particularly linked to the discursive mode of Smith in his two works, and therefore to the dimension of the internal dialogue and speech. Thus, Brown reads the *Wealth of Nations* as "an amoral text" which denies a role of sympathy and impartial spectator, supported here, however (Brown, 1994: 45-46, 183). Griswold states, instead, that the *Wealth of Nations* is a "moral" work (Griswold, 1999, 260-261). The position of Brown is consistent with that of Viner (1972), with which Young (1986) does not concur. Young states, with an interpretation different from that advanced here, that "the community's standard of propriety, justice, and status embodied in the impartial spectator, therefore, are prior to and exert a control over the evaluations of the services rendered in the market" (Young, 1986, 381).

This amounts to a positive “spatialisation” of the self, an opening out of it. An internal distance is achieved by removing oneself as far as possible from the self, so as to be able to arrive at a truly impartial evaluation of the self. From this point of extreme alienation, which is that of the impartial spectator we identify with, we must identify with what we were before the alienation. It is a matter of finding the right distance between self and oneself:

We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at *a certain distance* from us”. (III.I.2 my italics).

As impartial well-informed spectators we are now able to judge ourselves appropriately. At this point we can verify whether the sentiments we start from are in accord with those of the impartial spectator, and thus whether we gain his *sympathy*. In this case we achieve *self-approbation*, which corresponds to the approbation of the impartial spectator. This is the approbation which that self – the interior imaginary spectator – accords to oneself.

Smith does not introduce the idea of an imaginary spectator to justify any respect of the social norms, but rather to explain how we are able to judge ourselves appropriately and impartially.

The greatest possible alienation serves to be as impartial as possible, while identification of the impartial spectator with us serves to be able to judge ourselves most appropriately, with our better knowledge of the situation we find ourselves in. This is why, according to Smith, each of us is recommended by nature to his own care, i.e. his *self-love*, for no one can judge us better than ourselves or know what is in our best interest (II.ii.1).

The internal distance between self and oneself corresponds to continual pursuit of interior equilibrium. On the basis of the impartial spectator's judgement and the right distance achieved between self and oneself, each of us is able to direct his actions and to regulate sentiments as he sees most fitting. This regulation is achieved through adjustment of one's own sentiments with those of the impartial spectator in order to arrive at *self-approbation*.

### **3. The other solution: accord**

#### **3.1 Self-love is the pleasure of the self's mutual sympathy**

The *solution* to the *Adam Smith Problem* advanced here centres on “accord”. We take Smith's two works as being in mutual accord, understanding that the dimension of accord is what they bring to light. In our interpretation, *self-love* corresponds to the pleasure of *mutual sympathy* between self and oneself, and opens the way to mutual sympathy with the others. Self-love does not correspond to love of the self, but love of one's impartial spectator, which is not love for oneself, but love of one's self. The spring of *self-love* represents the desire to be lovable to one's own eyes, with which is associated the desire for confirmation from the others.

Rather than clashing with sympathy as it is understood in the *Adam Smith Problem*, and rather than a supplement to it or something cut out of it, or indeed incomparable with it or modified by it, as supposed in the previous solutions, self-love is interpreted here as being in a constituent relationship with sympathy.

At this point we must in the first place make clear that *merited approbation of the others* corresponds to a *mutual sympathy with the others*, while *self-approbation* is *mutual sympathy between self and oneself*.

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith holds that approving of someone else's judgement means sympathising with his judgement.

When someone sympathises with us, we can judge his sympathy to be deserved or undeserved. If we deem it deserved, it means we approve of it, and if we approve of it, it means we sympathise with it. Thus the merited approbation of another corresponds to mutual sympathy with the other. To sympathise with the other's sympathy, and so judge it to be appropriate, the self-approbation judgement is necessary. And what this actually amounts to is inner mutual sympathy.

In fact, to achieve self-approbation it is necessary, as we have seen, to separate oneself from the self in an imaginary impartial spectator. From this position one must then identify with the self in order to be able to judge oneself in the most informed and appropriate way. Once the imaginary spectator has arrived at his evaluation, however, the process is not yet complete, for the need is now for the self that activates the process, which Smith terms "agent", to identify with the "judging" self and verify whether there is accord with his judgement. If the self sympathises with the inner judge's approbation, then self-approbation is achieved. Similarly if the self sympathises with the inner judge's disapprobation, the result is then self-disapprobation:<sup>23</sup>

We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapprobation, and condemn it. (III.I.2)

*Self-approbation*, therefore, is not simply the approbation of the impartial spectator, but the self's approbation of his approbation, amounting to sympathy for his sympathy. The judgement always remains one's own, also with respect to oneself.

Thus when Smith writes that "man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love" (III.2.1-2) he does not mean that man respects the social norms even when unseen because he has interiorised them.

Rather, he means to stress that individuals seek not only the love of the others, but also, and indeed above all, the love of their impartial spectator, for it is on this – as autonomous judgement of the self – that worthiness of the others' love is based. In other words, individuals do not simply seek the sympathy of the others, but mutual sympathy with the other, which can only rest on inner mutual sympathy.

Being *lovable to one's own eyes* means sympathising with the love that our impartial spectator feels for us. Self-love is the pleasure of sympathising with the love that our impartial spectator feels for us when he deems us lovable, i.e. when he is in complete sympathy with our sentiments and our actions. Self-love is the pleasure of *sympathy* with our impartial spectator's *sympathy*, which is *mutual sympathy* between us and ourselves.<sup>24</sup>

Just as the agreeable sentiment produced by sympathy corresponds to approbation, so the agreeable sentiment generated by mutual sympathy is *self-approbation*.

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<sup>23</sup> In support of this reading, see the reference to mutual sympathy in Haakonssen (1981).

<sup>24</sup> This decisive point can be compared with the different position of Griswold (1999, 126).

Self-love is, then, the pleasure of self-approbation. Saying that we all seek the pleasure of self-approbation to be able to gain the merited approbation of others, or in other words that we seek the pleasure of inner mutual sympathy to achieve mutual sympathy with the others, means in fact that we all seek self-love. This, then, is a virtuous motive for action prompted by the strongest of our desires, which is to be lovable to our own eyes in order to be deservedly lovable to the eyes of the others.

Towards the end of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where he comes to the culmination of his argument, Smith offers a particularly explicit passage:

Dr. Hutcheson was so far from allowing *self-love* to be in any case a motive of virtuous actions, that even a regard to *the pleasure of self-approbation*, to the comfortable applause of our own consciences, according to him, diminished the merit of a benevolent action. This was a selfish motive, he thought, which, so far as it contributed to any action, demonstrated the weakness of that pure and disinterested benevolence which could alone stamp upon the conduct of man the character of virtue. In the common judgments of mankind, however, this regard to the approbation of our own minds is so far from being considered as what can in any respect diminish the virtue of any action, that it is rather looked upon as *the sole motive which deserves the appellation of virtuous*. (VII.ii.3.13 my italics)

While Hutcheson deemed self-love never to be a motive of virtuous actions, Smith argued that in the common judgement of mankind *self-love*, understood as the *pleasure of self-approbation*, is the sole motive which deserves the appellation of virtuous.

Again, in the chapter dedicated to his critique of Mandeville, and again towards the conclusions of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith is clear enough on this point:

Whether the most generous and public-spirited actions may not, in some sense, be regarded as proceeding from self-love, I shall not at present examine. The decision of this question is not, I apprehend, of any importance towards establishing the reality of virtue, since self-love may frequently be a virtuous motive of action. I shall only endeavour to show that the desire of doing what is honourable and noble, of rendering ourselves the proper objects of esteem and approbation, cannot with any propriety be called vanity. Even the love of well-grounded fame and reputation, the desire of acquiring esteem by what is really estimable, does not deserve that name. (VII.ii.4.8)

Self-love is not, therefore, a naturally violent, impulsive and selfish sentiment hiding behind every action, visibly virtuous as it may be. Nor is it a selfish sentiment made socially acceptable by reason, prudence or the pleasure of other people's sympathy.

Self-love is in fact the fruit of the self's mutual sympathy, which comes about thanks to the inner division of the mature individual.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes that when we talk of self-love, it is not in a proper sense, for love always implies another:

As the immediate object of pride and humility is self or that identical person, of whose thoughts, actions, and sensations we are intimately conscious; so the object of love and hatred is some other person, of whose thoughts, actions, and sensations we are not conscious. This is sufficiently evident from experience. Our love and hatred are always directed to some sensible being external to us; and when we talk of self-love, it is not in a proper sense. (*Treatise*, 2.1)

So it appeared to Hume, for the individual he was thinking of is not divided between self and another oneself and the idea of love of one's self is therefore inconceivable. There is no spatialisation of the self, and so sympathy has no play within the individual, but only between individuals, and as transmission of contagious sentiments between one individual and another.

And yet distance is a key concept in Hume. The closer a thing is, the more important it is for the individual, and it conditions him. For this reason, according to Hume, each of us is the most important thing for himself. This is what makes us fundamentally self-interested, driven to prefer a trivial interest of our own to that of anyone else, no matter how much it matters to him.

Smith answers to this position taken by Hume with the idea of a self-love that corresponds to an inner division of the mature individual. In other words, it is a matter of that right distance between self and oneself that enables us to compare our interests with those of the others fairly and appropriately.

In his letter to Elliot Smith says that only children are forever in pursuit of the approbation of the others. In fact, they are projected outside themselves, they are not endowed with self-love because they have not had enough experience of life among other human beings to mature another self.

Attributing the meaning of self-love to this pursuit of approbation by the others is to approach it without the positive contribution of Smith's theoretical work on sympathy. In fact, it is this that led Smith to say of Mandeville's system that "that whole account of human nature", based on his understanding of the meaning of self-love, "seems to me to have arisen from some confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy" (TMS, VII.iii.I.4).

To distinguish this sentiment, devoid of the idea of sympathy, from Smith's conception of it we can omit the hyphen, which, in the word self-love, can indicate the spatialisation of self that makes such a sentiment possible. Smith's society of *self-love* is not Mandeville's *selflove* society.

Smith's first published article (1756) was a review of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* and Rousseau's *Discourse upon the Origin of Inequality* and dealt with these very issues, which he was never to abandon and, indeed, would attempt to answer in his own way.

If we stopped short at the fourth solution to the *Adam Smith Problem*, we might be tempted to interpret the distinction between self-love and sympathy through the distinction between "amour de soi" and "amour propre". Smith's *self-love* could correspond to Rousseau's *amour de soi* – that "healthy" regard for the self that nature has endowed us with.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand *amour propre*, which emerges from socialisation, would be the pleasure of other people's sympathy. The only difference in Smith would then lie in thinking that *amour propre*, as pursuit of the approbation of the others, should not be seen as a vice or blemish of the individual, but something that leads self-love to be in society what it was for the savage in the state of nature, namely *amour de soi*, moderate concern for the self and those dear to one.

However, bearing in mind the solution to the *Adam Smith Problem* advanced here and the entailed interpretation of the constituent relationship existing between inner *mutual sympathy* and *self-love*, we should, rather, be thinking in terms of "amour du soi" – i.e. love of one's self and not love for oneself – which is neither *amour de soi* nor *amour propre* and takes into account all of Smith's distinctions.

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<sup>25</sup> See: Force (2003, 42-47).

### 3.2 Self-love and sympathy, principles that regulate the sentiments

It is self-love that allows the sympathy principle to function within each of us as regulator of the sentiments. If there were no desire to attain the pleasure of the self's mutual sympathy to arrive at mutual sympathy with the others, nobody would be motivated to heed their impartial spectator's judgement and regulate their sentiments accordingly. Rather than being a sentiment moderated by sympathy, self-love is, then, with it, a principle that regulates the sentiments.

When a sentiment is "unregulated", our impartial spectator does not sympathise with us and the pleasure of self-approbation which is self-love is not forthcoming.

For both Hume and Smith, the sentiments are not *moderate* by reason, but *regulate* themselves reciprocally.

However, while for Hume (*Treatise*, 2.2) contrary sentiments balance out, which is why, for example, benevolence counterbalances selfishness, for Smith every sentiment finds its equilibrium thanks to the pursuit of accord with the impartial spectator's corresponding sentiment.

Whether joy or anger, for Smith it is not this that counts. Every sentiment has its own dignity and importance relative to a given situation.

For example, even resentment, which Smith deems an antisocial sentiment, has its importance when it is felt against someone who has done some harm to someone else. Indeed, this sentiment underlies the fundamental desire for justice (TMS, II.ii.I.4).

What counts is that this sentiment – like all the others – be felt to the right degree.

In fact, just as excess in it would be offensive and harmful, so also a lack of it in the face of an injustice we suffer would, Smith observes, imply a deficiency of self dignity:

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

It is self-love that drives us to adjust this sentiment for the sake of self-respect.

Thus the pursuit of inner mutual sympathy is the pursuit of an inner accord between self and oneself on the basis of which sentiments can come into accord.

Self-love does not function as a *tuning fork*: it is not a standard sound for the others to be attuned to. Rather, it is a sign of accord achieved between the sentiments of the acting self, the "agent", and those of the judging self.

Pursuing self-love means seeking this inner accord and "adjusting" one's sentiments, trying, in other words, to bring them to the right pitch.

Self-love is not a mere impulse driving to action, but above all a desire – to be lovable to one's own eyes in order to be lovable to the eyes of the others – that orients it. This means striving to become one's real self.

The possibility of equilibrium with the others rests on the self's pursuit of inner equilibrium.

If inner mutual sympathy lies behind the possibility for mutual sympathy with the others, then the pursuit of self-love opens the way to the possibility of accord amongst human beings.

Smith's society is a community of individual communities. If inner accord is possible only when an inner distance has been created between me and myself, then this spatialisation of the self constitutes an opening of the individual to the possibility of society, which in turn makes this interior dimension possible. It is not, in fact, a matter of individuals joining together, but rather of individuals who, being born and growing in a human community, open up an inner space that makes it possible.

### 3.3 Harmonic society and Smith's good news

More than a harmonious society, Smith's is a "harmonic" society.

Harmonious society is the society in which all are bound together by benevolence, reciprocal love or friendship, while in harmonic society these relations are possible but not obligatory; in other words, it is human society as a place where accord is possible.

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith offers a clear description of this difference.

The ideal, harmonious society is that of mutual love:

It is thus that man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices. (II.ii.3.1)

However, until this ideal future society becomes a reality, it is not necessary for everyone to get on swimmingly with one another:

But though the necessary assistance should not be afforded from such generous and disinterested motives, though among the different members of the society there should be no mutual love and affection, the society, though less happy and agreeable, will not necessarily be dissolved. (II.ii.3.2)

Even if there were no "mutual love" among the various members of society, "and though no man in it should owe any obligation, or be bound in gratitude to any other" society would continue to exist thanks to the "exchange of good offices according to an agreed valuation" (II.ii.3.2).

On reading this passage from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* one might well suppose that Smith is writing about cynical human beings motivated by selfishness. Actually, however, Smith is saying what he will be repeating at the beginning of the *Wealth of Nations*, to the effect that the harmony of society does not depend on loving relations all round to ensure the good offices the members of society need. What in fact counts is that they should always be able to evaluate and, on the basis of agreed valuations, exchange amongst themselves the good offices that they need.

In this passage Smith goes on to speak of justice:

Society may subsist, though not in the most comfortable state, without beneficence; but the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it. (II.ii.3.3)

If the previous passage is read as an apology for the selflove society – and not for self-love one – then it may seem obvious that Smith is saying here that underpinning society there must be justice, to be understood as the sense of reason as opposed to selfish passions, which would be destructive if left

unrestrained.<sup>26</sup> However, in Smith's conception justice does not derive from reason.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it has to do with sympathy and that particular sentiment that we call resentment. This comes into play when disapprobation of someone's actions, and thus lack of sympathy for that person, is accompanied by sympathy for the persons suffering the consequences. It is from this sentiment, regulated by self-love, that the desire for justice is generated.

Not owing its origin to general principles of reason, this justice has to do with "justness", that just pitch sentiments which is achieved with inner accord and which enables us to evaluate what is appropriate, and in this sense "just".<sup>28</sup>

Understood thus, being based on the capacity for appropriate and impartial evaluation, justice presides over every accord at the very moment it is arrived at, and thus before any requirement to have it respected. Moreover, accord implies mutual sympathy with the other, and thus lack of resentment. This is why when the sense of justice is not forthcoming any resentment there may be, failing to find satisfaction, becomes the most antisocial of sentiments. At that point, the members of society are no longer able to achieve accord, and society dissolves.

To understand, therefore, what Smith means when he says that society crumbles away without justice, we must see what, according to him, makes society possible.

Society is possible, in the interpretation advanced here, because human beings have a *predisposition to accord*: individuals have the tendency to come into accord with the others thanks to the tendency to come into accord with themselves, which in fact enables them to evaluate things in such a way as to be able to enter into accord with the others.

While inner accord is necessary to the possibility of accord with the others, and thus to the very existence of society, it is not necessary for accord to come about amongst all the members of society. What counts is that the desired accord with the others be *possible*.

Here we have the liberal foundations of Smith's thought, or rather, what the foundations could be for *truly liberal thought*.

For a society of human beings to exist it is not necessary for them all to be "bound together" by relations of moral obligation or friendship or mutual love; it will suffice if each member of society is able to make autonomous evaluations, and thus possibly enter into accord with the others, without the accord being necessary or obligatory, though desired.

The harmonic society of self-love is not one in which all are necessarily in accord, but in which they are able to enter into accord. This certainty of the possibility of accord does not depend on sharing the same identical rules for behaviour absorbed through experience and education, but derives from each member of society's autonomous capacity for judgement.

All that is needed for the harmony of society is that, thanks to inner division, and with it the presence of an impartial spectator, the sentiments of each individual *are able* to enter into "accord" with those of the others:

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<sup>26</sup> A reading in these terms is given, for example, by Brown (1994, 43). See also Macfie (1967, 47-48).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example Pack (1991, 83-84). The idea of a government that imposes reason over passions in civil society through general rules does not come into Smith's argumentation. Indeed, he argues the secondary role of reason vis-à-vis sentiments in opposition to this position and to Hobbes. Cf. Smith (TMS, VII.iii.2) on Hobbes and reason.

<sup>28</sup> In this sense of "just" is to be understood the sense of sufficiency. For full treatment of this point, see Bee, (2011).

Though they will never be unisons, they *may be* concords, and this is all that is wanted or required. (I.i.4.8 my italics)

The sentiments of the individual can enter into accord with those of the others thanks to the prior pursuit of accord that each makes with his own impartial spectator, and this is what "is sufficient for the harmony of society" (I.i.4.7).

Smith uses the term harmony because this is the way he describes sympathy and the sentiment of approbation. In various contexts he describes "complete sympathy" as "that perfect harmony and correspondence of sentiments which constitutes approbation" (e.g. I.iii.i.3).

Smith continually makes use of musical language in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to evoke the regulation of the sentiments.<sup>29</sup> In fact, he speaks of finding "the right pitch" of sentiments.

Smith's harmonic society could be described as an orchestra, but not as an orchestra playing in a concert, for in this case it would be an ideal harmonious society in which all are in accord amongst themselves. Rather, it is an orchestra preparing to play in a concert, at that particular moment when the instruments are being severally tuned to be able to play in accord with the others.

The harmonic society is the continual pursuit of attunement of each individual instrument as a prelude possible accords with the others, as may be the case in loving or friendly, or indeed economic relations. Human society has in fact always been – as long as it has been human – a harmonic society, no less.

This is *Adam Smith's good news*. For the harmony of society it is not necessary for everyone to be friends or lovers, it suffices that each already tends to be friendly or lovable to his own eyes. There is no need for mutual sympathy or *mutual love and affection among the different members of society*, for what is already comes about quite naturally is sufficient, each being oriented by his self-love: each seeks the inner *mutual love or mutual sympathy* that makes mutual sympathy and mutual love with the others possible but not obligatory, albeit desirable. With regard to the good news of Christianity, Smith writes:

As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us. (I.i.5.5)

Until all follow the Christian precept, each is able to love himself as anyone could love him; that is, as his impartial spectator can love him.

The pursuit of self-love is not a normative moral precept to be followed, like that of loving one's neighbour, but a precept of nature. It describes what makes of society a community of human beings.

Between the harmonious and ideal society of mutual love and the impossible human society of self-love there is the harmonic society of self-love as it has always been.

### **3.4 Self-love is not the opposite of benevolence**

With the interpretation proposed here it is possible to distinguish not only between sympathy and benevolence, i.e. exquisite sympathy, but also and above all – unlike the four previous solutions – to make it clear that self-love is not the opposite of benevolence.

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<sup>29</sup> On this point, see also Griswold (1999, 127).

Benevolence, in fact, constitutes that exquisite sympathy that functions without any judgement, while self-love is based on mutual sympathy with one's self and with the others, or in other words on that autonomous judgement of the self that enables comparison with the interests of the others.

Returning to the point made in the letter to Elliot and subsequently in the revisions of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* about the absurdity of seeking the approbation of everyone, at the beginning of the *Wealth of Nations* Smith remarks that an entire life would not suffice to win over the friendship and love of all the people we may need. It is, therefore, better to rely on each individual's capacity to judge, or in other words on the self-love of the others.

In fact, Smith points out, once they have reached maturity animals are completely independent and, moreover, when they have need of a human, they try to gain his approbation:

When an animal wants to obtain something either of a man or of another animal, it has no other means of persuasion but to gain the favour of those whose service it requires. (WN, I.ii.2)

By contrast, human beings living in a "civilised" society, where the division of labour is fairly generalised, still need their fellows even when they have reached maturity. Moreover, they can hardly expect to enjoy the approbation and love of all those they need. In fact, the more widespread the division of labour is, the more individuals each will need to satisfy his own wants, and it becomes increasingly difficult to be able to be a friend to all of them. To obtain everything that is needed there can be no relying on the love the others might feel towards us, or in other words their sentiment of *benevolence*:

In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons. In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is entirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creatures. But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. (I.ii.2)

*Benevolence* is that immediate sense of love for others which drives us to their aid and to favour their happiness. This sentiment becomes a motive for action without going through any comparison between one's own interest and that of the other.

It is, Smith remarks in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, an *exquisite sympathy* – that *sympathy* that serves as a motive for action, but is not that more comprehensive sympathy that, thanks to imagination and identification, gives rise to comparison and the judgement of the sentiments. (TMS, IV.2.10).

It is, in short, *compassion, humanity*, the sentiment description of which opens the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In fact, as pointed out above, being a greatly generalised sentiment, for practically all – even the worst scoundrels – it can be taken as a starting point since it requires no justification.

Benevolence is distinguished from *generosity* precisely in this respect. The latter, Smith observes, derives from *sympathy* itself, and consists in preferring the interest of another, but only subsequent to comparison between own interest and that of the other (IV.2.10). However, unlike *exquisite sympathy*, generosity requires a certain magnanimity, a certain wisdom, which means that it is even less to be relied on to obtain what we need from the others. Generosity is a noble quality, lack of which, however, does not make anyone blameworthy.

It is better, then, Smith goes on, to rely on *self-love*, i.e. the capacity for autonomous judgement of every individual which, unlike benevolence, allows for comparison of interests and, unlike generosity, is a quality most people have.

Furthermore, if self-love did not involve the capacity to compare reciprocal interests, no exchange could ever be made. Thus Smith observes in a celebrated passage:

Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. (*WN*, I.ii.2)

This could be interpreted through the famous formula of the "invisible hand": even though pursuing personal, individual interest, each involuntarily promotes a general interest: although driven by individual interest, the butcher, the brewer or the baker satisfy others' needs.

However, Smith is not simply saying that each attends to his own needs and that this suffices to obtain reciprocal advantages. He is not, in fact, saying that exchange is made because each has moved solely by self-love, but, rather, because each addresses the other's self-love.

For exchange to be made, the need is for each to consider the others' needs and interest.

The explanation of this passage, therefore, lies in the account of exchange as the *capacity* to address the self-love of the other.

However, this capacity depends on the fact that each of us, at the same time, is oriented by his *own* self-love.

In fact, if every individual was oriented by his selflove, he could never address himself to the selflove of the others. But since he is oriented by his self-love, he is, then, able to address the other's self-love. On the basis of an inner accord, he can seek a possible accord with the other, and thus exchange. Let us now see how this is possible.

## **4. The origin of the possibility of exchange and the pleasure of accord**

### **4.1 Self-love underlying the possibility of exchange**

The previous four solutions to the *Adam Smith Problem* are insufficient to account for the origin of the *possibility of exchange* as presented in the *Wealth of Nations*.

We could attempt an explanation of the sort following the interpretation in the fourth solution: the conjectured moderation of self-love would allow the opposing interests not to clash irremediably but to arrive at an accord.<sup>30</sup> What counts, however, even before the motive for which they enter into accord rather than remaining in disaccord, is what makes either of the two alternatives possible.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Young (1986).

Between the motive for exchange and what makes it possible there is a difference that needs to be elucidated.

Although Smith refers to the faculty of speech, as we will see in the following section, he considers it a consequence of the predisposition to accord, and not a preliminary condition for it.<sup>31</sup>

Following the solution proposed here, we can account for the possibility of exchange thus: self-love is at one and the same time the motive for exchange and what makes it possible.

It would not be possible if own self-love and that of the other did not have a constitutive relationship with sympathy.

When Smith says that in exchange each addresses the self-love of the other, he is saying that each addresses the other's desire to be lovable and worthy to the eyes of *his* impartial spectator. Thus addressing the other's self-love means addressing the other's impartial spectator.

One who addresses himself to the other's self-love is also divided between himself and his impartial spectator. Thus, when he identifies with the other to be able to judge him in a truly impartial way from that position, he has to imagine what his own impartial spectator would experience in that particular situation. In this case – a case that occurs whenever an individual identifies with another – that individual's *own* impartial spectator corresponds to that of *the other*.

When, therefore, one individual speaks to another, it is in reality his own impartial spectator that speaks to that of the other, or in other words to his autonomous capacity for judgement, his self-respect and his desire to obtain the sympathy of himself, i.e. his own *self-love*.

When the other responds to my proposal, he is doing exactly the same; he is identifying with me and his impartial spectator can enter into accord with mine.

Indeed, when I address myself to another I identify with him. In that position, I verify what my feelings could be in his situation. This means that I question my impartial spectator – in that position – and I see what accord with him there could be. This means that if I want to exchange with another, addressing myself to his self-love, I just have to get my impartial spectator in my situation into dialogue and accord with my impartial spectator as if I were in the other's situation.

When the other does the same, our reciprocal impartial spectators *can* enter into dialogue with each other. When my internal accord between me and myself in my situation agrees with the internal accord between me and myself as if I were in the situation of the other and when for the other it is the same, there is the *possibility* that our reciprocal internal accords can become attuned. In this case there *can* be exchange. And this, says Smith, happens "so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it" (III.3.3).

On the subject of what suffices for the harmony of society, significantly Smith writes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators. (I.i.4.8)

Being able to enter into accord with one's self, i.e. to enter into mutual sympathy with one's self, the individual is able to find accord with anyone else, able to enter

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<sup>31</sup> As, however, could be interpreted (Fleischacker 2004, 92-94), especially if there are no other explanations of the possibility of the exchange, following this interpretation.

into mutual sympathy with him – with his capacity to enter into mutual sympathy with himself.

In a situation of exchange, *each* addresses the other's self-love. The reciprocal impartial spectators enter into dialogue, and if the exchange takes place it means that they have found themselves in accord.

The inner accord of each has made the desired entry into accord with the other possible. If exchange takes place, it means that the *reciprocal inner accords* have found mutual attunement.

For accord with the other to be possible, it is necessary for each to be able to compare his interest with the other's.

Being moved by self-love means being oriented by the pursuit of one's impartial spectator's sympathy – it means being able to place one's self in a *third dimension* which is not partial between self and oneself, and so between self and the others, and being able to seek a position of equilibrium. Since the other acts in the same way, accord is then possible:

In the same manner, to the selfish and original passions of human nature, the loss or gain of a very small interest of our own, appears to be of vastly more importance, excites a much more passionate joy or sorrow, a much more ardent desire or aversion, than the greatest concern of another with whom we have no particular connexion. His interests, as long as they are surveyed from this station, can never be put into the balance with our own, can never restrain us from doing whatever may tend to promote our own, how ruinous soever to him. Before we can make any proper comparison of those opposite interests, we must change our position. We must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a *third person*, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us. Here, too, habit and experience have taught us to do this so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it. (III.3.3)

The *third person* Smith refers to in this passage is the impartial spectator – not third in numerical order, but in another dimension, other than that in which the two opposed interests find themselves. Only from this third, impartial position is it possible to evaluate them and compel them, or in other words “put into the balance” the reciprocal interests.

This passage from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in fact, is drawn entirely from the letter to Elliot and thus derives from the account Smith gives of the impartial spectator. As we have seen, in fact, in the letter Smith had already made the point that we soon learn “to set up in our minds a judge between ourselves and those we live with”, i.e. “a man in general, an impartial spectator” (1759b, 54). And indeed, shortly after in the letter, and again in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a little before the passage quoted above, Smith observes (1759b, 54):

It is only by consulting this judge within, that we can ever see what relates to ourselves in its proper shape and dimensions; or that we can ever make any proper comparison between our own interests and those of other people.

To summarise, it is not simply a matter of moderating one's original self-love, for example in conformity with social rules, to make it acceptable to the other and thus succeeded in persuading him.

The point is, rather, that once mature, the individual is able, thanks precisely to self-love, to evaluate his own interests appropriately and to put them in the balance with those of the others.

This is possible thanks to an inner dimension opening up to create a third dimension between self, oneself and the others. It is that dimension in which the corresponding impartial spectators *are able* to compare their reciprocal interests.<sup>32</sup>

It is precisely in this third dimension that accord and exchange are possible.

## 4.2 Credibility and self-love

Only after an explanation with oneself is there any chance of arriving at an explanation with the others.

At the level of ideas, too, what really matters is not that everyone be reciprocally in accord. What counts is that accord with the others be possible, besides being desired. According to Smith, it is possible because everyone desires in the first place accord with himself. The faculty of speech is the fruit of this desire. Being in dialogue with oneself opens the way to sincere dialogue with the others, and thus satisfactory accord. Being credible to oneself is the basis to be able to relate to one's impartial spectator, to be able to enter into inner accord, and so to be able actually to identify with another's impartial spectator and to address oneself to him in a credible way and thus possibly to enter in accord with him.

The love of the impartial spectator can be credible thanks to pursuit of the love of virtue, to the desire to be credible to oneself.

Shortly before explaining exchange through self-love, in the *Wealth of Nations* Smith observes that the propensity for exchange could derive from the *faculty of speech or reason*, but is not the object of such an inquiry. In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* Smith makes his meaning clearer when he remarks that the propensity for exchange derives from the faculty of speech, from the inclination, that is, to persuade:<sup>33</sup>

If we should enquire into the principle in the human mind on which this disposition of trucking is founded, it is clearly the natural inclination every one has to persuade. (*LJ*, 352)

However, it is in the closing chapter of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that Smith deals with the desire to persuade and the origin of speech.

For this reason he explains in the *Wealth of Nations* that he is not concerned with the topic there: he had dealt with it when coming to his conclusions in his previous research.

From the very outset, in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith points out that sentimental accord corresponds also to the possibility of accord on ideas:

To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them. If the same arguments which convince you convince me likewise, I necessarily approve of your conviction; and if they do not, I necessarily disapprove of it: neither can I possibly conceive that I should do the one without

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<sup>32</sup> For a divergent reading, see Brown (1994, 53). Brown argues, in fact, that in exchange no intervention of the impartial spectator takes place, just as, in her opinion, in all the reasoning of the *Wealth of Nations*.

<sup>33</sup> See also (*LJ*, 493-494). In the last chapter of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, dealing with the propensity to persuade and seek credit vis-à-vis the self and the others, Smith follows the same reasoning: "It is always mortifying not to be believed, and it is doubly so when we suspect that it is because we are supposed to be unworthy of belief and capable of seriously and wilfully deceiving". (*TMS*, VII.iv.26). It is, then, a line of reasoning we find at the end of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments Morali* and at the beginning of what would be the *Wealth of Nations*.

the other. To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinions of others is acknowledged, by every body, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own. But this is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of others. (I.i.3.2)

Approving or disapproving of someone's ideas means verifying whether or not there is accord between the reciprocal ideas.

Once again, for Smith it is a matter of looking into what it is that makes this accord with the others possible.

He observes that children tend to believe the opinions of others (VII.iv.23), but with maturity come to show due diffidence when called for. Nevertheless, we all have a propensity to grant credit to the others: "The natural disposition – Smith says – is always to believe" (VII.iv.23).

Just as sentimental accord is pleasurable, so also is the accord of ideas. And just as we seek to be lovable to our own eyes, we equally seek, according to Smith, to be credible to our own eyes:

As we cannot always be satisfied merely with being admired, unless we can at the same time persuade ourselves that we are in some degree really worthy of admiration; so we cannot always be satisfied merely with being believed, unless we are at the same time conscious that we are really worthy of belief. As the desire of praise and that of praise-worthiness, though very much a-kin, are yet distinct and separate desires; so the desire of being believed and that of being worthy of belief, though very much a-kin too, are equally distinct and separate desires. (VII.iv.24)

Here, then, towards the end of the book, Smith's reasoning comes to its culmination. Just as the *love of virtue* denotes the desire to be praiseworthy, so the *love of truth* betokens the desire to be credit-worthy, or in other words to be credible to the eyes of our impartial spectator. On the basis of this inner credit, between us and ourselves, we can consider whatever credit the others may accord us to be merited, and therefore agreeable.

In conclusion of the book Smith arrives at the *love of truth*, for this is fundamental to the whole argument. In fact, the inner relationship with one's own impartial spectator is based upon it. Anyone who is not creditable to his own eyes can never be in harmony with his impartial spectator, which in fact works when we are moved by the wish to be honest with ourselves. The desire to be lovable to one's own eyes is conceivable thanks to this desire.

In the passage cited above, in fact, Smith remarks: "we cannot always be satisfied merely with being admired, unless we can at the same time *persuade ourselves* that we are in some degree really worthy of admiration". Self-persuasion underlies the *love of virtue* and *self-love*. Self-persuasion takes place by virtue of our propensity to persuade another – in this case it is that other that we ourselves are, i.e. our impartial spectator – that we are truly meritworthy. This desire is "one of the strongest of all our natural desires" (VII.iv.25) together with the *love of virtue*.

At the same time, the desire to gain the merited approbation of the others could find no realisation if we did not have a tendency to wish to obtain from the others their conviction that the approbation they accord us is indeed merited. This means that the desire to be credible to oneself is associated with the desire to be deemed credit worthy by the others. This desire for *merited* credibility rests upon self judgement and upon finding oneself credible to one's own eyes. *Love of virtue* and *love of truth* work together as constituent desires constituting *self-love*, i.e. of the relationship each has with his own impartial spectator.

The desire to persuade the other that we are worthy of the credit we deem due to us is probably – Smith observes – that “upon which is founded the faculty of speech” (VII.iv.25).

According to Smith, therefore, this faculty is the consequence of an activity of sentiment. It is the consequence of the desire for credibility, or in other words the will to convince the other of one's own merits.

In this sense, the propensity to give and receive credit lies behind the propensity for exchange.

Here we have the final point in the argumentation set out in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, coinciding with the starting point of the *Wealth of Nations*, which is the origin of the propensity for accord and exchange.

This, in fact, derives from the propensity of each of us to seek attunement with the sentiments and ideas of the others, and to bring these into attunement with one's own, or in other words the propensity to pursue the sympathy and credibility of one's self, and thus of the others – in short, the propensity to come into accord with one's self, and so with the others.

### 4.3 Self-love as motive for exchange

In the *Wealth of Nations* the motive for exchange is not selflove, but self-love. When Smith refers to the propensity for exchange, in fact, he does not mean that everyone has a propensity to pursue their own interest as selflove: if it were so, exchange would be a means to that end. Rather, he is saying that we are all moved by the pursuit of exchange. With the propensity for exchange, in fact, Smith is referring to the desire for that self-satisfaction that only mutual sympathy with one's self and with others can grant. Having the propensity for exchange implies being oriented by one's self-love as desire for accord.

If the motive for exchange were selflove, then the capacity to identify with others would merely be a means to devise a “strategy” to obtain what interests us.<sup>34</sup> Sympathy, then, would come into the exchange as a capacity serving to understand what to propose to the other to persuade him to do something in our own interest, leading him to believe that it is to his advantage.

Anyone proposing exchange while pursuing this strategy would, however, not only fail to be credible to the eyes of the other, but above all would not be credible to his own eyes. This form of accord, failing to satisfy the single person, is neither desired nor pursued.

By contrast, on proposing some exchange, thanks to identification with the other, one sets out to offer something which he believes may be *acceptable*. This does not, however, mean solely “acceptable by the other” – in the sense that as likely outcome the other will accept to take part in the exchange – but in the first place “acceptable in itself” – such that the other can accept or not accept on the basis of his capacity to judge.

Smith is not saying that the motive for exchange is self-interest passed off as the interest of the other, if indeed it is true that we all wish to be credible to ourselves and to the others.

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<sup>34</sup> For an interpretation of exchange in terms of strategy, see Fleischacker (2004, 90-91), Fontaine (1997, 269-270).

Rather, a person proposing some exchange will try to persuade the other that he believes what he is offering to be worthy of him and worth what he is asking for in exchange.

According to Smith, most people tend to believe in the others and this generates trust, because "we trust the man who seems willing to trust us" (VII.iv.28).

Being oriented by self-love in exchange means, therefore, that exchange is sought above all for its own sake. In this sense, the motive for exchange is self-love, and not selflove.

If self-love implies pursuit of the pleasure of accord with one's self and with the others, having a propensity for exchange means precisely this. Self-love is the motive for exchange, for this it is that drives someone to seek the accord of someone else, having made it possible. When the exchange is accomplished, it produces pleasure in self-satisfaction for the very fact of its accomplishment.

Suffice it to turn back to the passages in the *Wealth of Nations* where Smith considers how the propensity for exchange leads to the division of labour to see where this direction is leading:

In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He *frequently exchanges* them for cattle or for venison with his companions; and *he finds at last* that he can in this manner get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of armourer. Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is *accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbours*, who reward him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, *till at last he finds* it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a brazier, a fourth a tanner or dresser of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. (*WN*, I.ii.4 my italics)

Smith's account is indeed significant. The individual *first* exchanges or at any rate is accustomed to serving his neighbours, and only *subsequently* realises that in this way he is able to obtain more goods than he otherwise would if he had to do everything by himself. This means that he *frequently exchanges*, although it takes some time to appreciate the advantage. In other words, he exchanges the fruits of his labour frequently for goods that he still thinks he has to procure by himself. This means that he does not practice exchange "from a regard to his own interest". Smith says that first he practices frequent exchange, and subsequently, "from a regard to his own interest", he decides to dedicate himself to just one activity.

Care for his own interest drives him to concentrate on a particular activity, not to exchange.

Exchange does not come about through calculation of the sort, but for the pleasure of exchange, to the extent, indeed, that in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, explaining this point, Smith refers to individuals that "at first make presents" to their neighbours (LJ, 493).

Exchanging before realising its advantageousness in obtaining more goods means seeking another type of gratification. For example, the pleasure one can have in seeing the fruit of one's labour appreciated by another, to the extent that he accepts it, uses it or is even prepared to deprive himself of something he already has in order to obtain it. At the same time, when we accept his offer is gratification derives primarily from the fact that we are prepared to accept the fruit of his labour in exchange for ours.

This mutual gratification is the self-satisfaction of mutual sympathy.

Dedicating himself to a single activity corresponds to a “regard to his own interest”, but in the sense that it allows him to continue exchanging. If his interest is primarily exchange in itself, then we might say that the individual exchanges with “regard to his own interest”, moved to act by his self-love.

In the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, when he explains the propensity for exchange starting from the propensity to persuade, significantly Smith points at that people seek to persuade others even if it brings them no advantage:

Men always endeavour to persuade others to be of their opinion even when the matter is of no consequence to them. (*LJ*, vi.56, 352)<sup>35</sup>

Seeking accord with the others, we arrive at exchanging for the pleasure of doing so and thus reciprocally procure *good offices*. In turn, the latter do not serve to satisfy needs essential to survival and reproduction of the species, which – Smith argues – in the savage state of nature individuals would be able to look after easily enough by themselves (*WN*, I.xi.c). These *good offices*, which are the result of pleasurable accord, also serve to satisfy this need for accord with ourselves and with the others. In fact, according to Smith's distinction between necessary goods and luxury goods, they are necessary for personal dignity and self-respect (*WN*, VII.ii.k; *TMS*, VI.i.3) – respect based on self-approbation, upon which is based the pursuit of the merited respect of the others.

In this sense we might say that the desire to “improve one's own conditions”, as the purpose of exchange, corresponds to pursuit of self-love, i.e. accord with one's self and the others.

#### 4.4 Inverting the origin of society myth

If we live in society it is not because we need the others to survive. If that were the case, society would be a means for an individual selfish end, which socialisation would moderate for the existence of society. This, then, would be no less than the institution of rules as illusory methods to bring individuals who would otherwise starve to death to collaborate.

If society exists, instead, it is because it is the place of accord.

Here we find inverted the line of reasoning followed by Hume, who adopts the hypothesis of isolated individuals, rational and selfish; although he holds that accord amongst men for the constitution of society did not come about at a precise

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<sup>35</sup> The preceding sentence is: “If we should enquire into the principle in the human mind on which this disposition of trucking is founded, it is clearly the natural inclination every one has to persuade. *The offering of a shilling, which to us appears to have so plain and simple a meaning*, is in reality offering an argument to persuade one to do so and so as it is for his interest”. The description Smith gives of *money* here is particularly interesting: when money is offered, it is implicitly acknowledged as acceptable value, not in the sense that it must be accepted, not being false, but because the measurement it entails is based on acceptable judgement. It is, therefore, not only of the measurement and means of exchange, as Smith was to point out immediately after, but what it entails is the acceptability of the exchange and thus the credibility of oneself and the other, without this significance visibly emerging. Although we do not think of it, money corresponds to that third dimension which opens up scope for exchange. We find a similar line of reasoning precisely when, in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith refers to this third dimension: “We must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a *third person*, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us. *Here, too, habit and experience have taught us to do this so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it*” (III.3.3).

point in time but gradually, he maintains the myth and in any case argues that the principal would be the same in the institution of a new society (*Treatise*, 3.2.3).

The idea is that, aware of the advantages that the division of labour can bring them given the different natural talents people have, individuals are driven by sheer selfishness to get together. The exchange is thus a consequence of the division of labour.

However, knowing each other well enough, they know that the selfishness that has brought them together may soon jeopardise the very existence of society. The capacity to appreciate the future advantage as exceeding any present one, i.e. prudence, drives them, then, to bring in rules that must apply to all if society is to function, regardless of the particular cases. The primary general rules are those of stability of possession, of its transference by consent, and of the performance of promises (*Treatise*, 3.2). These make exchange feasible (*Treatise*, 3.2.6).

The sequence runs thus: individuals with innate talents come together to enjoy the advantages of the division of labour, and to ensure the well functioning of this union and enable exchange they institute these laws and, consequently, a government that enforces respect of it. Without government, therefore, there would be no respect of them and individual interest would all too often prevail over the general interest of society, to the disadvantage of all, exchange could not take place and no one could benefit from the work of others.

In the second chapter of the *Wealth of Nations* Smith sets out to reverse this myth of the foundation of society. Having explained how it is that an individual decides to attend to one single activity, he writes:

And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business.

The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. (*WN*, I.ii.4)

Hence, according to Smith, the division of labour derives from the possibility of exchange.

The certainty is given by the general propensity for exchange and the possibility for men to address themselves to the self-love of the others.

As we read, the division of labour is not the result of natural talents, for the latter are the result of it. At the beginning, it is not a matter of isolated individuals with innate talents sensing the advantages of the division of labour, but of individuals with a propensity for exchange and for coming into accord amongst themselves.<sup>36</sup> From this reciprocal accord and exchange, individuals gradually realise that they can concentrate on a single activity, which gives rise to talents.

Exchange, therefore, does not derive from the institution of private property and a government that enforces its respect and the respect of contracts. In the *Wealth of Nations* (V.i.a-b), Smith observes that in a society with no great economic disparities, there is no need for a government to enforce respect of private property because individuals have no propensity to harm each other reciprocally, and this is precisely because they tend to respect themselves and the others.

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the division of labour is not, for Smith, "an effect of human prudence" (*LJ*, 492).

Only after the predisposition for exchange has led to the division of labour, and the latter has yielded a great quantity of wealth, can a government then appear necessary or useful (V.i.b). Government, then, can be a consequence of exchange and the division of labour, but it is not, contrary to Hume's hypothesis, a necessary condition for them.

Much the same applies to the needs. While Hume embraces the myth dating back to Plato of individuals whose personal faculties come short of their needs, Smith argues that for survival human beings would be self-sufficient, but seeking accord with the others, this need gives rise to further needs, fruit of this satisfaction.

Similarly, in conclusion, justice is not artificial, as it is for Hume (*Treatise*, 3.2.1-2), but lies in the capacity of each to be able to judge the particular situation appropriately and impartially.<sup>37</sup>

According to Smith, human beings take pleasure in coming into accord regardless of the positive consequences that may result.

In the interpretation of Smith proposed here, predisposition to accord with one's self and others is the basis of the predisposition to accord with the others and of being together. It precedes any calculation of the individual and social advantages and any form of government of the individuals. It is not a consequence but is independent of them. It is what enables human society – a harmonic society, that is – to exist.

#### 4.5 Predisposition for accord

The predisposition for accord is to be seen as at the same time "propensity for accord" and "preliminary disposition for accord".<sup>38</sup>

The propensity for accord with one's self is due to the preliminary disposition for accord with one's self, deriving from inner division. This predisposition for accord with one's self is the preliminary disposition for accord with the others, and thus for the propensity for accord with them. Being predisposed for accord means that the propensity for accord with one's self makes the propensity for accord with the others possible.

In other words, the propensity for accord with that other that we ourselves are lies behind the possibility for desired accord with the others.

In the closing pages of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith explicitly returns to the theme of music and says of the pleasure of accord:

The great pleasure of conversation and society, besides, arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another. (VII.iv.28)

Smith's position is based on the idea that sympathy "is always agreeable and delightful" (1759b, 51), to the extent indeed that experiencing it and receiving it are keenly desired, both in relation to one's own impartial spectator and in relation with the others, provided it is deemed merited.

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<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that Smith held recourse to third-party judge never to be necessary, but rather that the recourse is made in the same way as one addresses one's own impartial spectator and that of the other; indeed, the judge himself can only make his evaluation in this way (*TMS*, VII.iv.36).

<sup>38</sup> Smith speaks of "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange" and "trucking disposition" (*WN*, I.ii.1-3).

This means that we experience pleasure even when sympathising with someone who is suffering.

For Hume this was an unacceptable idea: sympathy conveyed pleasure or displeasure; it could not yield pleasure before a displeasure.

In fact, the only real criticism he had to make of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was, of course, on this point. With his customary sarcasm, Hume pointed out that if Smith's observations were correct, then "an hospital would be a more entertaining place than a ball" (Hume, 1759).

For Hume sympathy could be associated with moral approval or disapproval only with reference to the advantages or disadvantages that the sentiments or action can produce for the self or for society (*Treatise* 3.1.2 – 3.2.2), whereas for Smith saying that sympathy always yields pleasure implies being able to state that it is always accompanied by the sentiment of approbation. Unlike for Hume, in other words, for Smith it meant being able to associate sympathy with judgement of sentiments.

Smith replied to his friend in a note to the second edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, remarking that the pleasure produced by sympathy is quite distinct from the sentiment, of suffering or joy, which the two sympathisers can share.<sup>39</sup>

Here we have the fundamental point. The pleasure of sympathy that corresponds to approbation is of a different nature from the pleasure that some particular situation can afford. It is not like pleasure as opposed to suffering. It is the pleasure of accord. As Smith makes eloquently clear in his letter to Elliot (1759b, 51):

Two sounds, I suppose, may, each of them taken singly, be austere, and yet, if they are perfect concords, the perception of this harmony and coincidence may be agreeable.

It is this pleasure which his theory is based upon and which, he holds, makes human society possible.

Smith does not define the pleasure explicitly, but he makes it clear enough: it is the pleasure experienced in finding oneself in accord with one's self and with someone else, and thereby finding confirmation of one's capacity as a sentient being.

It is the pleasure of knowing oneself able to feel and think, to feel one feels and to think one thinks. In short, it is the pleasure of recognising oneself as a human amongst humans.

## Conclusions

The good news of Adam Smith is that even if the whole life of a man is scarcely sufficient to gain the *friendship* and the *love* of a few persons, what matters for the harmony of society is that everyone knows how, and indeed desires, to be *friendly* and *lovable* to one's own eyes.

It is true that people seek the love and approbation of others, but once adult, Smith argues, each of us learns that it is impossible to be loved and approved by everyone.

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<sup>39</sup> Smith anticipated the note in his letter to Elliot, writing "I have sent you an answer to an objection of D. Hume. I think I have entirely discomfitted him" (1759b, 49).

What is important, however, is that when people seek the love or the approbation of others, they generally seek *merited* approbation or *merited* love. To know if this approbation or love is merited or not, we have first to know by ourselves whether we merit them or not, i.e. if we are lovable.

The capacity to judge our merits autonomously is what is really required for the harmony of society.

Everyone seeks the love and the approbation of his impartial spectator, i.e. for the inner mutual sympathy, that is *self-love*. This is possible if we are able to create the right distance between us and ourselves, thanks to the presence of others.

The solution to the *Adam Smith Problem* can be found in this way to interpret self-love.

The other solutions to the problem rest basically on an interpretation of sympathy leaving the sense of self-love practically unchanged – always and in any case understood as a selfish sentiment, at best moderated by the prudence and socialisation induced through pursuit of the sympathy of others.

With these interpretations, however, we cannot account for the predisposition for exchange as possibility of and propensity for accord with one's self and thus with the others.

The division of the self arises from sympathy towards the others and the perception that the others sympathise or do not sympathise with us. From this derives the desire to be worthy of the sympathy of others, and from the awareness that receiving it from everyone is humanly impossible. Thus the individual imagines an impartial spectator to identify with and seek the merited sympathy of.

This predisposition for accord with one's self predisposes him for accord with anyone else.

The third dimension between self, oneself and the others offers the right conditions for appropriate comparison between one's own and others' interests. The possible meeting in this third dimension corresponds to that particular form of accord which is exchange.

The pleasure of finding oneself in accord with the others is in fact the perfectly human pleasure of discovering oneself able to feel. The pleasure of finding oneself in accord with one's self is the pleasure of discovering oneself thanks to the difference between self and oneself that sets us before our sentiments. The pleasure of the others' accord with us is the pleasure of having this continual discovery confirmed.

This is why accord is sought as an end, predisposing people to enter into accord and exchange although it is neither obligatory nor necessary. What counts for the harmony of society is that it is possible. In this precise sense we may say that Smith's is profoundly "liberal" thought.

Behind this thought we find the individual not as an "indivisible" element from which to begin analysis, but as a "divisible" individual, whose very *divisibility* lies at the origin of society, and indeed of exchange.

To put it another way, society induces the individual to divide himself internally, which thus makes its existence possible as human community – not, that is, as an aggregate of indivisible elements, but a harmonic composition of inner dimensions seeking accord.

The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is not a moralistic text, nor one of social science, nor psychology as we might take these disciplines today.

It is not a text that says how human behaviour should be judged, but rather an inquiry into what makes such judgement possible as the autonomous judgement of each individual. It is not research into the functioning of society or the interactive mechanisms between individuals, nor does it examine their behaviour and its psychic causes.

Rather, it is research into the nature and origin of moral sentiments, examining what it is that makes accord possible between human beings and what makes it desired.

In short, it is research into the possibility of human society existing.

The pleasure of accord, i.e. of mutual sympathy – with one's self and with others – lies at the very heart of this reasoning.

The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a text that establishes the bases for discussion of the irrelevance of civil government for society and exchange between individuals to exist.

Following this reading, also the *Wealth of Nations* takes on a new identity. It is not a text on political economy that simply seeks to demonstrate the harmfulness of government intervention in the accords, i.e. the exchanges, between individuals. Nor does it set out to demonstrate the uselessness of government intervention in these accords.

Rather, it is an investigation that, starting from the fact that no government is necessary for accords to be established between individuals, sets out to determine how there can be *a society based on the principles that make it possible*, namely the predisposition for accord with one's self and with the others.

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