

FROM SMITHIAN SYMPATHY TO HEGELIAN RECOGNITION

Richard Gunn

My argument concerns the place of Adam Smith in the history of ideas. According to a widely-held view, Smith's significance lies in his contribution to the liberal individualist tradition.¹ Such a view fails, I maintain, to acknowledge important strands in what Smith says.

Because the term "liberalism" came into use after Smith's time of writing, my discussion must start by explaining how dangers of anachronism will be held at bay. My strategy is to consider Smith's relation to a current of seventeenth- and eighteenth century thought from which (it is uncontroversial to say) liberal individualism emerged. The current of thought is the modern natural law tradition. My paper emphasises differences between Smith's work and modern natural law thinking: in doing so, it prepares the way for a claim that philosophers of 'recognition' (rather than liberal individualists) are Smith's most insightful heirs.

My discussion of Smith's relation to the modern natural law tradition focuses on two issues: the nature of the human self and the basis on which moral values rest. On both issues, I claim, the contrast between Smith and modern natural law thinking is clear. Whereas the modern natural law tradition sees the self in broadly "solitary" or monological² terms, Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* favours a conception that is dialogical and rooted in the idea of interaction. The modern natural law tradition responds to questions about the basis of moral values by listing essential (or minimally necessary) rules under which monologically-seen individuals may live; by contrast, Smith's response is to argue that moral values exist through interaction's play.

The issues on which my discussion concentrates have, I note in passing, more than historical importance. Both a "solitary" conception of the self and

¹ An instance of this view is to be found in, for example, the *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* ed. T.Mautner (Penguin Books 1997) p. 317.

² By a *monological* conception of the self, I understand a conception that refers to the self alone; by a *dialogical* conception, I understand a conception that refers not merely to the self but to others. (I am unable to decide whether Brown's distinction between 'monologic' and 'dialogic' texts – see V.Brown *Adam Smith's Discourse* (Routledge 1994) p. 21 – and my own 'monological'/'dialogical' distinction coincide.)

the project of formulating minimally necessary rules remain points of reference in present-day liberal political theory. Smith (I wish to suggest) has closer affinities to writers such as Fichte and Hegel, for whom *Recht* rests on a raft of recognition, rather than to liberal individualists who argue in the converse direction.³ My suggestion attempts to change the landscape of ideas in a way that has bears on continuing debate.

In section 1 of my paper, I outline the view of self and other – and, thereby, the view of interaction – presented in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. My aim in this section is to provide a basis for discussion. In section 2, I comment briefly on issues in the ‘Adam Smith problem’. Section 3 contrasts Smith’s and the modern natural law tradition’s conceptions of the self. Section 4 contrasts Smith’s and the modern natural law tradition’s approaches to the justification of moral values. In section 5, I comment on Fichte and Hegel as theorists who explore dialogical themes.

1. *Smith and interaction*

I take it to be uncontroversial that a fascinating and complex view of the relation between self and other (or between selves and others) underpins the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*’ ethical arguments. This view can, I suggest, be understood as an account of human interaction.

A first-time reader of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*⁴ is apt to find Smith’s view of interaction difficult to interpret because essential parts of the view receive discussion at widely different places in Smith’s text. The overall picture that Smith presents emerges in a clear form if, I propose, the opening pages of *TMS* Part I and *TMS* Part III are seen as providing accounts – complementary accounts – of the relation between knowledge of oneself and knowledge of other people. I comment briefly on each section of Smith’s argument in turn.

(i) For Smith in *TMS* Part I, *knowledge of oneself is the key to knowledge of other individuals*. Knowledge of others presupposes self-knowledge

³ Is this contrast related to Smith’s change in conceptual order between his 1762-3 and 1766 series of lectures (see editors’ introduction to A. Smith *Lectures in Jurisprudence*, Liberty Classics 1982, and Brown *Adam Smith’s Discourse* pp 116-20)? I suspect that this is the case, but do not pursue the point here.

⁴ A. Smith *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford University Press 1976) [henceforth *TMS*].

because, as Smith tells us, ‘we have no immediate experience of what other people feel’: our only way of gaining knowledge of other people is by ‘conceiving what we ourselves should feel like in a like situation’.⁵ ‘By imagination,’ says Smith, ‘we place ourselves in his [the other’s] situation’.⁶ We attempt, that is to say, to place ourselves in the other’s shoes; changing the metaphor, we attempt to see the world from the other’s situation and through his or her eyes. ‘Changing places in fancy [or in imagination] with the sufferer’ is – to take a more specific example – ‘the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others.’⁷ What allows me to empathise or, in Smith’s term, ‘sympathise’ with the misery of others is that I know from my own experience how a wretched situation feels.⁸

Evidently, a reference to Smith’s notion of ‘sympathy’ might be a cue for a lengthy discussion. Here, I confine myself to two clarificatory points. One is that, for Smith, sympathy ‘does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation that excites it’.⁹ stated differently, *what* one sympathises with is not, merely, passions that individuals feel but individuals who occupy specific situations. Smithian sympathy involves judgement (on situations) rather than direct emotional contagion.¹⁰ My other point is that sympathy, for Smith, sympathy is both an affective and an epistemological category. Through a process of sympathising, knowledge of other individuals is obtained. (As has been indicated, however, the knowledge is never ‘immediate’.) My reason for drawing attention to sympathy’s epistemological dimension is to indicate Smith’s distance from crudely emotivist claims.

(ii) If *TMS* Part I maintains that self-knowledge is the key to knowledge of others, so *TMS* Part III contends that *knowledge of others is the key to knowledge of oneself*. In Smith’s words:

⁵ *TMS* p 9. On the separateness of individuals in Smith, see D.Marshall ‘Adam Smith and the Theatricality of the Moral Sentiments’ *Critical Inquiry* vol. 10, no. 4 (1984) pp. 595, 601; C.L.Griswold, Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press 1999) pp. 83-96.

⁶ *TMS* p. 9.

⁷ *TMS* p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.* See editor’s note on the same page.

⁹ *TMS* p 12. For discussion of the passage, see Griswold *Virtues* p. 87.

¹⁰ Hume seems to come close to the contagion-of-feeling view when he uses the following analogy to explain the ‘nature of sympathy’: ‘As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another’ (D.Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press 1978, pp. 575-6).

We can never survey our sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgement concerning them, unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from them. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them.¹¹

According to the first arc, so to speak, of the *Theory of Moral Sentiment's* argument, what makes knowledge of other people possible is my knowledge of myself. According to the second arc, what makes self-knowledge possible is my knowledge of others; more specifically, it is my knowledge of how other people see me. If I wish to know myself, I must look into other people's eyes.

Why (a reader of Smith may want to know) should I adopt so seemingly round-about route to self-knowledge? Why not look directly into myself? A good deal turns on my hypothetical reader's question because the notion that *self-consciousness is gained through direct introspection* lies at the core of lengthy tradition in European thought. The tradition is one where the individual is seen as "solitary" (rather than "social"), as "private" (rather than "public") and as existing in abstract and atomistic terms. By contrast, the notion that *self-consciousness is gained through knowledge of others* lies at the core of a tradition wherein a social individual is dialogically self-aware. Smith's answer to the question raised by my hypothetical reader underlines his membership in the second, social and dialogical, tradition. An individual cannot, suggests Smith, form an estimation of 'his own character' or 'his own sentiments and conduct' unless he or she looks into the 'mirror' that society holds.¹² In 1848, James Ferrier aptly described the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a study in 'Moral Optics'.¹³ The root idea underlying Smith's and Ferrier's expressions is that others may perceive features in an individual which the individual is unable to see.

Standing back from what has been said, we may ask: what sort of conceptual picture emerges if arcs (i) and (ii) of Smith's argument are taken together?

¹¹ *TMS* p. 110.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ J.Ferrier 'Criticism of Adam Smith's Ethical System' *Edinburgh Review* No. 74 (1986) p. 105.

At first sight, the picture appears to be disquieting. Because *knowledge of others presupposes knowledge of the self* (first arc) and because *self-knowledge presupposes knowledge of others* (second arc), the argument of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* appears to be viciously circular. This appearance of vicious circularity is, I suggest, removed if Smith's argument is seen as a picture or description of interaction. Seen thus, arcs of Smith's argument complement one another: each traces a distinct aspect of the same conversational exchange.

If the *Theory of Moral Sentiments'* account of self and other is, indeed, a description of interaction, what sort of interaction does Smith appear to have in mind? It is, we may say, an interaction with a strong to-and-fro dynamic. An indication of this is the circumstance that Smith thinks of conversing or interacting individuals in a two-fold way. *On the one hand*, he thinks of individuals as *seeing* others and, in doing so, imagining what it would be like to occupy their situations. *On the other hand*, he thinks of individuals as *being seen* by others who, for their part, occupy a spectatorial role. Smith's 'spectator approach' – the phrase is Haakonssen's¹⁴ – implies a situation approach, and *vice versa*. A reader of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* must, I suggest, familiarise him or herself with the view that, as an interaction unfolds, one and the same individual may play the parts of *the individual who sees* and *the individual who is seen*.¹⁵ One and the same individual may play both "spectatorial" and, so to say, "situational" roles.¹⁶ He or she may do so at different times in the same interaction, or at the same time when relations to different individuals are concerned. To the extent that Smith sees interaction in such terms, he thinks of interactive roles – those of "seer" and "seen" – as existing in a fluid and dynamic sense.¹⁷

¹⁴ K.Haakonssen *The Science of a Legislator* (Cambridge University Press 1981) p. 136.

¹⁵ This is so according to Smith himself: as individuals consider 'what they themselves would feel, if they were actually the sufferer', so the individual imagines 'what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation' (*TMS* p. 22). The passage is quoted in Marshall 'Theatricality' p. 596.

¹⁶ In Marshall's words: 'both the characters in the scene of sympathy play the roles of spectator and spectacle' ('Theatricality' p 597).

¹⁷ Smith and Habermas, I suggest, see interaction in not-dissimilar terms. See Habermas *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction* (Polity 2001) p. 98; 'Wahrheitstheorien' in H.Fahrenbach (ed.) *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (Pfullingen 1973) p. 255. For Habermas, a speech situation that is 'ideal' is one where – in McCarthy's words – there is 'a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts' and 'an effective equality of opportunity for the assumption of dialogue roles' (T.McCarthy *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*, Polity Press 1984, p 306). Cf. note 52, below.

2. A note on the ‘Adam Smith problem’

If the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is taken to be a book premised on the idea of interaction, how may its relation to the *Wealth of Nations* be seen? The so-called ‘Adam Smith problem’ – the problem of how Smith’s two main published works stand related – has been addressed by generations of scholars,¹⁸ and only a brief and inconclusive note is possible here.

In the light of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*’ emphasis on interaction, what are we to make of the *Wealth of Nations*’ comments on a ‘propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’?¹⁹ What should be our response to its example of ‘the butcher, the brewer, or the baker’ as figures to whose self-interest the individual must appeal?²⁰ No doubt, such questions might be approached from a number of angles. Here, I note that the passages are less straightforward than at first appears.

Smith introduces his ‘propensity to truck, barter, and exchange’ as a ‘propensity in human nature’: if a reader puts down the *Wealth of Nations* at this point, his or her impression must be that Smith is advocating a market-based conception of man. Two lines later, however, he raises the question of ‘whether this propensity be one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given’.²¹ The ‘more probable’ answer to this question is, he tells us, that the propensity is ‘the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech’.²² How should this last-quoted phrase be understood? Is the reference to the faculties of reason and speech an allusion to the idea of interaction? Be this as it may, Smith appears to be telling us that the propensity to truck and barter is (probably) a social product. So far, so good. But a further question arises because the phrase ‘necessary consequence’ can be understood in more than one way.

¹⁸ Literature on the Adam Smith problem includes A.Oncken ‘The Consistency of Adam Smith’ *Economic Journal* vol. 7, no. 27 (1897); R. Teichgraber III ‘Rethinking *Das Adam Smith Problem*’ in J. Dwyer, R.A.Mason and A.Murdoch (eds.) *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland* (John Donald 1982); L.Dickey ‘Historicising the “Adam Smith Problem”’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol 58, no. 3 (1986); V.Brown *Adam Smith’s Discourse* ch. 2; D.Gocmen *The Adam Smith Problem: Human Nature and Society in The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (I.B.Tauris 2007).

¹⁹ A.Smith *An Inquiry into the Natures and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Liberty Classics 1981) [hereafter WN] p. 25.

²⁰ WN pp. 26-7.

²¹ WN p. 25.

²² Ibid.

Does Smith mean by the phrase that the propensity to trade is a necessary consequence of all social existence whatever? Or does he mean that the propensity is necessary if certain social conditions obtain? Support for the latter suggestion is found if we note that, although Smith at first introduces the butcher/baker/brewer example abstractly and ahistorically, he later on refers to the (relatively undeveloped) Scottish Highlands where ‘every farmer must be the butcher, baker and brewer for his own family’.²³ The butcher/baker/brewer example turns out to be, in Smith’s mind, historically specific and to apply only where commercial society (involving a social division of labour) obtains. May the same thing be said about the *Wealth of Nations*’ propensity to trade and barter? Does Smith introduce the notion ahistorically only to have the conditions of commercial society in view?

Such reflections place a question mark against the view that Smith sees market behaviour as rooted in human nature. They suggest that, instead, the *Wealth of Nations* is to be regarded as a socially specific text. Not Smith, but the world which the *Wealth of Nations* analyses, stipulates a propensity to truck and barter. Not Smith, but commercial society, makes an appeal to self-interest mandatory. How far (we may ask) can such suggestions be pressed? At first sight, the *Wealth of Nations* advocates a property-based and monological²⁴ conception of individuality: may we say that first appearances are misleading and that, instead, it analyses a society where a property-based and monological conception of individuality has become widespread? If so, we may go further and draw parallels between the stance of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* – a work which Smith knew, and reviewed in appreciative terms.²⁵ For Rousseau, it may be argued, the property-based categories of existing commercial were those which the modern natural law tradition took for granted.²⁶ To what extent did Smith share the same perspective? I make no attempt to answer this fascinating question here.

²³ *WN* p. 31.

²⁴ I link the terms ‘property-based’ and ‘monological’ because property (although a social relation) *presents itself* in monological terms. (Locke’s notion of property takes this *presentation* at its face value.)

²⁵ See ‘Letter to the *Edinburgh Review*’ in A. Smith *Essays of Philosophical Subjects* (Liberty Classics 1980) pp. 242-56. (Smith’s claim on p. 251 that the *Discourse* ‘consists almost entirely of rhetoric and description’ is far from dismissive.)

²⁶ On Rousseau and criticism of the modern natural law tradition see R. Wokler ‘Rousseau’s Pufendorf: Natural Law and the Foundations of Commercial Society’ *History of Political Thought* vol. 15, no. 3 (1994).

Returning more directly to *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, I offer a suggestion which brings the two works into a common conceptual frame. The suggestion takes as its starting point the *Wealth of Nations*' reflections on the stultifying and dehumanising effects of a social division of labour. Where a social division of labour obtains, as in commercial society, an individual's work becomes confined to 'a few very simple operations'; his perspective becomes accordingly restricted and his capacity for 'rational conversation' is undermined.²⁷ Is Smith here claiming that, in a society where there is a social division of labour, individuals' capacity for 'sympathy' (in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*' sense of the term) is eroded? Does he consider that, in such a society, individuals' situations are so particularised as to make changing places in fancy problematic? This line of thought may be extended further. Does the *Wealth of Nations* describe a society where a circulation of interactive roles is increasingly difficult and where, in consequence, to-and-fro interaction is all but impossible? Does Smith, with Rousseau, worry that the dynamics of commercial society corrupt humanity's capacity for social life?

3. *Conceptions of the self*

The intellectual world which formed the background to Smith's theorising was one where a monological conception of the self took a number of forms. One such form was philosophical. Famously, Descartes sets the scene for his *Discourse on Method* by describing how one upon a time, without 'society [conversation]' to divert him, he spent a day 'alone in a stove-heated room'²⁸ – and traced the conceptual path that lead him through doubt to certainty. Subsequent philosophy sought truths of experience by means of introspection.²⁹ Religious thinking and social theory were further subject-areas where a monological conception of selfhood appeared.

The Scotland of Smith's day was Calvinist, and an unmistakable trait in Calvinist religious thinking is the inward-looking gaze that it turns upon the self. This gaze is, notoriously, an intense one: for Calvin, 'no man can descend into himself, and seriously consider what he is, without feeling that

²⁷ WN pp/ 781-2.

²⁸ R.Descartes *Philosophical Works* (Cambridge University Press 1967) vol. 1, p. 87.

²⁹ This is true, at least, of the Scottish philosophers (Hutcheson and, in part, Hume) who formed Smith's point of departure.

God is angry and at enmity with him'.³⁰ The passage is of interest in the present connection because, in effect, it anticipates Descartes in linking the themes of privacy and self-discovery. Calvin, a recent study has claimed, sees spiritual self-examination as 'best performed privately' – with the effect that the Calvinist 'splits' the self into 'observer and observed'.³¹ Ultimately, the unity of the self is lost sight of in a division between an "higher" and a "lower" self. The line of thought here indicated provokes the fascinating suggestion that self-division and splitting is intrinsic to a monological conception of the self.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social theory, a monological conception of selfhood played a key part in modern natural law thinking. This was the case in passages where the notion of an asocial state of nature served as a basis for discussion. In addition, it was the case in passages dealing with the origins of private property. Here, in supplying background to Smith's discussion, I comment briefly on the account (or accounts) of property that the modern natural law tradition contains.

A widespread starting point in the modern natural law traditions reflections on property was what Pufendorf, writing in 1672, termed a 'negative communion' of goods.³² (Writing earlier in the same century, Grotius employs the notion of negative communion in all but name.³³) A situation where a negative communion obtains is defined by Pufendorf as one where 'all things lay free to any that would use them, and did not belong to one more than to another':³⁴ although such a situation may at first sight seem to have communistic overtones, its chief implication is that individuals may *without reference to any other individuals* appropriate property to themselves. Property ownership is, like the property owner, construed in monological terms. This image of ownership may, to be sure, be softened or qualified (as in Locke's "enough-and-as-good-for-others" condition³⁵), but the notion of an individual who holds property independently of all others

³⁰ J. Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Eerdsmans 1989) vol. 1, p. 434.

³¹ W.J. Bouwsma *John Calvin* (Oxford University Press 1988) pp.179-80.

³² On positive and negative communion, see S. Pufendorf *Law of Nature and Nations* (London 1729) Bk. IV, ch. IV. An account of Pufendorf's positive/negative distinction is given by Carmichael in *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Carmichael* (Liberty Fund 2002) pp 92-3.

³³ Both Grotius and Pufendorf employ the example of (unreserved) seats in a theatre: see H. Grotius *The Rights of War and Peace* (Liberty Fund 2002) vol. 2, p. 421; Pufendorf *Law of Nature and Nations* p. 384).

³⁴ *Law of Nature and Nations* p. 366.

³⁵ J. Locke *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge University Press 1988) pp. 288, 291.

remains encribed in the modern natural law tradition's fundamental claims. It is Locke, moreover, who rivets the notions of private property still more closely together with the claim that *property in oneself* (or *self-ownership*) is the final basis on which property-acquisition rest.³⁶

Turning to Smith, it is remarkable how little of this is to be found in his writings. When he turns, in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, to comment on the notion of property his key question is whether ‘the spectator can go along with my possession’.³⁷ In place of the natural law tradition’s picture of a progression from negative community to modern property,³⁸ he presents accounts of “four-stages” theory.³⁹ More drastic still are the differences between the natural law tradition’s account (or accounts) of the individual as a proprietor and the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*’ conception of the self.

There, Smith tacitly agrees with theorists of self-ownership (and with Calvin) that an individual exists in, so to say, a twice-over sense: just as, according to the thesis of self-ownership, the individual is both *owner* and *owned*, so in Smith’s view, a self-reflective individual divides him or herself ‘as it were, into two persons’.⁴⁰ What makes Smith’s view distinctive is, however, that the relation between the ‘two persons’ is neither a property relation (as the self-ownership thesis assumes) nor a relation that may be sustained in intense privacy (as Calvinism claims). Instead, it is a relation that may subsist solely in an interactive sense. To stand back from oneself is, for Smith, to call upon the witness of others. To divide oneself into “seer” and “seen” (or ‘observer’ and ‘observed’) is to invoke interactive roles that may be united through interaction’s flow – and there alone. Whereas the metaphor of a proprietorial relation imports monological assumptions into a picture of the self, only a dialogical conception of the self makes possible the unity of unity and difference that self-reflection entails.

How does Smith’s conception of the self stand in relation to the modern natural law tradition’s account of property acquisition under conditions of negative communion? If the self is seen as existing through interaction then, it may be argued, the account of property-acquisition set out by Pufendorf

³⁶ See Locke *Two Treatises* p. 287. (Locke’s line of thought is that, because I own myself, I own my labour; therefore labour-mixing generates property rights.)

³⁷ *Lectures on Jurisprudence* p 459; for a parallel passage, see p 17.

³⁸ For discussion, see S.Buckle *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* (Oxford University Press 1991) esp. chs. 1 and 2.

³⁹ *Lectures on Jurisprudence* pp. 14-27; cf. pp 459-60.

⁴⁰ *TMS* p. 113.

and others becomes incoherent. In a situation of negative communion, individuals' claims to property are (as we have noted) made *without reference to any other individuals* whereas, for Smith, the notion of individuals who *claim* or, indeed, *exist* without reference to others is meaningless. Carrying this point a stage further, a general comment may be offered. In contrast to theorists (and they are legion) who base their conception of the self on the notion of an individual and his or her property, Smith for his part starts off from a conception of the self and makes a question out of how property may serve human needs. His memory is falsified if he is seen as (merely) a political economist.

4. *Scepticism and moral values*

Present-day scholarship on the modern natural law tradition is massively indebted to Richard Tuck's explorations of intellectual history.⁴¹ A claim which plays a central part in a number of his discussion is that, in the first part of the seventeenth century, the modern natural law tradition arose in response to sceptical challenge.⁴² Critics of Tuck have called this claim into question⁴³ and, at the time of writing, the modern natural law tradition's relation to scepticism remains a topic of debate.

An adequate discussion of issues in this debate lies well beyond the boundaries of this paper. Nonetheless, I offer two comments. The first is that the 'Pyrrhonist' crisis, unleashed by the Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus in 1562, was part of a concern with scepticism that took a number of forms during the early-modern period. Stuart Clark draws attention to one such form when he notes that 'Pyrrhonism acted as a commentary on what had already taken place (and was continuing to take place) in the visual

⁴¹ See R.Tuck *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge University Press 1979); *Philosophy and government 1572-1651* (Cambridge University Press 1993); 'The "modern" theory of natural law' in A.Pagden (ed.) *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press 1987); also Tuck's intro. to the Liberty Fund edn. of Grotius's *Rights of War and Peace*.

⁴² On scepticism, see Tuck *Philosophy and government* pp. 48-50.

⁴³ Critics of Tuck who raise questions about the historical importance of scepticism include J.P.Sommerville 'Selden, Grotius, and the Seventeenth-Century Intellectual Revolution in Moral and Political Theory' in V.Kahn and L.Hutson (eds.) *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe* (Yale University Press 2001); T.Mautner 'Grotius and the Sceptics' *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 66, no. 4 (2005); B.Tierney *The Idea of Natural Rights* (Eerdmans 2001) ch. 13.

culture of the age'.⁴⁴ Critics of Tuck who stress that it is wrong to exaggerate the influence of the current of thought stemming from the Sextus translation perhaps miss the larger, cultural and intellectual, picture.

My second comment is to the effect that, quite regardless of how questions about intellectual influence are to be answered, claims raised in the modern natural law tradition can very plausibly be interpreted as an attempt to hold scepticism at bay. For Barbeyrac, we may note, the modern natural law tradition attempts to formulate 'duties, without which, society could not be maintained'⁴⁵ – and a programme of outlining a platform of fundamental (or minimally necessary) moral rules is one that makes intellectual sense when sceptical questions are widespread.⁴⁶ Whatever the patterns of influence may be traced amongst sixteenth- and seventeenth century writers, it is scarcely to be doubted that modern natural law thinking can be viewed as a response (whether adequate or inadequate) to questions that sceptics may raise.

My comments on the natural law tradition's relation to scepticism prepare a basis for consideration of Smith – whose writings respond to the tradition at a time Barbeyrac's and Hume's and Rousseau's (mutually very different) worries about the tradition had been made clear.⁴⁷ The form taken by Smith's response was, I suggest, that of refuting scepticism at the cost of throwing natural law's programme of minimal thinking to the winds. The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* responds to the sceptic by grounding moral values in the play of interaction. It understands interaction as a process where all conceivable moral and ethical values are up for discussion, and in doing so removes the rationale of considering only minimal duties 'without which, society could not be maintained'.

Smith's contemporaries were in no doubt that the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* addresses questions about the foundation of moral values; and Smith's text, itself, draws attention to foundational issues when it

⁴⁴ S.Clark *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford University Press 2007) p. 266.

⁴⁵ J.Barbeyrac *An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality* (London 1729) p. 3.

⁴⁶ In Tuck's presentation, the modern natural law theorist in effect taxes the sceptic with two rhetorical questions: must you, the sceptic, not agree that humanity is worth preserving? If so, must you not agree that a minimally-necessary set of duties must be endorsed?

⁴⁷ I do not discuss Hume or Rousseau in the present paper. On Barbeyrac, see J.Moore's 'Natural Law and the Pyrrhonian Contraversy' in P.Jones (ed.) *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (John Donald 1988). On Barbeyrac's concern with scepticism, see Barbeyrac *Historical and Critical Account* sections 3 and 4.

distinguishes between ‘praiseworthiness’ and mere ‘praise’.⁴⁸ What is praiseworthy merits praise, a reader gathers, whereas what is praised is what happens to be admired at a given place and at a given time. Smith underlines the importance of the distinction when he says that an individual is endowed ‘not merely with a desire of being approved of, but with a desire of being what ought to be approved of’.⁴⁹ In the present connection, the distinction is important because accounts of *what is praiseworthy* and *what is worthy of approval* become possible only if difficulties concerning scepticism have been surpassed.

My suggestion is that, for Smith, sceptical worries about the foundation of moral values are surpassed through interaction’s play. Stated differently, the criteria of moral conduct are not, for Smith, *presupposed by* interaction – as though all participants must first of all agree on what, praiseworthiness is. Rather, the criteria of moral conduct are *at issue in* interaction – so that interaction itself may address the question of how praiseworthiness (say) may be defined. If Smithian interaction does indeed have purchase on questions of definition – if it addresses questions not merely of *praise* but of *praiseworthiness* – then, we may note, it is able to reach beyond “local” discursive bounds. How may it do this? At this stage in his argument Smith introduces the figure of not a locally-influenced but an ‘impartial’ spectator.⁵⁰ But a difficulty arises: may the notion of the notion of impartiality be understood differently in different discursive communities? Does an appeal to the figure of an impartial spectator not presuppose what it was intended to show?⁵¹ A more complete answer to the question of how interaction may reach beyond local boundaries must, I propose, turn on identification of capacities that interaction, itself, contains.

Might such capacities be sought in the analysis of unconstrained and uncoerced discussion? Might discourse most readily reach beyond boundaries when interactive roles – in Smithian terms, the roles of “seer” and “seen” – circulate freely?⁵² Although faithful to the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*’ main argument, the line of thought is one that Smith does not explore in at least a detailed way.

⁴⁸ *TMS* p. 114.

⁴⁹ *TMS* p. 117.

⁵⁰ *TMS* pp. 116, 130-1.

⁵¹ The question is raised in A.Ferguson’s *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Imprint Academic 2007) pp. 164-6.

⁵² In effect, Habermas replies to this question affirmatively in his writings on an ideal speech situation.

5. *From Smith to Hegel*

I have argued that Smith breaks with the modern natural law tradition's conception of the self, and that he proposes an answer to problems of scepticism (problems which formed the modern natural law tradition's starting point) in distinctive terms. Behind Smith's innovations there lies, I have suggested, the notion of a theorising that adopts a dialogical perspective. In generations subsequent to Smith's, where may such a perspective most strikingly be found?

The question admits of numerous answers. I comment on one such answer here. In German Idealism of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the notion of human subjectivity is understood in a dialogical (social and interactive) sense.

A dialogical perspective on subjectivity underlies Fichte's and Hegel's discussions of 'recognition [*Anerkennung*]'. For Fichte, 'the finite rational being [the individual self] cannot ascribe to itself a free efficacy in the sensible world without also ascribing such efficacy to others'.⁵³ An implication of this claim is that human individuals must be aware of their relatedness to others if they are to be aware of themselves. They must be aware of themselves as standing in the play of 'recognition' through which they exist⁵⁴ and within which they stand. Although Fichte and Hegel concur on the importance of 'recognition', however, they differ significantly on how the category is to be seen/

One set of differences concerns recognition's beginning. For Fichte, the origins of recognition lie in 'a summons [*ein Aufforderung*] to the subject, calling upon it to exercise its efficacy'.⁵⁵ what Fichte has in mind is, apparently, a call from an already-interpersonal or already-interactive world. For Hegel, the notion of such a call presupposes the recognition that it was supposed to show. Seeking to avoid such circularity, Hegel sought (in a

⁵³ J.G.Fichte *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge University Press 2000) p. 29; see also p. 45.

⁵⁴ See G.W.F.Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press 1979) pp. 110-11.

⁵⁵ Fichte *Foundations* p. 31. For discussion, see R.R.Williams *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (State University of New York 1992) ch. 3.

series of his Jena writings⁵⁶) to trace the outlines of a no-holds-barred which commentators frequently describe as a struggle ‘for “recognition”’,⁵⁷ but which may more accurately be characterised as a struggle of which recognition is an unintentional result.⁵⁸

A further set of differences concerns issues that are central to the present paper. Fichte’s discussion of recognition remains tied to assumptions which, I have suggested, characterise the modern natural law tradition. A world where individuals receive recognition is, for Fichte, a world that respects the discrete ‘spheres [*Spharen*]’ of right that individuals possess.⁵⁹ Fichte’s notion of ‘spheres’ is, interestingly, singled out for especially harsh criticism by Hegel: ‘If the community of rational beings were essentially a limitation of true freedom, the community would be in and for itself the supreme tyranny’.⁶⁰ Whereas Fichte turns from an account of recognition’s beginnings to an account of right seen in terms of *Spharen*, Hegel for his part provides a history of recognition from the days of Mastery and Slavery (when recognition was ‘one-sided and unequal’⁶¹) to those of the French Revolution (when mutual recognition appeared).

With Hegel’s notion of mutual recognition,⁶² echoes of Smith’s account of interaction become apparent. I have suggested that, for Smith, interaction serves as a basis on which issues of scepticism may be addressed. I close with the further suggestion that, for Hegel, mutual recognition (free interaction) is the practical basis on which claims to scientific wisdom may be raised.⁶³ Smith’s view of interaction’s relation to a non-sceptical account of moral values provides, so to say, a conceptual model on which Hegel’s view of mutual recognition and science may be seen.

⁵⁶ G.W.F.Hegel *System of Ethical life and First [18-3-4] Philosophy of Spirit* (State University of New York Press 1979) pp. 124-5, 138, 235-42; L.Rauch (ed.) *Hegel and the Philosophy of Spirit [1805-6 Philosophy of Spirit]* (Wayne University Press 1983) pp 110ff.; *Phenomenology* pp. 112-9.

⁵⁷ A.Kojeve *Introduction to the reading of Hegel* (Basic Books 1969) p. 7.

⁵⁸ For further discussion, see R.Gunn ‘Hegel de tarihin bas laugici ve sonn [The beginning and the end of history in Hegel]’ *Baykus* Issue 2 (2008).

⁵⁹ *Foundations* p. 48. (Fichte’s notion of spheres is modelled on the notion of property-holdings; see discussion in section 3, above.)

⁶⁰ G.W.F.Hegel *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy* (State University of New York Press 1979) p. 145 (and pp. 144-7 generally). For discussion of the passage, see Williams *Recognition* p 83.

⁶¹ *Phenomenology* p 116.

⁶² *Phenomenology* pp. 112, 388-95, 405, 408.

⁶³ The same suggestion is made by E.Hammer in his edited volume *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge 2007) p. 118. For background, see Williams *Recognition* pp. 3, 141-4.

Conclusion

My paper attempts to prise Smith's writings – especially, but not exclusively, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – away from the grip of liberal individualist conventions. Smith, I claim, supplies an alternative to notions of monological selfhood and minimalism which lie at the root of modern natural law tradition (and of liberalism). Smith's relation to subsequent social and political theory is complex, and can be estimated only when the degree of his disquiet with prevailing intellectual attitudes is made evident.

