A THESIS ON

ADAM SMITH'S THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
OF
LAVAL UNIVERSITY

IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE
DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY

QUEBEC
1945
ADAM SMITH'S THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS

BY

Mme. Marie de Jesus Kelly, R.S.H.M.

LAVAL UNIVERSITY

QUEBEC, 1945
PROPOSITIONES DEFENDENDAE

I Sensibilia dividuntur in tria: in sensibilia per accidens, et sensibilia per se, quorum alia propria, alia communia jure sunt appellata.

II In sola politia optima simpliciter, idem est optimus vir et civis optimus simpliciter.

III Res physice continentur et mensurantur ab aeternitate etiam antequam sunt in re.

IV Tria rerum naturalium principia esse, non pauciora nec plura.

V Syllogismus demonstrativus recte definitur syllogismus faciens scire.
CHAPTER I

In so far as Adam Smith's "Theory of Moral Sentiments" accords an important role to sentiment, it is sometimes mentioned as a reaction against the extreme rationalism of his time. It seemed to be a return to a more traditional concept of truth in action as opposed to truth in pure thought. Aristotle himself had in the VI Ethics defined practical truth by the conformity of reason to right appetite, whereas speculative truth is mere conformity of reason with what is. It is our purpose to show that this view of Smith's moral philosophy is an extreme oversimplification. In reality his moral philosophy is rather the result of the very application of rationalism to the field of human action.

What do we mean by rationalism? One of the most outstanding rationalists of our times has described it in the following words: "Rationalism is that trend of philosophy which intercedes for the rights of 'natural reason' and sees in it the source of all truth. Common to all the historical forms of rationalism is the belief in the 'autonomy of thought', i.e., the view that thought can discover by its own strength, without support from a supernatural revelation and
and without appeal to sense perception, a system of 'eternal truths', a system presented to thought within its own realm and comprehended by thought as necessary."

Again it would be an over simplification of the facts to trace the outlook implied in Modern Thought merely to the Renaissance since it actually has much deeper roots. It is evident in Averroism as is clearly attested to by Casimir in his article on Pico della Mirandola: "We know the strong influence that Averroism exerted on scholastic thought, and we know how it gradually conquered the entire scientific world. In 1270 Etienne Tempier, Bishop of Paris, summoned the faculty of masters of theology to condemn thirteen Averroistic theses. But not all the prohibitions following each other in quick succession were able to prevent the spread of Averroism in the universities. The humanistic attacks, like those we find with extreme sharpness and violence in Petrarch, likewise rebounded from the iron armor of Averroes almost without effect. Averroism ends by appearing, in the form expressed in the School of Padua, as 'science' pure and simple. The reason for this lies less in its empirical content of knowledge than in

its conceptual form and in the basic theoretical conviction it stood for. For only within the framework of Averroism could there be, under the conditions of medieval culture, anything like an 'autonomous' physics, and interpretation of natural phenomena independent of theological presuppositions. It was this function that gave Averroism its meaning, even within the sphere of Christian culture, and secured its exceptional position—despite all the keen criticism directed against it from the side of the real defenders of the Christian faith, like Thomas Aquinas. Within its own field Averroism was invincible, so long as it offered the only possibility and the only assurance of a scientific physics. By John of Jandun Averroes was celebrated as 'perfectus et gloriosissimus physicus,' as 'veritatis amicus et defensor intrepidus,' and Michele Savonarola speaks of him, in the book which he composed in praise of the philosophy of the School of Padua, as a thinker who for the acuteness of his mind should be called truly divine."

Pico della Mirandola's "Oratio de dignitate hominis" lays strong emphasis on man's ability to be "sui ipsius plastes et fuctor. Whatever is indeterminate in man, or that which leaves him open to

self-making, serves to raise him even above the angels: "At last the Best of Artisans ordained that that creature to whom he had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been the peculiar characteristics of the different creatures. He therefore accorded to Man the function of a form not set apart, and a place in the middle of the world, and addressed him thus: 'I have given thee neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself, Adam, to the end that, according to thy longing and according to thy judgment, thou mayest have and possess that abode, that form, and those functions which thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other things is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by me: thou, coerced by no necessity shall ordain for thyself the limits of nature in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand I have placed thee. I have set thee at the world's center, that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. I have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that thou mayest with greater freedom of choice and with more honor, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have
the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are animal; thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms of life, which are divine."

"O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of Man! to whom it is granted to have that which he chooses, to be that which he wills. Beasts as soon as they are born (so says Lucilius) bring with them from their mother's womb that which they will possess forever; spiritual beings, either from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for ever and ever. On Man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all good and the germ of every form of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates, those seeds will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensual, he will become brutish. If rational, he will issue as a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, happy in the lot of no created thing, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit made one with God in the solitary darkness of God Who is set above all things, he shall surpass them all. Who will not admire this our chameleon. Or who could more greatly admire aught else whatever. It is Man
who Asclepius of Athens, arguing from his mutability of character and from his self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries. Hence those metamorphoses renowned among the Hebrews and the Pythagoreans.”

Man then is raised above all other creatures of God in so far as he is the author of himself. The indetermination raises men above the angels because it allows man to build and shape himself. Hence, that which, according to St. Thomas, places man at the very lowest scale of the intellectual hierarchy turns out for Pico to be the reason why man occupies the very center of creation. It is true that from the supernatural point of view man does actually occupy the center of creation; he most certainly does because of the hypostatic union and because of the Divine Maternity of Mary. In the order of grace human beings may be above the angels; (Prima Pars, qu.20), but this elevation was not due man because of a dignity inherent in his very nature but rather to the boundless mercy of God. It is true that God gave great power to man; however, the very wonder of the order of redemption consists in the fact that God can do so much with so little. We destroy the very greatness of the order of

redemption when we seek in human nature an innate power which makes him particularly eligible to perform the role that God has conceded him.

Hence, in this passage at least (for other passages of his works might be shown to contradict this idea), Fico definitely confused the natural and the supernatural orders, thus supporting the fundamental idea of rationalism which accords to natural reason the ability to penetrate of itself into the field of the supernatural.\(^1\)

Descartes (1596-1650) was a product of the Renaissance in whom we see clear cut ideas that will have a definite influence on later thought. Being a great mathematician he thought to find mathematical precision in philosophy but could only do this by banishing philosophy proper. He rejected Aristotle's philosophy of nature by declaring that Aristotle's definition of its fundamental notions rendered

---

1. Dulles, Avery, *Principia Concordiae*, Harvard University Press, 1941. He has shown that Fico does not concur with the Humanistic view that the stupendous miracle of the Incarnation was merited by the grandeur of human nature. It remains true, however, that the "Oration" cannot be referred to as a proof of the disagreement, and it also remains true that the historians of the Renaissance philosophy have exploited this Oration to the full; to relegate the ideas expressed in it to rhetoric does not suppress their meaning.
ridiculously obscure things which are so clear.

Not only was theology utterly beyond the
domain of human reason but even metaphysics was found
too difficult to deserve sustained attention.

1. Descartes, René, *Regulae*, Texte de l'édition Adam et
Tannery, Paris Librairie Philosophique, J. Vrin,
1950, pp. 70-75.

homines in considerationes veritatis propter
consuetudinem diversos modos acceptant: et dicit,
quod quidam non recipiunt quod eis dicitur, nisi
dicitur eis per modum mathematicum. Et hoc
quidem convenit propter consuetudinem his, qui
in mathematicis sunt nutriti. Et hoc quia
consuetudo est similis naturae, potest etiam
hoc quibusdam contingere propter indispositionem:
ilis seclis, quod sunt fortis imaginationis,
non habentes intellectum multum elevatum."

n. 376. "Ostendit quod illa modus, qui est
simpliciter optimus, non debet in omnibus
quaerir; dicens quod 'acribologia' id est diligens
et certa ratio, sicut est in mathematicis, non
debet requiri in omnibus rebus, de quibus sunt
scientificas, sed debet solus requiri in his, quae
non habent materia. Ea enim quae habent
materia, subjecta sunt mutui et variationi; et
ideo non potest in eis omnibus omimodo certitudo
haberi. Quaeritur enim in eis non quid semper
sit, et ex necessitate; sed quid sit ut in
pluribus. Immaterialia vero secundum seipsa
sunt certissime, quid sunt immobilia. Sed illa
quae in sua natura sunt immaterialia, non sunt
certa nobis propter defectum intellectus nostri,
ut praedictum est. Hujusmodi autem sunt substan-
tiae separateae. Sed mathematica sunt abstracta
a materia, et tamen non sunt excedentia intellec-
tum nostrum: et ideo in eis est requirendo
certissima ratio. Et quis tota natura est circa
materia, ideo istic modus certissimæ rationis
non pertinet ad naturam philosophicam. Dicit
autem 'forsen' propter corpora caelestia, quia
He presumed to reveal a real universe proportioned to the human intellect; on the one hand the body of man was part and parcel of this physico-mathematical universe and could be studied exhaustively in the terms of that science, whereas on the other hand the human soul was an object of direct intuition and studied as it were, in its state of separation. By this isolation man was completely rationalized and all his parts reduced to clear and distinct ideas.

As a result of Descartes' work, philosophy soon became an analysis of the mind and of the elements of consciousness. He gave to the mind a status comparable to that he had given to matter; and the mind now had a direct hold upon itself which had never been claimed before. This new critical philosophy was just the opposite of the critical attitude of previous philosophies since it made the self the standard of criticism, whereas the old systems had looked upon the object as the standard.

This mathematizing of nature which reached a

non habent eodem modo materiam sicut inferiores."

Descartes, Discours de la Méthode, p. 27. "Je révérais notre théologie, et prétendais autant qu'aucun autre à gagner le ciel; mais ayant appris, comme chose très assurée, que le chemin n'en est pas moins ouvert aux plus ignorants qu'aux plus doctes, et que les vérités révélées qui y conduisent sont au-dessus de notre intelligence, et je pensais que, pour entreprendre de les examiner et y réussir, il était besoin d'avoir quelque extraordinaire assistance du ciel et d'être plus qu'homme."
climax with Descartes served to make the world image at the time of Isaac Newton fundamentally much more simple than at the time of the early Greeks or even during the Middle Ages. The corruptible world of the ancients was much more involved. The Moderns were trying to explain everything in terms of efficient causality since the final cause is too difficult to know "quoad nos"; as a result, reason dispensed with all final causes as irrelevant and concentrated on those causes which were accessible to it. The way was now open to Newton to formulate the world machine philosophy that was to play such a dominant role during the (so-called) Age of Reason. Men were seeking, whether willfully or not, to express their human, social, and international relations in terms of a nature that is only a machine deprived of all purposes and spiritual significance. The natural was identified absolutely with the rational. "The Universe is one great harmonious order, not as for Thomas and the Middle Ages, an ascending hierarchy of purposes, but

1. Most writers are inclined to typify a period by the system or thought of the man who begins a new stream of inquiry. Actually at that time the works of some of the greatest and most influential theologians that the world has ever known were available: e.g., those of John of St. Thomas, Suarez, Baron, etc. However since Descartes was advocating new outlooks and new methods and since he has exercised such a tremendous influence upon modern thinkers it has become customary to classify the whole period as one of rigid mathematical mechanism.
a uniform mathematical system." This development was logical enough since final causality is the causality of the good, not as true but as good. This good which is a final cause is, as such, "extra limites intellectus".

Men were now convinced as never before that it was an irrefutable certainty that man could become the absolute maker of his own perfection and that the one sure method of achieving this perfection was through the aid of science; not the science that is wisdom, wisdom in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense of the word, but the science that stands for construction and for practical achievement; a science where man is principle, either in the order of thought alone as in logic and mathematics where the constructive role of reason is preponderant, or in such experimental sciences which will give us increasing power over nature. We see this attitude indicated in the following passage from Descartes' Discours de la Méthode: "car elles m'ont fait voir qu'il est possible de parvenir à des connaissances qui soient fort utiles à la vie; et qu'au lieu de cette Philosophie spéculative qu'on enseigne dans les écoles on en peut trouver une pratique par laquelle

connaissant la force et les actions du feu, de l'eau, de l'air, des astres, des cieux, et de tous les autres corps qui nous environnent, aussi distinctement que nous connaissons les divers métiers de nos artisans, nous les pourrions employer en même façon à tous les usages auxquelles ils sont propres, et ainsi nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la Nature."

Most of the writers of this period therefore seemed to deal with human life and human conceptions as if they were mechanical contrivances to be regulated by the constant working of an immense machine which relied on ceaselessly through the ages intent upon its own perfection and to a great extent totally unconcerned about the destiny of individuals. This mechanical conception of nature did infinite harm in every department of knowledge by destroying the unity of man since man could no longer be conceived as a unique person but became an

---

1. Descartes, René, Discours de la Méthode, (Paris: Librairie A. Matier) sixième partie, p. 76.
2. Mr. Randall in his "Making of the Modern Mind" maintains that "Throughout the 18th Century all thinkers believed that the scene of human life was set in a great fixed geometrical and mechanical order of nature, a mighty machine eternally pursuing the same unchanging round of cyclical processes. And the dominating ideal by which they tested all human
aggregate parts functioning with mechanical precision but having only an accidental relation to each other. Scholastic philosophy had reconciled the apparent contradiction of our nature by accounting both for what is material in it and for what is spiritual without disrupting its fundamental unity, and had not set up any insurmountable barriers between religion and science. The Modern Age in losing this unified conception has become the victim of a one-sidedness which has remained one of its most outstanding characteristics. This showed itself in the 19th and 18th centuries' interpretation of man and nature. For Rationalism man is the business of pure reason without allowing any form of emotion or feeling to interfere. Man must forget that he has a heart and an imagination and direct his whole life in the light of cold reason.

"The 18th Century was indeed an age that rejected fancy and desired to be guided by reason. It wished to understand, not to imagine. If there was one emotion which seemed to it suspect, out of place, conceptions were Nature and Reason." Whether or not we can attribute this belief to all the thinkers of the period without exception is rather difficult to prove but it certainly seems most evident that a very great number were convinced of this theory.
bordering on madness, it was enthusiasm whether that of faith or that of Metaphysics. The power of reason, then, is supreme in this nature which is pure extension devoid of finality. It makes the individual self-sufficient with no need of either God or His revelation, and the whole of morality is found to consist in conformity to Nature's laws. Faith holds no place since it is considered to be opposed to reason. From this time onwards we find a deadly opposition between science and philosophy.

Mathematical rationalism could find no real beauty in Nature itself but sought all beauty in the rational alone since it held that only rational beauty, created by human reason, could possess the perfection of detail, symmetry and design that should be found in the truly beautiful. The beauty that men usually find in sensible nature was never seen by the pure rationalist.

The aim of this period as expressed by one of its supreme literary representatives was to "bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea

---

tables and in coffee houses." (This attitude was carried to its realization in the works of Marx who insisted upon the necessity of making philosophy absolutely practical so that pure speculative thought would be done away with). A close examination of this philosophy which needs to be given to all the people reveals it to be both Rational and Empirical. Cartesian thought had led men to independence of thought and complete confidence in human reason for the affairs of "l'homme purement homme." It had engendered a lively interest in this world and in all that concerns earthly life and a confidence in private judgment as opposed to reliance on authority; also a belief in the intrinsic orderliness of the processes of Nature without any magical or supernatural interference. Reason's "dictates were certain, infallible and universal and were tacitly identified with the will of God...as a guiding principle it was sufficient unto itself. It illuminated the darkness lurking around the theological doctrine of man's total depravity. Thus universal, thus common to all, reason often became the equivalent of an infallible common sense."

1. Addison, Joseph, Spectator, No. 10, March 12, 1711.
There was a definite spirit of secularism in so far as all interest and effort was concentrated on this world and in the broadening and enlightening of earthly life as distinguished from the Medieval attitude which attempted to see man in the light of a creature destined to life in another world. It was the abstract universal man with a solution to all his problems to be found by human reason that the 18th Century studied.

This complete self-satisfaction which characterized the achievements of this century may be seen in the words of G. B. Buhl in his history of philosophy written in 1797: "We are now approaching the most recent period of the history of philosophy which is the most remarkable and brilliant period of philosophy as well as of the sciences, and of the arts and of the civilization of humanity in general. The seed which had been planted in the immediately preceding centuries began to bloom in the eighteenth. Of no century can it be said with so much truth as of the eighteenth that it utilized the achievements of its predecessors to bring humanity to a greater physical, intellectual and moral perfection. It has reached a height which, considering the limitations of human nature and the course
of our past experiences, we should be surprised to see the genius of future generations maintain."

It was indeed an Age that rejected fancy and all claims of the emotions and desired to be guided by reason alone. As a result of Newton's discovery of a mathematical method that would describe mechanical motion, and his universal application of it, men fell into his position in the midst of this newly ordered world and he and "his institutions were included in the order of nature and the scope of the recognized scientific method, and in all things the newly invented social sciences were assimilated to the physical sciences." Newton was recognized as the greatest mind of all ages and Pope wrote of him:

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night: God said, let Newton be! and all was light."

Since Nature was considered to be thoroughly orderly and humanly rational it followed that whatever was

2. Randall, op. cit., p. 255.
3. Moeen, Ernest C., op. cit., p. XI
natural was rational and Nature and the Natural were interpreted as Reason and the Reasonable and became the ideal of man and of human society.

This rationalistic outlook did not confine itself to any particular sphere of activity but invaded all fields. The opening years of the 18th Century were astir with religious controversies. As reason grew bolder and gained ground it attempted to shed natural light upon the obscure parts of religion. The conflict between revealed dogma and scientific discoveries as well as the rivalries of sects and their mutual persecution, led the people to lose respect for the traditional churches and follow the rationalistic tendency of their age in seeking a belief that would conform to their ideas of Reason and Nature. Therefore we find an attempt to find a natural religion which would admit a God but not a creed, a reasonable religion which would do away with all mysteries and be based upon understanding rather than on revelation. Both morality and religion were examined in the light of reason and made to conform to it. The philosophy of Empiricism as taught by Locke had added its influence to rationalism and severed the connection between
the mind and objects of reality. A subjectivism resulted which made the human mind the measure of reality itself in the fields of practical philosophy such as ethics, politics and economics. Since he is not born with the distinction between good and evil, "men forms by reason out of experience moral values which, at least theoretically, are capable of demonstration as incontestable as mathematics itself. Experience shows that things are good or evil only in reference to pleasure or pain and man's sole guide to choice of action is his reason." Thus the individual was no longer obliged to conform his conduct to any objective principles and became a law unto himself.

Locke's statement that the reason "must be our last judge and guide in everything" was the motto of the Deists. He gave to Deism its philosophical basis by limiting human knowledge to the empirical and thereby denying the possibility of establishing fundamental principles of morality. This religion of reason held firmly to the belief

that Nature contained a law which was to be discovered and followed exactly like all the other laws pointed out by Newton. They were determined to separate the science of ethics from any theological or supernatural implications. It became the vogue to glorify the savages and Indians as the pure types of human nature who were uncorrupted by tradition and following a universal, primitive and socially useful order of morals. The philosophy built around Newtonian science was destroying the Christian concept of God with its richness and depth of feeling and forming a philosophical religion which appealed only to the cool and deliberate reason of the truly rational man. The great Saints and mystics were bitterly criticized for being primarily concerned with mysteries which they could never hope to explain or understand instead of contemplating man who answered to set rules and had a definite standard of life and morals. To a great extent Christianity was looked upon as the enemy of moral virtue because it influenced "the mind by fear of God, not by love of good."  

In Deism God is no longer the first principle of all that is: He is either an extrinsic principle

which accounts for the original impulse that the Universe needs to be set on its course, or He is merely identified with the orderliness and laws of nature. Perhaps the conception of divinity was never lower than Deism.\(^1\) Deism attacked revelation, prophecy and miracles in order to undermine Christianity and dispose of the supernatural once and for all. David Hume in his "Essay on Miracles" in 1748 gave what he considered conclusive proof that it is absolutely impossible to establish a miracle since "for one who accepts Newtonian physics, unless he assumes that he has so complete a knowledge of the workings of nature as to be able to exclude every natural cause—a thing obviously impossible—it is impossible to prove that any given event was supernaturally produced.\(^2\)

The mind of the 18th Century was so attracted by the idea of general laws and universal fixity that it no longer considered it possible to draw a distinction between the spiritual and the natural. "The revolt from theology had blinded men to the

---

deeper meanings veiled in theological teachings and led to a contemptuous estimate of the great moving forces which had uttered themselves in theological language as mere fanaticism, enthusiasm and superstition. Being cut off from the past and judging in the light of an abstract logic, man's thought becomes superficial, lacking in insight and blind to the deeper elements of the human spirit. Its most obvious features are a practical unimaginative character, a hatred of vague enthusiasms, a determination to apply reason to everything and an attempt to exalt the individual into a position of absolute supremacy.

As science ascertained more and more clearly the inadequacy of ancient notions concerning the Universe, and the place of the earth itself and then the position of man in the Universe, men grew ever more doubtful about the religious doctrines that had been handed down to them. "It became daily more difficult to identify the god of philosophy with the God of Christianity. How could the tutelary deity of a petty tribe be the God of the Medieval imagination, the God worshipped by the Christians when Christen-

---

dom was regarded as approximately identical with the Universe be still the ruler of the whole earth, in which Christians formed but a small minority and of the universe in which the earth was but as a grain of sand on the seashore?"¹

After substituting the abstract metaphysical deity identified with Nature, for the personal Ruler and God of the Christians man found himself faced with the problem of explaining any restrictions or evils in nature. If God is Nature, He must sanction all instincts and all forces alike thus opening the way for the banishment of whatever divinity had been left him.

Locke had declared that he could find no "innate practical principles", except "a desire of happiness and an aversion to misery" ² and then later had added that "Good or evil are nothing but pleasure or pain to us".³ Reason can discover for us the foundation of all so-called moral principles in the fact that men having taken up many principles on

---

². Locke, Essay on Human Understanding, Bk. I, ch.III, Sec. 3.
³. Ibid. Bk. II, ch. XXVIII, Sec. 5.
trust and having entirely forgotten whence they came, assume them to be divinely implanted axioms whereas they have actually been "derived from no better original than the superstition of a nurse and the authority of an old woman."

This wave of rationalism was in some measure gradually tempered by a wave of sentimentalism. We recognize traces of a reaction which showed an instinctive and obstinate preference for the rights of morals and sentiment. Lord Shaftesbury was prominent in his support of this active opposition against the rationalistic interpretation of nature which used the mathematically balanced line as its ideal, employed diagrams instead of beautiful pictures and a system of axioms instead of rich mythology. He returned to the ancient classical notions of harmony and aesthetic beauty in the universe as found in the Neo-Platonic schools which stresses the importance of the relation between the beautiful and the good. Rejecting the modern ideas which opposed the state of nature to the social state he insisted upon man's ability to live outside society. For him "le bonheur dépend de l'intérieur, et non de l'extérieur recherchez le

---

beau en tout, même dans les plus petites choses."¹

He continually refers to "a uniform consistent fabric" and to "a universal mind" by which the whole is animated. He invented the term "moral sense" to indicate "that natural tendency to virtue which is implicitly denied in the dogma of human corruption."² Moreover, he attributed to it the power to admire the noble and the good, and to penetrate into the evil and to arrive at a proper harmonious balance in distinguishing the character of an action.

Virtue for Shaftesbury was its own recompense and just as the music lover gets full satisfaction from indulging his taste, so the virtuous man contemplates virtue in all its aesthetic beauty without dreaming of further reward than that deep enjoyment felt by him at the sight of such perfect proportion and harmony. Shaftesbury attributes divinity to human nature itself and thus tries to avoid the difficulty of having his "moral sense" influenced by our selfish instincts.

Those moralists who followed Shaftesbury may be considered as successfully modifying or developing his theory. "There is, it is maintained by them all,

a certain mysterious harmony or order in the Universe which reveals itself to the divine faculty or conscience. With Shaftesbury the faculty is almost identified with the aesthetic perceptions and is rather a sentiment than a power of intellectual intuition. By his followers the doctrine takes a moral formal shape. The sense of harmony is made more definite as a perception of final causes."

This change of attitude was further developed by Francis Hutcheson who was the immediate predecessor of Adam Smith and to whom the latter was deeply indebted. "In the scope of his philosophy, in temper and practical aim, Smith may be called the spiritual descendent of Hutcheson." Francis Hutcheson in turn likens the moral sense to an internal sense that perceives moral excellence or turpitude as external causes perceive sound, etc. In him we find strongly marked the Newtonian concept of God as a skillful contriver of an harmonious system which works with machine-like precision. The moral sense, in concord with this, points by a pre-

---

arranged harmony to the course productive of the greatest happiness; actually it is "nothing but the approval of such affections and consequently of such courses of action, as are most conducive to the public welfare."\(^1\) In a final analysis it appears that utility is for him the sole and sufficient guide to and measure of virtue. It seems too "that the standard of moral goodness was the promotion of the happiness of others;" and that "we could have a knowledge of good and evil without and prior to a knowledge of God."\(^2\) Hutcheson belonged to an era which had turned to the light of nature for guidance and had discovered by it the good and benevolent deity of the eighteenth century, who lived only for human welfare and whose will was not to be known from mysterious signs and providence, but from a broad consideration of the greater good of mankind—the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Adam Smith who was born in Kirkcaldy in 1723 during this age of religious doubts and philosophic curiosity, reacted to this environment by formulating an ethical system of his own. He shared

---

3. Ibid., p. 12.
the general enthusiasm in regard to Newton and held his discovery to be the greatest ever made by man. He looked upon him as the only natural philosopher whose system, instead of being a mere invention of the imagination to connect otherwise discordant phenomena, appeared to contain in itself "the real chains which Nature makes use of to bind together her several operations."\footnote{Hirst, \textit{Adam Smith}, p. 17.}

Although he was deeply imbued with the rationalistic tendencies of his age, nevertheless, he yielded to the influences of the sentimental school, and endeavored to work out a system which would explain man and society in terms of both reason and instinct. He did not concede to the rationalists in their teaching that man's reason alone is sufficient to guide and control his destiny but insists upon certain impulses implanted in every man by Nature which are wiser than human reason and which cooperate with nature's designs for man and society. The individual becomes the product of his environment in Smith's theory.

The two great works in which Adam Smith has explained his philosophical theories are "The
Theory of Moral Sentiments" and "The Wealth of Nations". The first was written during his early years while he was professor of moral theology at the University of Glasgow; and deals with the development of the psychological theory of the origin of the moral judgment. In discussing the moral faculty by which we distinguish between right and wrong he also reveals his theological convictions. He seems to be a thorough representative of an optimistic Deism and despises anything that savours of religious zeal or enthusiasm.

His second book was written many years later. During the interval he had travelled extensively and spent much of his time in France where he became acquainted with the teachings of the French Physiocrats. It is evident from his work that he shared their faith in a rational order in society which would provide for the ultimate perfection of the Universe even while allowing all men to follow their natural instincts and to work for their own selfish interests.

"It is a fundamental proposition of the 'Moral Sentiments' that our natural sympathies impose upon us certain restraints. It is the fundamental proposition of the 'Wealth of Nations' that so long as those restraints are obeyed the happiness of mankind will be
promoted by allowing each man to obey his own instincts without authoritative interference. ¹

CHAPTER II

In his critical review of the older systems Smith says there are two questions to be considered:
"First, wherein does virtue consist? Or what is the tone of temper, and tenor of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praiseworthy character, the character which is the natural object of esteem, honour, and approbation? And secondly, by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us? Or, in other words, how and by what means does it come to pass, that the mind prefers one tenor of conduct to another, denominates the one right and the other wrong; considers the one as the object of approbation, honor, and reward, and the other of blame, censure, and punishment?" ¹

In answer to the first question he says that the character of virtue must be ascribed indifferently to all our affections when under proper government and direction, or to some one class or division of our affections. Here there are two general classes of affections; the selfish whose regulation is by what Smith calls "prudence", and the altruistic whose

regulation is by benevolence.

According to Smith, the system of Plato, Aristotle and Zeno, in different ways, found the character of virtue in propriety. Propriety is said of all our affections when they are under proper government and direction. After an extremely sketchy and distorted account of these systems, he gives his evaluation in very significant terms. The ancient Greeks, he claims, tried to show that happiness was either entirely (Stoics) or to a great extent (Platonists and Peripatetics) independent of fortune and based more on the enjoyment of "the complete approbation of (the virtuous man's) own breast." He commends their "spirit and manhood" and contrasts it to "the desponding, plaintive and whining tone of some modern systems". But this propriety, Smith holds, is but one part of virtue.

He then goes on with a criticism of certain contemporary systems which also confine the character of virtue to propriety. However, he says, "None of those systems either give, or even pretend to give, any precise or distinct measure by which this fitness or propriety can be ascertained or judged of. That precise and distinct measure can be found nowhere but in the sympathetic feelings of the impartial
and well-informed spectator. Smith's reactions to these systems is well expressed in his own words: "The description of virtue, besides, which is either given or at least meant and intended to be given in each of those systems, for some of the modern authors are not very fortunate in their manner of expressing themselves, is no doubt quite just, so far as it goes. There is no virtue without propriety, and wherever there is propriety some degree of approbation is due. But still this description is imperfect. For though propriety is an essential ingredient in every virtuous action, it is not always the sole ingredient. Beneficent actions have in them another quality by which they appear not only to deserve approbation but recompense. None of those systems account either easily or sufficiently for that superior degree of esteem which seems due to such actions, or for that diversity of sentiment which they naturally excite. Neither is the description of vice more complete. For, in the same manner, though impropriety is a necessary ingredient in every vicious action, it is not always the sole ingredient; and there is often the highest degree of absurdity and impropriety in

1. Ibid., p. 239. Underlined ours.
very harmless and insignificant actions. Deliberate actions, of a pernicious tendency to those we live with, have, besides their impropriety, a peculiar quality of their own by which they appear to deserve, not only disapprobation, but punishment; and to be the objects, not of dislike merely, but of resentment and revenge; and none of those systems easily and sufficiently account for that superior degree of detestation which we feel for such actions.¹

Then he begins to take up those systems which make virtue consist in what Smith calls "prudence". The first of these is Epicureanism, which made bodily pain and pleasure the criteria of virtue. Smith rejects the materialism of Epicurus and insists that there are spiritual values which are overlooked in this system. However, careful examination of Smith's own theory and his criticism of Epicurus and others might make us wonder if Smith's notion of the spiritual does not require the same careful examination as his notion of "prudence".

He then concerns himself with a system which he claims was espoused by the Eclectics and later Platonists, whereby virtue consists in imitating the benevolence and love which influenced all the actions

¹. Ibid., p. 260. Underlined are ours.
of the deity. Smith says that according to Dr. Hutcheson virtue consists in pure and disinterested altruism. Hutcheson himself uses such expressions as "the greatest possible good", "the general happiness of mankind". Also Hutcheson said "self-love was a principle that could never be virtuous in any degree or in any direction." 1 In this respect Smith says "in the common judgments of mankind, however, this regard of the approbation of our own minds (which Hutcheson rejects) is so far from being considered as what can in any respect diminish the virtue of any action, that it is often rather looked upon as the sole motive which deserves the appellation of virtuous." 2 Also Smith adds that this system does not seem to explain the "approbation of the inferior virtues of prudence, vigilance, circumspection, temperance, constancy and firmness." 3

For Smith these three systems which place virtue in propriety, prudence and benevolence respectively are fundamental positions on this question and all other systems are reducible to these. We might add that it is very difficult to see to which

1. Ibid., p. 265.
2. Ibid., pp. 268-269
3. Ibid., p. 269
of these three systems Smith's moral sentiments may be reduced. He himself does not tell us. We shall attempt to show later that his system is not a system of virtue.

After a discussion of what he terms "licentious systems", where he criticizes Dr. Mandeville for attempting to "impose on our credulity" with a system that is so preposterous that no man in his right mind could accept it, Smith begins to determine the position of the other moralists as regards the second question, namely, by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us. Here again we have three opinions: [1] We approve or disapprove of our own actions and those of others from self-love only, from some view of their tendency to our own happiness or disadvantage. [2] Reason enables us to distinguish between the fitting and unfitting in both actions and affections. [3] The distinction between fitting and unfitting is the effect of immediate sentiment and feeling and arises from the satisfaction or disgust with which the view of certain actions or affections inspires us.

In regard to the first, he says that some,
like Hobbes, hold that society is necessary and that virtue is necessary to maintain society. While agreeing in part with the position, he says, "This account of the origin of approbation and disapprobation, runs into that principle which gives beauty to utility..."¹ In this same passage he refers to human society as a "beautiful and noble machine" which is "the production of human art."¹ His disagreement with Hobbes arises from the fact that such an explanation of virtue fails to show how we approve of the actions of the ancients whose society was not ours. He insists that "when these authors deduce from self-love the interest which we take in the welfare of society, and the esteem which upon that account we bestow upon virtue, they do not mean, that when we in this age applaud the virtue of Cato, and detest the villainy of Cataline, our sentiments are influenced by the notion of any benefit we receive from the one, or of any detriment we suffer from the other."² For him it was not self-love but rather its opposite, benevolence which was responsible for our interest. He says, "The idea, in short,

¹. Ibid., p. 280. See also footnote 3, p.
². Ibid., p. 280.
which those authors were groping about, but which they were never able to unfold distinctly, was that indirect sympathy which we feel with the gratitude or resentment of those who received the benefit or suffered the damage resulting from such opposite characters: and it was this which they were indistinctly pointing at, when they said, that it was not the thought of what we gained or suffered which prompted our applause or indignation, but the conception or imagination of what we might gain or suffer if we were to act in society with such associates. ¹ He says further that this whole notion of self-love arises from "some confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy." Sympathy for Smith is not selfish. ¹

In regard to the second system, namely, that the principle of approbation is reason, he says that in opposition to Hobbes, whose doctrine made right and wrong depend on the arbitrary will of the ruler, some thought to place the foundation of all law in the mind. These writers, he says, felt it necessary to prove "that antecedent to all law or positive institution, the mind was naturally

¹. Ibid., p. 281.
endowed with a faculty, by which it distinguished in certain actions and affections, the qualities of right, laudable, and virtuous, and in others those of wrong, blamable, and vicious." He refers to a Dr. Cudworth as proving that law could not be the original source of these distinctions "since upon the supposition of such a law, it must either be right to obey it, and wrong to disobey it, or indifferent whether we obeyed or disobeyed it. That law which it was indifferent whether we obeyed or disobeyed, could not, it was evident, be the source of those distinctions; neither could that which it was right to obey and wrong to disobey, since even this still supposed the antecedent notions or ideas of right and wrong, and that obedience to the law was conformable to the idea of right and disobedience to that of wrong."¹ He admits that the fact "that virtue consists in conformity to reason, is true in some respect,...by reason we discover those general rules of justice...we form those more vague and indeterminate ideas of what is prudent, of which is decent,...The general maxims of morality are formed like all other general maxims, from experience and

¹. Ibid., p. 282.
induction. From reason, therefore, we are properly said to derive all those general maxims and ideas."¹

For him, while reason is the source of general rules, the particular cases from which these general rules are formed are the objects, not of reason, but of sense and feeling. He says "pleasure and pain are the great objects of desire and aversion: but these are distinguished, not by reason, but by immediate sense and feeling. If virtue, therefore, be desirable for its own sake, and if vice be, in the same manner, the object of aversion, it cannot be reason which originally distinguishes these different qualities, but immediate sense and feeling."²

Then he goes on to the position that the principle of approbation is found in sentiment. Here we have two opinions: (1) Sentiment is of a peculiar nature, distinct from any other, called a "moral sense"; (2) Sympathy is sufficient to account for all the effects ascribed to the above faculty. He says that among those who attribute the principle of approbation to a moral sense there is Dr. Hutcheson who called this new power of perception a moral sense. He objects to this by saying that the qualities that belong to

¹. Ibid., p. 204 (only selected significant passages).
². Ibid., p. 284
the object of the sense cannot be ascribed to the sense. But a man can be constituted so as to approve of vice, thus he would have a morally bad moral sense.

Others said that this moral sense was a peculiar sentiment which answers this purpose and no other. He has several objections to this. In the first place just as there is a common perception of anger in all its varieties, so there should be a common perception of approbation, but this is not so since we have entirely different feelings for instance, of a "tender, delicate and humane sentiment" and one "that appears great, daring and magnanimous." We are softened by the one and elevated by the other. And again he asks: how is it "that, according to this system, we approve or disapprove of proper or improper approbation."

Smith says that "when the approbation with which our neighbour regards the conduct of a third person coincides with our own, we approve of his approbation, and consider it as, in some measure, morally good."

After this he offers an objection which is for him very important. He asks why has this moral

1. Ibid., p. 288.
2. Ibid., p. 289.
sense never been given a name? The term, he says, is relatively recent. Even "approbation" was too young to be entitled to much consideration. He considers the term "conscience" but decides that it does not immediately denote a moral faculty but rather "supposes, indeed, the existence of some such faculty, and properly signifies our consciousness of having acted agreeably or contrary to its directions."  

Finally he considers the attempts of some "to account for the origins of moral sentiments from sympathy, distinct from that which I have been endeavouring to establish. It is that which places virtue in utility, and accounts for the pleasure with which the spectator surveys the utility of any quality from sympathy with the happiness of those who are affected by it. This sympathy is different both from that by which we enter into the motives of the agent, and from that by which we go along with the gratitude of the persons who are benefited by his actions. It is the same principle with that by which we approve of a well contrived machine. But no machine can be the object of either of those two last mentioned sympathies."  

1. Ibid., p. 289.  
2. Ibid., p. 290.
book he had made this distinction when he spoke of beauty and utility. He says that when we consider virtue and vice in an abstract and general manner they present an appearance of utility which in turn gives rise to the perception of a "species of beauty". Still he is not prepared to agree with those who would identify this perception of beauty, which admittedly is pleasant, with our sentiment of the approbation of virtue. To do this would make the approbation of virtue a sentiment of the same kind with that by which we approve of a convenient and well-contrived building. Another consideration is that the sentiment of approbation of virtue always involves in it a sense of propriety which is quite distinct from the perception of utility.

1. Ibid., p. 185ff.
2. Ibid., pp. 167-168. "The qualities most useful to ourselves are, first of all, superior reason and understanding, by which we are capable of discerning the remote consequences of all our actions and of fore-seeing the advantage or detriment which is likely to result from them: and secondly, self-command, by which we are enabled to abstain from present pleasure or to endure present pain, in order to obtain a greater pleasure, or to avoid a greater pain in some future time. In the union of those two qualities consists the virtue of prudence, of all the virtues that which is the most useful to the individual.

With regard to the first of those qualities, it has been observed on a former occasion, that superior reason and understanding are originally approved of as just and right and accurate,
and not merely useful or advantageous. It is in abstruser sciences, particularly in the higher parts of mathematics, that the greatest and most admired exertions of human reason have been displayed. But the utility of those sciences, either to the individual or to the public, is not very obvious, and to prove it, requires a discussion which is not always very easily comprehended. It was not, therefore, their utility which first recommended them to the public admiration. This quality was but little insisted upon, till it became necessary to make some reply to the reproaches of those, who, having themselves no taste for such sublime discoveries, endeavored to depreciate them as useless.

That self-command, in the same manner, by which we restrain our present appetites, in order to gratify them more fully upon another occasion, is approved of, as much under the aspect of propriety, as under that of utility. When we act in this manner the sentiments which influence our conduct seem exactly to coincide with those of the spectator. The spectator, however, does not feel the solicitations of our present appetites.

To him the pleasure which we are to enjoy a week hence, or a year hence is just as interesting as that which we are to enjoy this moment. When for the sake of the present, therefore, we sacrifice the future, our conduct appears to him absurd and extravagant in the highest degree, and he cannot enter into the principles which influence it. On the contrary, when we abstain from present pleasure, in order to secure greater pleasure to come, when we act as if the remote object interested us as much as that which immediately presses upon the senses, as our affections exactly correspond with his own, he cannot fail to approve of our behaviour: and as he knows from experience, how few are capable of this self-command, he looks upon our conduct with a considerable degree of wonder and admiration. Hence arises that eminent esteem with which all men naturally regard a steady perseverance in the practice of frugality, industry, and application, though directed to no other purpose than the acquisition of fortune. The resolute firmness of the person who acts in this manner, and in order to obtain a great though remote advantage, not only gives us all present pleasures, but endures
far above what is vulgar and ordinary." He refuses
to allow anything below excellence to be termed virtue
and says: "As in the common degree of the intellectual
qualities there is no ability, so in the common degree
of the moral, there is no virtue."

For him the virtues are divided into two
types, the first of which he refers to as the soft,

the greatest labour both of mind and body, necessarily
commands our approbation. That view of his interest
and happiness which appears to regulate his conduct
exactly tallies with the idea which we naturally
form of it. There is the most perfect correspondence
between his sentiments and our own and at the same
time, from our experience of the common weakness
of human nature, it is a correspondence which we
could not reasonably have expected. We not only
approve, therefore, but in some measure admire his
conduct and think it worthy of a considerable de-
gree of applause. It is the consciousness of this
merited approbation and esteem which is alone
capable of supporting the agent in this tenor of
conduct. The pleasure which we are to enjoy ten
years hence interests us so little in comparison
with that which we may enjoy today, the passion
which the first excites is naturally so weak in
comparison with that violent emotion which the
second is apt to give occasion to, that the one
could never be any balance to the other, unless it
was supported by the sense of propriety, by the
consciousness that we merited the esteem and
approbation of everybody, by acting in the one
way, and that we became the proper objects of
their contempt and derision by behaving in the
other."

1. Ibid., p. 24.
2. Ibid., p. 24.
gentle and amiable virtues, and the second as
great, awful and respectable. The first set is
founded upon the spectator's efforts to enter into
the feelings of another person, while the second
arises from the person's efforts to restrict his
emotions to the level of the spectator.

All virtue for Smith must have its roots in
sympathy. He establishes this sympathy or partici-
pation in the feelings of others as the basis of
morality. However, he qualifies sympathy by saying
that in order to have ethical values it must be the
sympathy experienced by an impartial and well-informed
 spectator.

He seems to base these theories upon observa-
tion and practical experience and tries to establish
his contentions by having recourse to many vivid
examples taken from everyday life and from history.
As a result the reader receives a realistic, concrete
and particular impression rather than a theoretical
or universal solution.

The only faculty that can be used to awaken
and sustain these sympathetic sentiments is the
imagination, since it alone enables us to go out
of ourselves and for the time being, at least, to
place ourselves in another's predicament so as to
experience his joys and sorrows. Experience proves that this and this alone is "the source of our fellow feelings for the misery of others." This sympathy must pass beyond the limits of individuality and we must by exercising our imagination attempt to place ourselves in the exact position of the person to be judged, and feel as much as we possibly can the same sentiments and emotions that he is experiencing. This is looked upon by Smith as a very natural process and he gives examples of the way in which we instinctively shrink when we witness a scene in which someone is receiving an injury of some description, and adds that we seem to actually feel the pain of the victim in our own bodies. He also mentions the common experience of having one's eyes water in a sympathetic reaction to seeing another person's eyes water.

It is only after imaginatively placing ourselves in this situation that we are able to express our approval or disapproval of another man's judgment or action. If we feel that we can enter into his feeling with sympathy and not find it revolting in any way, we are then moved to give our approval, but if we are not in agreement with his

1. Ibid., p. 10.
emotions but feel that he is allowing himself to be too much influenced by some situation, then we disapprove. "Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another."

In trying to discover what approval or disapproval we can give to our own actions, we must have recourse once again to the idea of the impartial spectator. It becomes necessary to divide oneself into two persons, as it were; one representing the judge and the other the one to be examined. In this way we can, in a certain sense, place ourselves at a distance from ourselves to allow a more unprejudiced review of our deeds or misdeeds and see if we can feel justified in sympathizing with them when we look at them from the viewpoint of an outsider.

Since his moral system demands a constant changing of places and balancing of judgments in so far as we must continually place ourselves in other people's situations to judge their conduct as well as our own, Smith is quite emphatic about the necessity of man living in society if his actions are to be provided with a norm or standard by which they can be classified as proper or improper.

1. Ibid., p. 18.
Society is the mirror in which we see ourselves as other human beings see us and therefore it enables us to regulate our conduct in conformity with the general judgment. If a man could grow up to maturity in complete isolation in some solitary place, with no means of communication whatsoever with the members of his own species, he would be absolutely incapable of thinking of merit or demerit in reference to his own character; he could no more think of the beauty or deformity of his mind or conduct than he could judge of the beauty or deformity of his own face. Man needs his fellow creatures as reflectors and models by which he can measure his own perfection or imperfection. In this way we can always have a means of testing to see if our actions are such that other people can sympathize with them and use them as a standard for themselves. Our interest in beauty and morals consists wholly and solely in the effect that will be produced upon those around us: "Virtue is not said to be amiable, or to be meritorious, because it is the object of its own love or of its own gratitude, but because it
As well as the propriety or impropriety of actions, we must also consider the qualities of merit and demerit which make us deserving of either reward or punishment. The sentiment which seems to prompt us most immediately to do good to another is gratitude, and the one which leads us to punish is resentment. The impartial spectator can enter with sympathy into either situation. "As our sense, therefore, of the propriety of conduct arises from what I shall call a direct sympathy with the affections and motives of the person who acts, so our sense of its merit arises from what I shall call an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of the person who is, if I may say so, acted upon." In the case of resentment, nature itself has endowed men with "an immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation"; thereby not leaving it to man's reason to determine the proper means of revenging great crimes.

To be the complete and proper object of either the sentiment of gratitude or of that of resentment, three different qualifications

1. Ibid., p. 102 (underscored ours)
2. Ibid., p. 68
3. Ibid., p. 65
are needed in a person: (1) he must be the cause of pleasure or pain; (2) he must be capable of feeling those sensations himself; and (3) he must not only have produced these sensations but must have done so from design. Regardless, however, of the intention of the agent a certain amount of approval or of disapproval falls on his actions themselves. "That the world judges by the event, and not by the design, has been in all ages the complaint, and is the great discouragement of virtue." ¹ If the consequences of an action are favorable, whether due to fortune or to the actual intention or plan of the agent, praise is given which is often far beyond what the person really deserves; whereas if the action fails to produce the proposed and successful effect and appears bad and a failure in the eyes and judgment of the onlookers, regardless of the loftiness or of the praiseworthiness of the agent's interior purpose, he becomes the object of blame and demerit.

Even this seemingly unjust arrangement,

¹. Ibid., p. 96.
however, seems to have been planned by Nature, for the happiness and perfection of the human species. If it were otherwise, we would be continually attributing blamable and even evil intentions to many persons regardless of the outcome of their actions. Our resentment would be easily aroused and "we should feel all the furies of that passion against any person in whose breast we suspected or believed such designs or affections were harboured, though they had never broke out into any actions." For this reason Adam Smith teaches that only actions which produce actual evil or attempt to produce it are the proper objects of punishment. Sentiments and intentions are only known to the "great Judge of hearts" and are reserved for the "cognizance of his own unerring tribunal." We can only base our approval or disapproval on what is evident to our senses and it then happens that "To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them."

According to Smith, it is perfectly

1. Ibid., p. 96.
2. Ibid., p. 96
3. Ibid., p. 17
natural for men to desire to be approved of and to wish to make himself worthy of this approval; therefore a real love of virtue and a hatred of vice is natural. We do not act in an honourable fashion because of our great love of our neighbour or of mankind in general, but rather because of a stronger love which is that of the grandeur and dignity and superiority of our own characters. However, we must cover up this self-love since it would make us the object of the scorn and indignation of society and this is a catastrophe that we must avoid at all costs. "As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the greatest 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 found capable of loving us." Since we are inclined to be prejudiced in our own behalf, our judgments concerning our own actions are likely to be out of focus and therefore when it is a question relating to personal interest that has to be answered we must step outside of

1. Ibid., p. 24
ourselves and adopt a purely neutral and impartial position. Small affairs of great personal interest mean much more to us than the most important affairs of great nations. A disaster which would cost the lives of thousands of the inhabitants of a faraway country would cause less real disturbance to an ordinary man than the loss of his little finger or an unfortunate business deal. The only thing capable of overcoming this inordinate self-love is a respect and reverence for "reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct." Upon all occasions when there is a conflict between the judgment given by the spectator within and those without it is necessary to have recourse to a higher tribunal, "to that of the all-seeing Judge of the world." If we act otherwise we are eventually overcome by qualms of conscience and are victims to remorse from which frightful condition society is powerless to save us.

Since there are times when the violence

1. Ibid., p. 120
2. Ibid., p. 116
and injustices of our selfish passions throw off the true report of the impartial spectator, there are certain precautions to be observed. It is always necessary to observe ourselves under two different aspects or at two different times: first, when we are about to act; and second, when we have completed the action. The first often proves extremely difficult because of the overwhelming strength of our passions, and even in the second case we are inclined to be prejudiced in our own favor and to try to throw a protecting cover over our misdeeds. No one enjoys thinking ill of himself and therefore pride prompts us to turn away from any unfavorable circumstances and to be most lenient in our judgment of our own conduct. It is far from hard to find plausible excuses for our deeds.

To help to correct these misrepresentations of self-love, general rules have been formulated. "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."¹

¹. Ibid., p. 139
careful observation of the conduct of others teaches man what it is fitting for him to do and what he should avoid doing in order to be a suitable member of the society in which he lives. Man-kind experiences an awesome respect and reverence for these rules that serve to check passions that are too violent and to temper unbridled impetuosity. This regard for the general rules is known as a sense of duty, "a principle of the greatest consequence in human life, and the only principle by which the bulk of mankind are capable of directing their actions." The very existence itself of human society depends upon the faithful observance of these rules, and the deep reverence for them is "further enhanced by an opinion which is first impressed by nature and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy, that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will finally reward the obedient and punish the transgressors of their duty." He reinforces this argument with the observation that in addition to these reasons it is really for the personal good and happiness of the individual to follow the designs and commands of Duty since virtue is rewarded in this world as

1. Ibid., p. 142
2. Ibid., p. 144
well as in the next. A strict observance and faithful carrying out of the injunctions of duty will in the majority of instances result in the attainment of wealth, confidence, esteem and love; in his way of looking at things there is little more to be expected in this life since he feels that there is little to be added to the happiness of a man who is "out of debt and has a clear conscience." 1 Nature is continually working through her own rules and laws for the perfection and happiness of mankind and it only remains for man to cooperate with her by following her inspirations and commands. Even in those cases or circumstances in which man is overcome by misfortunes, he is still able to maintain a free conscience in this life and he is rewarded with the hope of happiness and security in a future life. Although his attitude towards religion often leaves us in a puzzled frame of mind as to exactly what he does believe in personally, at least in this part of his work it seems fairly evident that he did believe that "religion enforces 2 the natural sense of duty", and is therefore an aid to man and society.

1. Ibid., p. 43.
2. Ibid., p. 150.
This does not mean, however, that the sense of duty is the sole principle by which we guide our conduct but "it should be the ruling and the governing one, as philosophy, and as indeed, common sense directs." We must allow for the great influence which sentiment or affection has on our own conduct and on our relations with others. The general rules are in themselves too broad or loose to be the only criteria and for this reason they must be made more exact and precise by taking into consideration the various circumstances which affect an action. "No action can properly be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation", but common experience shows that man often acts from a false sense of duty and when we are condemning such a one we cannot keep ourselves from sympathizing with him since we know that he has acted according to his principles and therefore in his own mind he can give himself his unstinted approval and even praise. We are inclined to admire a man who is faithful to his principles even though we cannot find it in our hearts to approve of those principles. Therefore, as well as regarding the dictates of the general rules of morality, we must

1. Ibid., p. 151.
2. Ibid., p. 158.
also take into account the "natural agreeableness or deformity of the sentiment or affection which would prompt us to any action independent of all regard to general rules." The only general rule which allows no looseness or free interpretation in its application to particular cases is that of justice, which is rigorous in its determinations.

By what faculty then are we to give the final judgment concerning right and wrong? Adam Smith says that in some sense we may if we wish consider reason as "the source and principle of approbation and disapprobation and of all solid judgments concerning right and wrong," since it is reason that discovers the general rules of justice and regulates the greater part of our moral judgments to the extent that "the general maxims of morality are formed like all other general maxims, from experience and induction...and induction is always regarded as one of the operations of reason." Moreover, it gives a much more stable foundation for our moral judgments since such insignificant factors as different states of health and humour do not

---

1. Ibid., p. 151.
2. Ibid., p. 282.
3. Ibid., p. 282.
directly affect reason whereas they are capable of completely altering sentiment and feeling. However, though in some sense or in some respects reason may be given the credit for being the source of our moral judgments, Adam Smith will concede no more to it and refuses to allow that the first perceptions of right and wrong can be derived from it. "These first perceptions as well as all other experiments upon which any general rules are founded, cannot be the object of reason, but of the immediate sense and feeling. It is by finding in a vast variety of instances that one tenor of conduct constantly pleases in a certain manner, and that another as constantly displeases the mind, that we form the general rules of morality. But reason cannot render any particular object either agreeable or disagreeable to the mind for its own sake." All vice and virtue, pleasure and pain are, therefore, not distinguished by reason but by immediate sense and feeling. Smith is convinced that Dr. Hutcheson had made this distinction sufficiently clear for any earnest reader to grasp, however he is not himself in complete agreement with this famous teacher for whom he feels the deepest

1. Ibid., p. 233
respect.

Instead of the "moral sense" advocated by Dr. Hutcheson or the "conscience" as taught by Bishop Butler, Adam Smith substitutes the "man within the breast" or the "great judge and arbiter of conduct". Therefore, for him the "moral judgment is based, not upon inner intuition of rational truth nor upon a divine revelation, but upon the reflected sentiments of other individuals; and the moral sentiments of himself and of those of his fellowmen, mutually supporting and influencing one another, produce the objective order of moral standards. At the same time this objective moral order is not a transcendent rational order, like the order of immutable truth to which the intellectualist moralist appealed, but an order immanent in human experience, and varying with the conditions of experience."

---

If Adam Smith had restricted himself to giving only a description of the general sentiments or feelings which lead men to praise or blame other individuals, he would perhaps have written a good work. However, he is always striving for more than that. In spite of his protestation that he is concerned with "fact" and not "right", in spite of his statement that "We are not at present examining upon what principles a perfect being would approve of the punishment of bad actions; but upon what principles so weak and imperfect a creature as man actually and in fact approves of it.", and in spite of his many references to the vulgar applause of the mob, we must insist that he is speaking of human actions and their principles. It seems that the subject matter of the treatise was not too clearly seen by the author. He seems aware that there is a difference between the actual state of a man's character and the judgment of society about the man. This leads him to the notion that he must find some

1. Ibid.; p. 71, footnote
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 57-59.
common denominator which will unite these two. Briefly, it can be said, he does this by his theory of moral sentiments. Moral sentiments, for him, are founded upon instincts implanted in man by an all-wise Nature. While these may be corrupted, and frequently are, still if we know the causes of corruption and have recourse to the judgment of society we shall be able to determine virtue for man in his present weak and imperfect state.

Contrary to many modern writers on moral philosophy, even many among the so-called followers of St. Thomas and Aristotle, Smith does not attempt to exhaust the subject in a purely speculative manner but actually proceeds in the practical mode. Thus we find many passages which, if taken out of the book and viewed by themselves, we should be forced to agree with. However, when we examine these ideas in the light of the principles which he uses, the only conclusion that we can arrive at is that they are gratuitous assumptions. He extols friendship, he admires the common good, he stresses the necessity of virtue; but in all this, while he always remains in the practical order, he has failed to see the proper role of prudence in human actions.

1. Ibid., p. 200.
2. Ibid., p. 209
For this reason whenever he attempts to investigate these ideas he is led to conclusions which are quite unacceptable. In a discussion of the common good, for example, with respect to the reason for the punishment of crime he makes the following statement: "That it is not a regard to the preservation of society, which originally interests us in the punishment of crimes committed against individuals, may be demonstrated by many obvious considerations. The concern which we take in the fortune and happiness of individuals does not, in common cases, arise from that which we take in the fortune and happiness of society. We are no more concerned for the destruction or loss of a single man, because this man is a member or part of society, and because we should be concerned for the destruction of society, than we are concerned for the loss of a single guinea, because this guinea is a part of a thousand guineas, and because we should be concerned for the loss of the whole sum. In neither case does our regard for the individual arise from our regard for the multitude: but in both cases our regard for the multitude is compounded and made up of the particular

1. Ibid., p. 82
regards which we feel for the different individuals of which it is composed."

By this confusion of the rule of practical action with judgments based upon the cause and effect of the action he apparently gives moral action a firm foundation in the individual. Actually, however, his ignorance of the proximate rule of action leads to the alienation of the individual. He begins with a discussion of sympathy and says that I judge that the passion expressed by another is good or bad in so far as it agrees with that which I would imagine myself to feel under the same circumstances. Thus the goodness of the other's actions depends upon my judgment. However, my judgment will, in turn, be validated by society. If I find that my judgment in this case is the same as that of the greater part of the community I can be certain that it is good. The implicit alienation of the self in this judgment of others is made explicit when he begins to describe how it is that I judge my own actions. Here he says that in order to know whether an action of mine is good or bad "we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them

1. Ibid., p. 82.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
as at a certain distance from us." As he says further in the same passage "Whatever judgment we can form concerning (our own sentiments and motives), accordingly, must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others." He follows this with a very remarkable metaphor to show man's dependence on society for his judgments of moral actions. Thus we have the other judged by the self, the self judged by becoming other, and both judgments validated by the community. Here, it must be noted, that Smith

1. Ibid., p. 99.
2. Ibid., p. 100. "Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects which he cannot easily see, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind."
attempts to base this validation by the community on something more than mere numerical superiority. Still, he feels forced to admit that there are no perfect men and that we must rely on the fact that a wise nature would not allow the corruption of these sentiments in the totality of mankind. In practice this means that the common sentiments of the community must be considered good.

Again we see the paradoxical non-humanism of humanism. The "impartial spectator" is not human. He is always "other". The norm of human action is non-human action, i.e., action considered in the abstract. This confusion makes him fail to see the distinction of prudence from the moral virtues and also causes him to identify art with prudence.

Smith has utterly failed to see that it belongs to prudence to determine the mean in all the moral virtues; that, in this respect, it is the principle of all virtue which is strictly so-called. In one of his first references to it he speaks of prudence as modifying our show of emotion in victory lest we cause envy—in others! It is a virtue which properly looks to the well-being of the individual.

1. Ibid., p. 229.
2. Ibid., p. 45
3. Ibid., p. 188
Thus we do not take too great a pleasure in seeing a prudent man, but view him with a certain "cold esteem". In the latter place he speaks of a "superior prudence" when we combine it "with many greater and more splendid virtues, with valour, with extensive and strong benevolence, with a sacred regard for the rules of justice, and all these supported by a proper degree of self-command." Here and in other places he seems to give to "self-command" the directive power of prudence properly so-called. In various references to what are, for him, the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice and benevolence he always gives the lowest place to prudence. In other words, he uses the term prudence in a very narrow and improper sense. Actually, prudence is universally directive of the whole of human life. A man who is prudent only with respect to some particular end such as making money, is prudent only "secundum quid". The best that could be said of Smith's conception of prudence is that he restricts it to the level of the purely personal virtue, that is the virtue of temperance. Again when he speaks

1. Ibid., p. 191.
2. Ibid., pp. 214, 215, 234, 235.
3. Ibid., pp. 210, 222, 234 and esp. 269.
of that superior prudence, we could understand him to mean that perfect prudence which is acquired by the possession of prudence with all the moral virtues. He seems to mean this when he describes the virtuous man. However, Smith, himself, in his criticism of Epicurus rejects the notion that prudence is the source of virtue. Also he always shows a disinclination to give any kind of normative office to the reason in practical affairs. The reason of man is too weak to comprehend the ends which Providence has set for him.

In spite of the fact that Smith seems to say many of the things about the practical order that St. Thomas and Aristotle could agree with, it must be said that his ideas of the nature of virtue, prudence, justice, etc., are false. He failed on the speculative side to see the nature of human acts, and consequently his moral philosophy was radically vitiated.

As a result of his confusion in the idea of prudence, he failed to distinguish the intellectual

1. Ibid., pp. 219-220.
2. Ibid., p. 280ff.
3. Ibid., p. 71, footnote.
virtues of art and prudence. He failed to see that man is the principle of a twofold activity; one which remains within the agent and is called immanent action; another which passes into external matter and is called transient action. The first of these embraces that activity by which man operates to attain his final end and is ruled by the intellectual virtue of prudence. The second is concerned with those operations of man whereby he makes or perfects something outside himself and is ruled by the intellectual virtue of art. The distinction between these two is very important. The end of prudence is the perfection of the man, while the end of art is the perfection of the external object. To apply the rule of art to moral actions is to set up an end for man which is not his own end but the end of something external to him, of a purely external self for whose actions we are nevertheless held responsible. Hence, to reach objective truth in action (as distinct from practical truth defined by right appetite), Smith disintegrates the moral self. In so doing, he is apparently emancipating the moral agent from the condition of the appetite, but actually he subjects the true moral and inalienable self to a morally unjust and tyrannical objective truth. The
important consequences of this will be brought out later; for the present we must show that Smith was led to this confusion.

One of the most significant facts about the "Theory of Moral Sentiments" is the lavish use of examples from art and more particularly from drama. At every turn he exemplifies the notions of sympathy, propriety, approbation, etc., by reference to characters in dramas. The reason for this is discovered in his basis for moral sentiment—the impartial spectator. Man must submit himself to the action and judge it according to its own nature. Smith says, in this respect, that there are two things in the action; its cause and its effect on others. Also we see that for him fortune plays a necessary part in morals because it has an effect on the very quality of the action. For example, it may impede the effect of this action, and thus, he would say, lessen the intrinsic good or evil of the act; or, on the other hand, fortune can cause a good or evil action by placing us in certain circumstances. Aristotle, too, admits that fortune operates in moral actions; but he would never admit that its operation was anything but accidental. The person is not responsible for what comes about by
fortune, nor is fortune a determining proper cause of the human act of the person.

In analyzing the effect of fortune on the amount of praise or blame which we give to any actions, Smith says that there are three different things which "constitute the whole nature and circumstances of the action, and must be the foundation of whatever quality (that) can belong to it." These are the intention, the external act or movement of the body, and the good or bad consequences. Of these three, he says, obviously the last two cannot be the foundation of any praise or blame. Still, while all may admit this as an abstract principle, "when we come to particular cases, the actual consequences which happen to proceed from any action, have a very great effect upon our sentiments concerning its merit or demerit, and almost always either enhance or diminish our sense of both." He then proceeds to examine and explain this "irregularity of sentiment" and here he will give its cause, influence and purpose.

As to the cause of the influence of fortune on the praise or blame attributed to actions, he shows that we have passions of gratitude and revenge or resentment. These, although they can be and are
directed to animals and even to inanimate objects, are properly directed to those which can be conscious of this passion in the one having it. We wish those who are the object of our gratitude or resentment to be aware of it. Thus he says that in order to be a proper object of these passions three qualifications are necessary. It must be the cause of pleasure or pain. It must be itself capable of feeling these. Finally it must have produced these "from design, and from a design that is approved of in the one case, and disapproved of in the other." It is by the first that the object is capable of exciting the passions; by the second, that it is capable of gratifying them; and by the third "is not only necessary for their complete satisfaction, but as it gives a pleasure or pain that is both exquisite and peculiar, it is likewise an additional exciting cause of those passions." Thus, because that which gives pleasure or pain "is the sole exciting cause of gratitude or resentment", we feel the need of expressing these passions even "though in the intentions of any person, there was either no laudable degree of benevolence on the one hand, or no blamable degree of malice on the other."

1. Ibid., p. 88.  
2. Ibid., p. 88.  
3. Ibid., p. 88.  
4. Ibid., p. 88. "As what gives pleasure or pain, therefore, either in one way or another, is
When he inquires as to how far the influence of fortune extends in this respect he shows first that it diminishes the sense of merit or demerit in those actions which fail of their effects, even when they arise from the best or the worst intentions.

is the sole exciting cause of gratitude and resentment; though the intentions of any person should be ever so proper and beneficent, on the one hand; or ever so improper and malevolent on the other; yet, if he has failed in producing either the good or the evil which he had intended, as one of the exciting causes is wanting in both cases, less gratitude seems due to him in the one, and less resentment in the other. And, on the contrary, though in the intentions of any person, there was either no laudable degree of benevolence on the one hand, or no blamable degree of malice on the other; yet, if his actions should produce either great good or great evil, as one of the exciting causes takes place upon both these occasions, some gratitude is apt to arise towards him in the one, and some resentment in the other. A shadow of merit seems to fall upon him in the first, a shadow of demerit in the second. And as the consequences of actions are altogether under the empire of Fortune, hence arises her influence upon the sentiments of mankind with regard to merit and demerit."

2. Ibid., pp.95-99. "The effect of this influence of fortune is, first, to diminish our sense of the merit or demerit of those actions which arose from the most laudable or blamable intentions, when they fail of producing their proposed effects; and, secondly, to increase our sense of the merit or demerit of actions, beyond what is due to the motives or affections from which they proceed, when they accidentally give occasion either to extraordinary pleasure or pain."
Conversely it increases the sense of merit or demerit of actions, regardless of motives, when they accidentally cause extraordinary pleasure or pain. In a rather confused passage he concludes that "good fortune either diminishes, or takes away altogether, all sense of guilt."

1. Ibid., p. 62. "The person himself who either from passion or from the influence of bad company, has resolved, and perhaps taken measures to perpetrate some crime, but who has fortunately been prevented by an accident which put it out of his power, is sure, if he has any remains of conscience, to regard this event all his life after as a great and signal deliverance. He can never think of it without returning thanks to Heaven, for having been thus graciously pleased to save him from the guilt in which he was just ready to plunge himself, and to hinder him from rendering all the rest of his life a scene of horror, remorse, and repentance. But though his hands are innocent, he is conscious that his heart is equally guilty as if he had actually executed what he was so fully resolved upon. It gives great ease to his conscience, however, to consider that the crime was not executed, though he knows that the failure arose from no virtue in him. He still considers himself less deserving of punishment and resentment; and this good fortune either diminishes or takes away altogether, all sense of guilt. To remember how much he was resolved upon it, has no other effect than to make him regard his escape as the greater and more miraculous: for he still fancies that he has escaped, and he looks back upon the danger to which his peace of mind was exposed, with that terror, with which one who is in safety may sometimes remember the hazard he was in of falling over a precipice, and shudders with horror at the thought."
Finally, in a passage which speaks of fortune as the governor of the world he attributes this "irregularity of sentiment" to Nature. The purpose is to prevent sentiments, thoughts and intentions from becoming the objects of punishment, and force us to give human jurisdiction power only over actions. He argues further that there is a certain utility in this that it makes men strive to implement their good will that it may produce its effects, rather than being satisfied with merely wishing for the good of their fellows. Even the evil aspect of blaming where no blame is due is useful in teaching men "to reverence the happiness of his brethren, to tremble lest he should, even unknowingly, do anything that can hurt them."

Smith attempts, in two chapters, to clarify the distinction between art and prudence. The result is only more confusion. In the first chapter, after having stated that one of the principal sources of beauty is utility, (he fails to mention any others), he tries to analyze the pleasure which utility causes. He credits an unnamed philosopher approvingly with the idea that "the utility of any object pleases the master

1. Ibid., p. 96.
2. Ibid., pp. 97-98.
3. Ibid., pp. 150-171.
by perpetually suggesting to him the pleasure or convenience which it is fitted to promote." Then "the spectator enters by sympathy into the sentiments of the master, and necessarily views the object under the same agreeable aspect." Smith, however, has a discovery of his own to add. He says: "But that this fitness, this happy contrivance of any production of art, should often be more valued, than the very end for which it was intended; and that the exact adjustment of the means for attaining any convenience or pleasure, should frequently be more regarded, than that very convenience or pleasure, in the attainment of which their whole merit would seem to consist has not, so far as I know, been yet taken notice of by any body." One example he gives is that of the person who has his pockets full of knickknacks. He claims that such a one carries these not because of their utility but for their contrivance. His proof is based upon the assertion that their combined utility would not compensate for the "fatigue of bearing the burden" of them. Then he expands this principle by saying that this applies not only "to such frivolous objects" but that "it is often the

1. Ibid., p. 158.
2. Ibid., pp.158-159.
secret motive of the most serious and important pursuits of both private and public life." It is this deception of ourselves that causes the rustic to work all his life to attain some of the conveniences of the wealthy; and then makes the same rustic wonder, when he has attained them, whether they were really worth the effort after all. Smith dwells on this for a while and then decides that "it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life." He goes on by further reasoning of the same type to the notion that it is this.

1. Ibid., p. 159.
2. Ibid., pp. 162-163. It is on this principle that he has based his later work "The Wealth of Nations". A wise and all-provident Nature directly orders even the naturally selfish and rapacious to the good of society. "It is no purpose, that the proud and unfeeling landlord views his extensive fields, and without a thought for the wants of his brethren, in imagination consumes himself the whole harvest that grows upon them. The homely and vulgar proverb, that the eye is larger than the belly, never was more fully verified than with regard to him. The capacity of his stomach bears no proportion to the immensity
same "spirit of system" which recommends to us the promotion of the happiness of our fellow-creatures. Thus, while we can say that Smith perceives the utility contained in the notion of art, we must add that it is very difficult to see just what his exact notion of utility was. More than

of his desires, and will receive no more than that of the meanest peasant. The rest he is obliged to distribute among those, who procure, in the richest manner, that little which he himself makes use of, among those who fit up the palace in which this little is to be consumed, among those who provide and keep in order all the different baubles and trinkets which are employed in the economy of greatness; all of whom thus derive from his luxury and caprice, that share of the necessaries of life, which they would in vain have expected from his humanity or his justice. The produce of the soil maintains at all times nearly that number of inhabitants which it is capable of maintaining. The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last, too, enjoy their share of
that, his notion of art is very confused. He
does not see, for instance, that there is one
division of art into the liberal and servile arts.
The servile arts are those which transform some
external matter, while the liberal arts direct
immanent operations, as logic, mathematics, music,
and the like. Then there are the fine arts whose
end is beauty. These divisions overlap in so far
as among the fine arts some are liberal, as poetry,
and others are more servile, as the art of sculpture.
If he had seen this division he might not have been
so ready to admit that one source of beauty was
utility. This involves another confusion from
which Smith evidently suffered, namely, the re-
lations between bonum delectabile, bonum honestum
and bonum utile. The object of a servile art
which is concerned with those objects which serve
man as instruments is obviously bonum utile. On
the other hand, the liberal arts and the fine arts,
even those which are servile, have a bonum honestum
as an object. Now all that is a bonum honestum or
a bonum utile is necessarily a bonum delectabile;

St. Thomas Comm. lect. 8, nn. 278-279.
but the converse is not true. However, there is reason to believe that his notion of art is even more confused. In another treatise he seems to restrict the notion of imitation to the fine arts. He fails to see the proper application of the term art. Thus we are not surprised to see that he also misunderstands the idea of the imitation in art. For him, imitation is a copying and this is beautiful when there is a "disparity between the imitating and the imitated object." He fails to see that when we say that art imitates nature "the (fundamental) reason is that just as the principles are related to each other, so proportionally are the operations and effects related."

In the second of these two chapters he wants to see just to what extent the perception of this beauty which the appearance of utility gives to the characters and actions of men can be regarded as one of the original principles of approbation. That there is beauty in virtue and a deformity in vice he readily admits. But the utility which causes this does not account for all of virtue, he holds. In the first place, it seems to him impossible that

---

1. "Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called the Imitative Arts."
2. Ibid., p. 412.
3. Of St. Thomas, Comm. in Octo Libros Politicorum, Prologus.
we feel no more in the sentiment which constitutes the approbation of virtue than that by which we approve of a convenient or well-contrived building. More particularly, however, the approbation of virtue involves a sense of propriety. There is a final passage where he attempts to show just how propriety operates in the approbation of virtue, which deserves to be quoted in full. Here Smith, in his own words, illustrates his fundamental confusion of the notions of art and prudence. "It is to be observed that so far as the sentiment of approbation arises from the perception of this beauty of utility, it has no reference of any kind to the sentiments of others. If it was possible, therefore, that a person should grow up to manhood without any communication with society, his own actions might, notwithstanding, be agreeable or disagreeable to him on account of their tendency to his happiness or disadvantage. He might perceive a beauty of this kind in prudence, temperance, and good conduct, and a deformity in the opposite behaviour: he might view his own temper and character with that sort of satisfaction with which we consider a well-contrived machine, in the one case; or with that sort of distaste and dissatisfaction with which we regard a very awkward and clumsy contrivance, in the other.

As these perceptions, however, are merely a matter of taste, and have all the feebleness and delicacy of that species of perceptions, upon the justness of which what is properly called taste is founded, they probably would not be much attended to by one in his solitary and miserable condition. Even though they should occur to him, they would by no means have the same effect upon him, antecedent to his connection with society, which they would have in consequence of that connection. He would not be cast down with inward shame at the thought of this deformity; nor would he be elevated with secret triumph of mind from the consciousness of the contrary beauty. He would not exult from the notion of deserving reward in the one case, nor tremble from the suspicion of meriting punishment in the other. All such sentiments suppose the idea of some other being, who is the natural judge of the person that feels them; and it is only by sympathy with the decision of this arbiter of his conduct, that he can conceive, either the triumph of self-applause, or the shame of self-condemnation.  

Smith is struggling here to add some note

of distinction to the notion of moral action over
that of art. However, he begins by admitting that
the only judgment that the individual can make of
his own actions in isolation from society is one
of art. This in itself is significant. Then he
goes on by referring again to the idea mentioned
many times before in the work, namely that the
notion of merit or demerit depends upon a judgment
of self by another as other. It is again the idea
of "impartial spectator" and again virtue is made
to consist in the judgment. In this respect we
refer to St. Thomas' idea on the proper act of
prudence, which is to command. He says that
in commanding about things to be done (agibilium)
there are three acts. First is the act of counsel
which considers the various means; after this we
have the act of judgment about these means which
are found by counsel, and this he says is done by
the speculative reason; then, since prudence is
about actions to be performed, it has that third
act which consists in the application of that
which was counseled and judged to what must be
performed, namely the act of command. Here he

1. Ila IIae, qu. 47, a.3, 6.
adds as a sign of the truth of the above that
"the perfection of art consists in judging, but
not in commanding". Thus, because Smith insists
on the sentiment arising from the judgment of
another on the character or action, it is at least
true that he does not see the clear distinction
between art and prudence. More than that, it can
be said that for the most part he would insist that
human actions are more under the rule of art than
under the rule of prudence. There are several
other passages which illustrate this.

In the discussion of self-command he
compares the development of perfect self-command
in all things to the making of a perfect work of
art. He says that just as it is an inferior artist
who is completely satisfied with his production so
it is in the character of virtue. He adds that
contrary to the artist who sits down in leisure to
work undisturbed, the man of virtue must operate
in all the contingencies and difficulties of life.
It would be quite possible here as in other places
to give this a good interpretation. However, in
the light of the principles that he himself uses
in other places, one is forced to the conclusion

2. Ibid., p. 221
that such a comparison has greater force than a mere metaphor. Again, near the end of the book he considers the question whether a man is bound to respect a promise extorted under threat of death. His conclusion is that "a brave man ought to die, rather than make a promise which he can neither keep without folly, nor violate without ignominy." He also says, "Breach of chastity dishonours irretrievably. No circumstances, no solicitations can excuse it; no sorrow, no repentance atone for it. We are so nice in this respect that even a rape dishonours, and the innocence of the mind cannot, in our imagination, wash out the pollution of the body." Thus the whole tone of Smith's work seems to indicate that he is continually looking at virtue as if it were some abstract work of art to be made by man. He begins with sympathy, an effect which we derive from another as other. He goes on to the notion of the impartial spectator who is constituted in an exteriorized judgment. Then he insists on the important role of judgment itself. Finally, in discussion of the rules of morality, he speaks of norms which have more the quality of the rigid rules of art rather than the imperative ordering of prudence.

1. Ibid., pp. 293 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 295.
3. Ibid., p. 295.
CHAPTER IV

There is something to the opinion that Smith's Theory of Moral sentiments is a reaction against the rationalism of his time, provided we stress the qualification "of his time." As we have seen in the first chapter, that rationalism was indeed most simplistic. Even all moral problems and actions were to be solved and governed by pure reason. Man had at last discovered the clue leading to unhindered self-possession. Smith represents very definitely the crisis of this simplism. His Theory is a most striking expression of the successive contradictions rationalism inevitably gets involved in. The solution of one contradiction leads him into another. Smith still belongs to that phase of rationalism which did not accept contradiction as a legitimate step toward a higher level.

Human reason tires of particular errors. Experience confutes particular errors to the satisfaction of the many, and makes them untenable. The particular forms taken on by profound and universal errors wear out, as it were. But this constant transmutation of form is but the process of concretion of that greater error into which even its most vigorous protagonists often have but dim
insight. The particular errors have an orderly succession which gives them a common inherent form which approaches ever more the true quasi separate form which is never fully achieved. It is as if the authors propounding these particular forms were guided by an instinct. It is our purpose, in this chapter, to show how Smith, even in the very contradictions he constantly got himself involved in, cooperated toward the contemporary form of rationalism in the field of matter.

"La vérité prudentielle, la vérité dans l'action est conditionnée par la rectitude de l'appétit. C'est, en pratique, une condition extrêmement dure, à tel point que l'histoire de la philosophie pullule de positions et de doctrines où l'on essaie d'émanciper l'intelligence de toute soumission à l'appétit, afin de contourner cet difficulté de bien agir que chacun éprouve en lui-même. Cette tentative regarde surtout l'action politique, et cela se comprend aisément, car cette action engage directement le bien de la communauté, de tous et chacun. Or, soutenir que la vérité prudentielle en matière politique est conditionnée par la rectitude de l'appétit du politique, cela veut dire que le jugement du politique comme tel dépendra
QUBci de en conduite privées que le bon politique doit être un homme bon. Si donc il y avait moyen de déterminer une règle prochaine qui, d'une part, garantirait la vérité dans l'action politique, et qui, d'autre part, serait indépendante de la condition de l'appétit de celui qui agit, le bien public, semble-t-il, serait bien mieux assuré, son accomplissement serait moins sous la dépendance de la condition subjective du politique. On établirait ainsi une science politique dont la vérité serait pratique, et qui serait dès lors un substitut de la prudence. La prudence serait coextensive à la dinotica.  

Does Smith's work fall in line with this attempt? A superficial glance at the Theory of moral sentiments might lead us to believe that he was precisely reacting against this rationalistic emancipation of man from the role of appetite in practical truth. Actually, his whole effort is bent upon rationalizing this appetite. This is obvious enough from his clearly stated purpose: to discover a “precise or distinct measure” by which the fitness or propriety of our moral actions can be ascertained or judged of.

But how can this possibly be reconciled with Smith's identification of sympathy with the moral sense? Let us not forget his meaning of the term

__________________________________________

1. De Koninck, Charles, Révolte contre la vérité prudentielle.
"sympathy". If we used that term in connection with the very basis of morality, it would have a quite different meaning. It would mean the conformity of our appetite with an end that is truly good, and the conformity of our intellect with right appetite. Hence, while truth in action is relative to right appetite, the practical judgment of what is right or wrong is the judgment of the individual person, and its value depends essentially upon the above-mentioned conformity. Smith's sympathy, however, is an attempt to escape the individual responsibility of this judgment before God and his eternal law, who is the only true other person involved in the value of our actions. The basis of Smith's morality lies in sympathy with the action of another human person. This sympathy is but an alienation of the sympathy as we understand it. It is a rationalistic escape from the moral good. The sympathy he speaks of is, in truth, the subject of a speculative judgment. Obviously, the very alienation is only apparent. This is obvious from the vicious circle Smith is involved in, as we have shown in the previous chapter. The value of the other's action is judged by our ability to sympathize with his action and judgment, and the value of our action
and judgment, and the value of our action and judgment is measured by the other's ability to sympathize with them in us.

Apart from being a vicious circle, it is indeed a base form of subjection of man to man. In what sense can the individual person still be free in his moral judgments? "Cette tentative de contourner les exigences de la vérité dans l'action m'en est pas moins une révolte contre la vérité et contre la liberté de conscience. Elle conduit vers la pire tyrannie qui se puisse concevoir, non pas parce que ceux qui refuseraient de se soumettre à un régime politique édifié, et en théorie et en pratique, sur la négation de la vérité prudentielle, seraient jetés dans des camps de concentration en tout simplement 'éliminés',—ne craignez pas ceux qui tuent le corps et ne peuvent tuer l'âme,—mais parce qu'elle tend à exterminer la notion même de vérité prudentielle et de liberté de conscience. Cette négation est d'autant plus sinistre qu'elle fait appel à cela même qu'elle veut détruire. Il est si facile de cacher une âme d'esclave sous l'étiquette d'homme libre."

Smith's fundamental idea of sympathy, far

1. De Koninck, Charles, Révolte contre la vérité prudentielle.
from recognizing the role of appetite in action, very
definitely rules out this appetite as the faculty of
the acting subject and of a rational agent. Smith
alienates the moral self into the otherness of society.
Men must judge his own worth according to his attune-
ment to the society he lives in, and to society as it
is. This idea is very strictly totalitarian. And
this alienation is logically carried through in
conformity with Smith's original intention. "We
are not at present, he said, examining upon what
principles a perfect being would approve of the
punishment of bad actions; but upon what principles
so weak and imperfect a creature as men actually and
in fact approves of it." Unless the approbation of
the latter is established by Smith as a true criterion
of the value of our individual actions, his very
theory of sympathy becomes wholly superfluous. But
as soon as we accept this approbation as a norm, his
theory of sympathy becomes inescapable. Hence, there
is a rigorous logic at the source of the said vicious
circle, and its purpose is clear enough.

The rationalistic merit of this alienation
lies in the fact that it has apparently confronted
the role of appetite in action and apparently
recognized this role. It is truly rationalistic, for
the self is objectively alienated, projected into
detached otherness. Thus the self can treat itself as an external object, and place the burden of responsibility upon the self’s otherness, upon society into which it has been absorbed.

In fact the text we have just quoted from Smith is a very significant statement of an idea that Hegel will accept with all its consequences, namely, the distinction between things as they are and things as they ought to be. While Smith does not yet reject this distinction, his whole purpose remains confined to things as they are as the very norm of what we must do. Hume and Hegel would explicitly cut all ties from the very transcendence involved in the idea of what ought to be as opposed to what factually is. "It is not what is that makes us furious and torments us, Hegel says, but rather the fact that what is is not as it ought to be; when we recognize that which is is as it ought to be, that is, not arbitrary, nor contingent, then we also recognize that it must be as it is." Hence the basis of morality lies wholly this side of whatever reality there is. Universal this-sidedness obviously destroys the distinction between the "ought" and the "is" which would destroy the self-inclusiveness and complete independence of the world.
One of the striking features of this logic is that the withdrawal of the self from all transcendence, from the natural law as derived from the eternal law, immediately leads to the negation of the moral self, to the alienation of that very personality which sought emancipation. The history of rationalism confirms the age-old idea that to turn away from God, even in the timid and tentative form exemplified in Smith's socialized morality, is moral suicide. At the very moment the human person is to enjoy absolute freedom, it is compelled to become the absolute slave of its fellow-man. All becomes caprice and the person must free itself from utter randomness of its own actions by ignominiously subjecting itself to the impersonal "impartial spectator", an impartial spectator who is actually as subjected to brute, irrational, fact as the depersonalized individual.

What are the truths that Smith can make his erroneous idea of sympathy hinge upon? There is first of all the principle: "Qualis unusquisque est talis ei finis videtur". (III Ethic., lect. 13). This indeed shows well enough the role of appetite in action. But how is one to know what is the right way to be? Can moral science tell us exactly what is right and what is wrong in such a way that we
merely have to apply this knowledge to given situations in order to ensure the right or wrong of our actions?

Determinat (Philosophus) modum inquirendi de talibus. Et dicit, quod illud oportet primo supponere, quod omnis sermo qui est de operabilibus, sicut est iste, debet tradi typo, idest exemplariter, vel similitudinario, et non secundum certitudinem; sicut dictum est in processio totius libri. Et hoc ideo, quia sermones sunt exquirendi secundum conditionem materiae, ut ibidem dictum est. Videmus autem, quod ea quae sunt in operationibus moralibus, et alia quae sunt ad hoc utilia, scilicet bona exteriora, non habeant in seipso aliquid stans per modum necessitatis, sed omnia sunt contingentia et variabilia. Sicut etiam accidit in operibus medicinalibus quae sunt circa sehas. Quia ipsae dispositio corporis sanandi et res quae assumantur ad sanandum, multipliciter variantur.

Et cum sermo moralium etiam in universalibus sit incertus et variabilis, adhuc magis incertus est si quis velit alterius descendere trahendo doctrinam de singulis in speciali. Hoc enim non cadit neque sub arte, neque sub aliqua narratione. Quia causae singularium operabilium varientur infinitis modis. Unde judicium de singulis relinquitur prudentiae uniuscujusque. Et hoc est, quod oportet ipse operantes per suam prudentiam intendere ad considerandum ea quae convenit agere circumstantiis: sicut oportet medicum facere in medicando, et gubernatorem in regimine navis. Quamvis autem hic sermo sit talis, idest universaliter incertus, in particulari autem inenarrabilis, tamen attentare debemus, ut aliquod auxilium super hoc homini conferamus, per quod scilicet dirigatur in quae operibus. (II Ethic., lect. 2. nn. 258-9).

But no practical science can become a substitute for prudence and for the condition of our appetite.

1. Also, Book II, lect. 8. nn. 328-4; lect. 9, n. 351; lect. 11. a. 569 and n. 361; Book III, lect. 1, n. 590; lect. 2. n. 399; etc.
Ultimately we must always have right intention.

The defendants of Smith might also refer us to our own position, for we too say:

_Illud anim quod videtur omnibus dicitur ita se habere: et hoc habetur quasi principium. Quia non est possibile quod naturale judicium in omnibus fallatur. Cum autem appetitus non sit nisi ejus quod videtur bonum, id quod ab omnibus appetitur omnibus videtur bonum. Et sic delectatio quae ab omnibus appetitur est bona._

_Ille autem qui hoc quod ab omnibus creditur interimit, non dicit totaliter credibiliora. Posset enim sustineri illud quod dicitur, si sola ea quae sine intellectu agunt, sicut brute animalia et homines pravi appetent delectationes: quia sensus non judicat bonus nisi ut nunc; et sic non oporteret delectationem esse bonum simpliciter, sed solum quod sit bonus ut nunc. Sed cum etiam habentes sapientiam appetant aliquam delectationem, omnino non videtur aliquid diuora._

_Verumtamen si etiam omnia quae agunt sine intellectu appetenter delectationem, aequaliter esse probabile quod delectatio esset quoddam bonum: quia etiam in pravis hominibus est quoddam naturale bonum quod inclinat in appetitum convenientis boni: et hoc naturale bonum est melius quam pravi homines, inquantum hujusmodi. Sicut enim virtus est perfectio naturae, et propter hoc virtus moralis est melior quam virtue naturalis, ut in sexto dictum est: ita cum malitia sit corruptio naturae, bonum naturale est melius, sicut integrum corrupto. Manifestum est autem quod secundum id quod malitiae aibi invicem contrarias. Et ideo id secundum quod homines pravi conveniunt, scilicet delectationem appetere, videtur magis ad naturam quam ad malitiam pertinent._ (X Ethic., lect. 8. nn. 1975-7).

But even this gives us only universal knowledge. In particular circumstances, we again have to judge what is to be done here and now: we again have to judge how this principle applies in these circumstances.
From this judgment there can be no alienation.
Our action will not necessarily be good because we have applied this general knowledge.

When we say that "the virtuous man is the measure and rule of human acts" (Ia, q. 1, a.6, ad3), this should not be interpreted to mean that the virtuous man should be considered as the proximate rule for the actions of others. His virtue is the rule for his actions. When considered as an example and rule for others, when we consider such or such a type of good man as one to be imitated, the type is never but a type, a general rule, a remote measure. This general rule will not furnish us with a proximate rule for what we must do here and now. The only thing the good man is to be completely imitated in is in doing what we should do in given circumstances. We must imitate him, not just materially by repeating a certain action he performed, but by doing what is right for us, just as he did what was right for him. The proximate norm of what I must do hic et nunc is ineffable and incommunicable in purely rational terms.

The alienation of the self Smith carries through to the very highest level, to that of charity, as we have seen. To love our neighbour as ourselves
means, to him, that we must love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves, so that the self and the neighbour are completely interchangeable. In truth, however, we must love ourselves more than our neighbour, as St. Thomas explains, IIa IIae, q. 26, a. b. c.:

Respondeo dicendum quod in homine duo sunt, scilicet natura spiritualis et natura corporalis. Per hoc autem homo dicitur diligere se ipsum quod diliget se secundum naturam spiritualem, ut supra dictum est, quaest. 25, art. 7. Et secundum hoc debet homo magis se diligere post Deum quam quemcumque alium. Et hoc patet ex ipsa ratione diligendi: nam, sicut supra dictum est, quaest. 25, art. 1 et 12. Deus diligit et principium boni, super quo fundatur dilectio charitatis: homo autem se ipsum diliget ex observantia secundum rationem qua est particeps prae dicti boni; proximus autem diligitur secundum rationes societatis in isto bono. Consociatis autem est ratio dilectionis secundum quandam unionem in ordine ad Deum. Unde sicut unitas potior esset quam unio, ita quod homo ipse participet bonum divinum, est potior ratio diligendi quam quod alius associetur in hac participatione. Et ideo homo ex charitate debet magis se ipsum diligere quam proximum; et hujus signum est quod homo non debet subire aliquod salum peccati, quod contrariatur participationi beatitudinis, et proximum liberet a peccato.

Hence it would be contrary to charity to sacrifice one's own eternal beatitude for that of our neighbour. This shows clearly enough how deeply perverse is the alienation taught by Smith. And while his interpretation of the law of charity
is in contradiction with several of his other positions, such as that one may not commit evil for the sake of a good, Smith has actually taught this profound error, and the evolution of rationalism will gradually eliminate the share of truth that remained associated with it in his Theory.

Smith's idea of charity already foreshadows the contradictory concept of brotherly love in Marxism. While on the one hand Marxism teaches that the individual self is the highest divinity, at the same time, the individual person is completely sacrificed for the welfare of some other individual whose own being is just as expendable. Here again the absolute assertion of the self implies its absolute negation.

No matter how we look at rationalism, it always leads to contradictory actions, to the "yes and no" of hegelianism and marxism. Smith was caught in a maze of contradictions from which he provisionally escapes only by inconsistency. He sidesteps some of the greater difficulties by suddenly bringing in the "Supreme Judge". His God is never but a "Deus ex machina" appealed to when a conflict arises between the spectator within and
those without. Rationalism will soon accept this conflict as a principle, and substitute to God himself the "fecundity of contradiction."

Nothing is more irrational than contradiction. Contradiction is impossibility, and impossibility is absolute nothingness. Irrationality is indeed the great paradox of rationalism. It is a paradox which becomes obvious only in its later and more logical conclusions. But even this paradox already finds striking expression in Smith's concept of reason. For the reason which formulates general rules derives all its value from the irrationally felt particulars. Hence irrationality lies at the very root of reason. Irrationality is the very principle and term of his rationalism.

The same idea underlies his conception of justice as the only rule which allows no looseness or free interpretation in its application to particular cases. Justice thus becomes the first of virtues. Now justice is "ad alterum". If justice is held to be the architectonic virtue in lieu of prudence, then again we have alienation. And since justice is in the appetite, and since there is not that primacy of the intellectual
virtue of prudence, justice itself becomes radically irrational.

The same irrationality may be seen to follow logically from Smith's neglect to distinguish practical reason from speculative reason. When the burden of reason in action is placed upon speculative reason, the realm of action itself becomes wholly irrational. That reason which attains the good as good, is denied, and hence the good as good becomes inaccessible to reason and irrational.

It is not only in its moral philosophy that rationalism turns out to be irrationalism. This holds true of its most abstract and speculative teachings. The most basic idea of rationalism is that the real is humanly rational, that the only rationality things in themselves have is the rationality they have for me. Human reason as such then becomes the very principle of their rationality. But actually, what is most rational to me is least rational in itself. Hence, if the rational to us becomes the measure of the rationality of things in themselves, then what is most irrational in them is at the same time
what is most rational in them. This rational irrationality is the irrationality of contradiction.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


