

ADAM SMITH AND FRIENDS

Richard Gunn

Not the least fascinating feature of Adam Smith is his centrality to a range of debates in the history of ideas. More precisely, it is the circumstance that so many aspects of his thought are central in so many ways. In the present paper, I illustrate this centrality by commenting on a specific theme in Smith's work and by setting it alongside the work of two earlier and two later thinkers. The theme which I consider is Smith's conception of human interaction. The "earlier" theorists whom I select for purposes of comparison are Calvin and the Rousseau of the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. The "later" theorists are the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Jurgen Habermas.

1. *Smith on interaction*¹

I take it to be uncontroversial that a complex and intriguing view of the relation between self and other (or between selves and others) underpins Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.² This view can, I suggest, be understood as an account of human interaction.

A first-time reader of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* [hereafter *TMS*] is apt to find Smith's view of interaction difficult to identify because essential parts of it receive discussion at 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 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 because, as Smith tells us, 'we have no immediate experience of what other people feel': our only way of gaining knowledge of others is by 'conceiving what we ourselves would feel like in a like situation'.³ 'By imagination,' says Smith, we place ourselves in his [the other's]

1 My account of Smith and interaction reproduces section 1 of my 'From Smithian Sympathy to Hegelian Recognition' (paper presented at the University of Kocaeli, Turkey, October 2009).

2 Adam Smith *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford University Press 1976).

3 *TMS* p. 9. On the separateness of individuals in Smith, see D. Marshall 'Adam Smith and the Theatricality of the

situation'.⁴ We attempt, that is to say, to place ourselves in the other's shoes; to employ a different 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.'⁵ 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.⁶

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, than from the situation that excites it':⁷ stated differently, *what* one sympathises with is not, merely, passions that individuals feel but individuals who occupy specific situations. Smithian sympathy involves judgements (on situations) rather than direct emotional contagion.⁸ My other point is that, 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 said, however, such knowledge is never 'immediate' and involves imagination.) 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:

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 situation, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance. 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.⁹

Moral Sentiments' *Critical Inquiry* vol. 10, no. 4 (1984); C.L.Griswold, Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press 1999) pp. 83-96.

4 *TMS* p. 9.

5 *TMS* p. 10.

6 *Ibid.* See editor's note on the same page.

7 *TMS* p. 12. For discussion of the passage, see Griswold *Virtues* p. 87. See also S.Fleischacker's distinction (in his *On Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations'*, Princeton University Press 2004, pp. 9-10) between Smith's 'sympathy-as-imaginative-projection' theory and the 'sympathy-as-infection' view.

8 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.

9 *TMS* p. 110.

According to the first arc, so to speak, of *TMS*'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 a 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-knowledge may be gained by direct introspection* is compatible with a lengthy tradition in European thought. The tradition is one where the individual is seen as "solitary" (rather than as "social"), as "private" (rather than "public") and as existing in abstract and atomistic terms. By contrast, the notion that *self-consciousness must be gained through knowledge of others* lies at the core of a tradition wherein a social individual becomes dialogically self-aware. Smith's answer to the question raised by my hypothetical reader underlies 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.¹⁰ In 1848, James Ferrier aptly described *TMS* as a study in 'Moral Optics':¹¹ the root idea underlying Smith's and Ferrier's formulations 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 view emerges if arcs (i) and (ii) of Smith's argument are combined? At first sight, the result appears to be disquieting. If *knowledge of others presupposes knowledge of the self* (first arc) and because *self-knowledge presupposes knowledge of others* (second arc), the argument of *TMS* 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 move in the same conversational exchange.

If *TMS*'s 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 as, in so doing, imagining what it would be like to be in 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' –

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J.Ferrier 'Criticism of Adam Smith's Ethical System' *Edinburgh Review* No. 74 (1986) p. 105. Cf. G.Davie *Ferrier and the Blackout of the Scottish Enlightenment*, *Edinburgh Review* 2003, p. 8.

the phrase is Haakonssen's¹² – implies a situation approach, and *vice versa*. A reader of *TMS* must, I suggest, familiarise him or herself with the view that, as interaction unfolds, one and the same individual plays the part of *the individual who sees* and *the individual who is seen*. One and the same individual plays both “spectatorial” and, so to say, “situational” parts.¹³ 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 subsisting in a fluid and dynamic sense.

2. Interpreting Smith

What should we make of Smith's view of interaction, thus summarised? The present section attempts to sharpen this general question by commenting on two issues raised in recent secondary works.

(i) Should Smith be seen as a sceptic or as a common sense theorist? Fleischacker, who sees Smith as 'a forerunner of “common-sense philosophy”',¹⁴ takes exception to Griswold's contention that passages dealing with sympathy and self-knowledge – in effect, passages on “interaction” – teach a 'moral psychology' which 'dovetail[s] with...scepticism'.¹⁵ A reader of the Fleischacker-*versus*-Griswold exchange may, it is true, experience disappointment (or irritation) when he or she realises that Smith, in Griswold's view, 'does not hold that as moral actors we normally treat morality as a skeptic would. Rather, we act as though commonsense realism were valid':¹⁶ the difference between the commentators reduces, it seems, to the circumstance that *Fleischacker sees Smith as having a commonsensical justification* whereas *Griswold sees Smith as having a sceptical justification* for operating in terms of existing common sense.

Here, I refer to the exchange between Griswold and Fleischacker because it illustrates a sense of unease sometimes experienced by commentators when passages in *TMS* on Smith's notion of interaction are set alongside passages where ethical discussion is pursued. This sense of unease is apparent in the circumstance that Fleischacker and Griswold disagree; it is likewise apparent in the distinction which Griswold draws between interactionist-and-sceptical and ethical-and-commonsensical sections of Smith's text. How may this sense of unease be dispelled? I suggest a two-stage

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

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

14 Fleischacker *On Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations'* p. 24.

15 Griswold *Virtues* p. 162. For Griswold, Smith's view of morality as 'communicated or grasped through sympathy' is an instance of scepticism's (or Pyrrhonist scepticism's) claim that 'morality is best understood within the confines of the “appearances” (that is, the phenomena) as they show themselves to ordinary agents' (ibid. p. 160).

16 Ibid. p165.

approach. First, it is conceded (with Griswold and against Fleischacker) that a difference of – so to say – conceptual level does indeed obtain between passages where Smith sets out his conception of interaction and passages where ethical issues are explored. When Smith comments on sympathy or imagination or self-knowledge he does not merely (that is to say) point to features of everyday modern life.¹⁷ Second, it is argued that Griswold's claim that Smith's interactionist passages are sceptical fails to identify – I should say: *narrowly* fails to identify – where the distinction between conceptual levels lies. Let me explain.

My explanation rests upon a suggestion – or, rather, two suggestions. Griswold regards the Smith of *TMS*'s interactive passages as a sceptic: but sceptical questions are, I propose, closely allied to questions about the conceptual basis on which truth claims and value claims stand. Indeed, *sceptical* questions and what may be termed *foundational* questions are, ultimately, the same questions asked with a different inflection and with a different expected answer in view. A sceptical-*cum*-foundational question is asked by a sceptic in order to demonstrate that criteria of judgement are non-existent or unknowable. A foundational-*cum*-sceptical question is asked by a foundationalist in order to discover criteria of a trustworthy kind. What are the implications of this point for an understanding of Smith on interaction? My second proposal is that Smith's account of interaction can be seen not merely as engaging with sceptical issues but as setting out a foundation on which moral or ethical judgement may rest. For Smith, I propose, interaction is not merely one area of life amongst others where ethical issues are present. Rather, interaction is the foundation of ethics and generates the criteria of normative and ethical judgement in and through itself.

Evidently, both of my suggestions require extensive supporting argument. No such argument is attempted here. What I do offer in support of my second suggestion is a note concerning the way in which *TMS* was seen by Smith and his contemporaries. According to Henry Home (Lord Kames), *TMS* gives an account – an inadequate account – of the 'foundation' for 'the various sentiments of morality'.¹⁸ In Reid's view, Smith's definition of 'Sympathy' is not accurate enough 'to be a foundation for a Theory of Morals'.¹⁹ Adam Ferguson complains, in a dialogue unpublished in his lifetime, that Smith's calling on sympathy to explain moral sentiments and his calling on moral sentiments to explain sympathy beats round a 'circle of objections'.²⁰ Smith for his part lists as one of the fundamental questions of moral theory: 'by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character [the character of virtue]...is

17 I stress this *merely*.

18 H.Home *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Liberty Fund 2005) p. 71.

19 The passage is given in E.H.Duncan and R.M.Baird 'Thomas Reid's Criticisms of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments' *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 38, No. 4 (1977).

20 A.Ferguson 'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation: David Hume, Robert Clerk, Adam Smith' in his *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Imprint Academic 2007) pp. 164-5.

recommended to us?²¹ In short, both the author of *TMS* and its eighteenth-century readers took it for granted – or seem to have taken it for granted²² – that the work addressed foundational issues.

(ii) Dennis C. Rasmussen observes that Rousseau, believes that 'people tend to be greatly concerned with the opinions of others' but goes on to argue that 'unlike Rousseau,...he [Smith] contends that this is actually a *good* thing'.²³ Concern with the opinion of others can (in Rasmussen's reading of Smith) serve as 'the very basis of moral conduct'²⁴ and have 'positive moral effects'.²⁵ How should we respond to the Rousseau/Smith comparison that Rasmussen here presents?²⁶

Smith's relation to Rousseau is the subject of a (short) section later in the present paper. I refer to Rasmussen's comparison here because it bears on points which my discussion so far have raised. Smith does indeed see other people's view of oneself – and, we must add, one's own view of other people – as a source from which moral judgement and thereby moral conduct may spring.²⁷ Precisely the passages in *TMS* which I have labelled “interactive” (or concerned with interaction) present the conceptual connection between the self's relation to others and normative judgement in this way. Until this point, we may endorse Rasmussen's position. Now, however, reservation enters the scene. In setting alongside one another passages where Smith sees self-and-other relations as *favourable* to morality and passages where Rousseau sees self-and-other relations as *unfavourable* to morality, Rasmussen takes no notice of what I have called a difference in conceptual levels between (on the one hand) Smith's account of interaction and (on the other) his discussion of moral and ethical claims.²⁸ This failure to notice a difference between levels becomes serious if, as I have suggested, Smith's account of interaction is (amongst other things) an account of moral *foundations* and his discussion of moral and ethical claims is a discussion of *what is founded* in an interactive way.

The significance of what I see as a failure in Rasmussen's account of Smith and Rousseau may be dramatised. Rousseau, as we shall see, writes as a trenchant critic of commercial society. In such a society, he argues, competitiveness is all-pervasive

21 *TMS* p. 265.

22 I introduce this qualifying phrase because the term 'foundation' as used by Home and Reid can be interpreted in broader and more specific fashions. My impression is, however, that an eighteenth-century writer who refers to foundations means what he (usually he) says.

23 D.C.Rasmussen *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith's Response to Rousseau* (Pennsylvania State University Press 2008), p. 12.

24 *Ibid.* p. 12, repeated on p. 114.

25 *Ibid.* p 118.

26 The Smith/Rousseau comparison here referred to is the second of three which *Problems and Promise* explores. I do not comment on comparisons (1) and (3).

27 I say *may* spring not because (according to Smith) other sources exist, but because not all views of self and other lead to conduct of a 'praiseworthy' (*TMS* p. 114) kind.

28 E.G.Smith likewise blurs conceptual levels when – in his 'Adam Smith and Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality: Inspiration or Provication?* *Journal of Economic Issues* Vol. 5. No. 2 (1971) p. 61 – he observes that the 'mutual “spectator function” of man in society' is 'sour and soul-destroying [in Rousseau] compared with Smith's [view]'.

and *appearance* counts for more than what is ethically the case.²⁹ Concern with other people's opinions is inevitable in a society where commercial relations prevail. When Smith for his part contends that concern with others' opinions can be favourable to morality, it may at first sight be tempting to see him as offering a (qualified) defence of commerce against Rousseau's critical claims. Rasmussen reads Smith in this fashion. If, however, Smith "interactive" passages are viewed as supplying (or as attempting to supply) a *foundation* of morality, the temptation vanishes and with it an inclination to interpret Smith in an apologistic – so to say, a "pro-commercial society" – way. Does interaction in commercial society go forward in such a way as to favour moral conduct (as Rasmussen by implication suggests)? Are market relations conducive to praiseworthy behaviour, as Rousseau denies and as a long sequence of *doux commerce* theorists maintain? Or is interaction in commercial society anathema to moral foundation? Is it (at most) a distorted and damaged and, in a word, alienated travesty of the notion of interaction which *TMS* presents? If *TMS* is read as a text concerned with moral foundations, such questions clamour for fresh attention. Here, my aim is not to supply answers. It is to indicate issues which a reader may usefully keep in mind when turning from Smith to Smith's friends.

3. Calvin

Jean Calvin (1509-64), French theologian and reformer and intellectual architect of the world-view which prevailed in Scotland between the Scottish Reformation of 1560 and the Scottish Enlightenment, may strike a reader as an unlikely place to open a list of Adam Smith's "friends". Smith, in Nicholas Phillipson's words, 'never forgot the fundamental Humean principle that theology...was a product of the imagination'³⁰ whereas Calvin's successors in Scotland were the presbyterian "High Flyers" who opposed Enlightenment attitudes and made a bane of Hume's life. Arguably, Smith had Scottish presbyterians in mind when he referred to 'whining and melancholy moralists who are perpetually reproaching us with our happiness'.³¹ It is true that Scottish Calvinism changed over time and, in Smith's lifetime, was increasingly willing to complement notions of revealed with notions of natural religion.³² The pace of such changes is not to be exaggerated, however. When Smith held a chair at

29 In O'Neill's words: 'For Rousseau the market is a sphere of deception' (J.O'Neill *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics*, Routledge 1998, p. 79).

30 N.Phillipson *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*, Allen Lane 2010, p. 67. A similar judgement on Smith's view of religion is given in E.Rothschild *Economic Sentiments*, Harvard University Press 2002, p. 135. See, however, Fleischacker op. cit. pp. 70-2.

31 *TMS* p. 139.

32 The place of natural theology remains to this day problematic in Calvinist thought because, as Calvin maintained, nature is *fallen* and saturated with sin: natural theology appeals to natural reason and natural order to find testimony of God's existence, but if nature is corrupt how can such testimony be found? Surely, as hard-line Calvinism claimed, only revealed (as distinct from natural) theology can bring results? For evidence of the power of the natural theology/revealed theology debate to stir twentieth-century passions, see E.Brunner and K.Barth *Natural Theology* (Wipf and Stock Publishers 1946).

Glasgow and was required to address questions of natural religion, students charged that his comments were 'flattering to human pride': allegedly, he treated 'the great truths of theology' as discoverable 'by the light of nature without any revelation'.³³ Smith nowhere in his works engaged in religious or anti-religious polemic – he was 'no iconoclast', as Phillipson reports³⁴ – but issues concerning Calvinism were unavoidable in the Scotland of Smith's day.

If Calvin and Smith differed, however, it is astonishing (given the centuries which divided them) how clear-cut the difference between them is. I comment on two areas of difference here.

First, Smith and Calvin endorsed opposing views of the human self. Smith, as we have seen, gives interaction a central place in his thinking. Accordingly he understands self-conscious individuality in social and interactive terms: 'Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without communication with his own species, he could no longer think of his character...than of the beauty or deformity of his own face...Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before.'³⁵ For Calvin, by contrast, an individual encounters him or herself most authentically when all worldly voices are stilled. When all dialogical considerations are stripped away, an individual is left alone – with himself and with his God. When Calvin's conception of the self is strictly monological and, when it is invoked, a reader experiences a curious sense that a deep and dark well has opened in a conceptually controlled text:

For seeing no man can descend into himself, and seriously consider what he is, without feeling that God is angry and at enmity with him,...the certainty here required is of no ordinary description...³⁶

He [God] testifies that He is propitious and benevolent to us: yet outward signs threaten His wrath. What then are we to do? We must close our eyes, disregard ourselves and all things connected with us, so that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.³⁷

33 John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, quoted in I.S.Ross *The Life of Adam Smith*, Oxford University Press 1995, p. 118.

34 Phillipson, loc. cit.

35 *TMS* p. 110.

36 J. Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Beveridge translation], Eerdmans Publishing Company 1989, Vol. 1 p. 434.

37 J. Calvin, Commentary on Paul to the Romans in *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Oliver and Boyd/Saint Andrew Press 1961, p. 66. (The passage is quoted and discussed by B.Gordon in his *Calvin*, Yale University Press 2011, p. 113.)

In section 1 of my paper I commented that Smith's social and dialogical view of the individual stands distinct from a lengthy tradition of thought which sees the individual in “solitary” and “private” terms. Calvin, I now add, belongs in this tradition and counts as one among its early modern founder-members.³⁸ A decision between monological and dialogical conceptions of the self has, I note in passing, momentous implications: Calvin's recommendation that a salvation-hungry individual should descend into himself and Smith's counsel that a 'disturbed' individual should seek out 'the company of a friend'³⁹ can scarcely be more dissimilar.⁴⁰

Why should Calvin's and Smith's positions, as here sketched be virtually the mirror image of one another? Why (stated differently) is the difference between them *so* vivid? An explanation may lie in the circumstance that they address one and the same question but answer it, or attempt to answer it, in different ways.

The question is, I suggest, that of how moral and epistemological scepticism may be avoided. In section 2, above, I proposed that *sceptical* questions and *foundational* questions are two sides of the same conceptual coin and that Smith, in *TMS*, discusses interaction as a foundation on which moral judgement may rest. Calvin, for his part, presents *faith* as a foundation – to be sure, a drastically different foundation – where a 'certainty' (his term) beyond the aporias of human and natural reason may be found.⁴¹ An intriguing question in the history of ideas is that of whether Smith and Calvin merely happen to address the same issue or whether Calvin in 1560 injected *anxiety regarding scepticism* into the bloodstream of Scottish thought, so that a line of continuity (or a line of common concern) links the Reformer and the author of *TMS*.⁴² Here, I do not explore issues in intellectual history other than to reassure a reader that Calvin was familiar with the challenge that sixteenth-century scepticism presented⁴³ and offered a response to its claims:

anyone who wishes to overcome all the [sceptical]

38 In the following century, Descartes reported the line of thought which he followed in a 'stove-heated room' where there was 'no society [*aucune conversation*] to distract me' (R.Descartes *Discourse on Method*, Penguin Books 1960, p. 44). What I refer to as the “monological” self and the “Cartesian” self are (roughly) one and the same.

39 *TMS* p. 22,

40 It is tempting to follow this line of thought further, noting (for example) Bouwsma's observation – W.J.Bouwsma *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, Oxford University Press 1989, p. 179 – that 'Calvin thought self-examination best performed privately': discussion may lead to the suggestion that *monological* self-examination (or introspection) entails self-division and is inegalitarian – there is always, necessarily, a superego-like self which asserts authority over an ego and an id – whereas *dialogically*-conducted self-examination (like Freud's 'talking cure') is egalitarian and leads to sanity. Smith's reference to a 'disturbed' individual and friendship (see previous footnote) likewise relates sanity to interaction. I do not explore this line of thought further here.

41 In effect, Calvin's position on the relation between faith and natural reason is the same as that of Montaigne at the end of his 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond': see M.de Montaigne *The Complete Essays*, Penguin Books 2003, p. 683. R.H.Popkin comments on Montaigne's fideism in his *The History of Scepticism from rasmus to Descartes*, Van Gorcum 1960, pp. 55-6.

42 My inclination is to say that this is the case.

43 Agrippa and Rabelais are mentioned (and deplored) in J.Calvin *Concerning Scandals*, Saint Andrew Press 1978, p. 61. (See Gordon *Calvin* p. 195.) Erasmus, another source of sceptical thought, was familiar to Calvin as a Biblical scholar.

scandals that I have mentioned...only needs to look within himself, for as soon as he realizes his own wretched [i.e. sin-sodden and sceptically bewildered] condition there will be a smooth, level road, not only for him to get to Christ but for Christ to get to him.⁴⁴

Stated differently: the 'fear of the Lord'⁴⁵ is the beginning of post-sceptical wisdom. Two points are worth noting in connection with this remarkable passage. One is that it draws upon Calvin's image of the individual, as above presented: the believer 'only needs to look within himself'. The other is that it avoids (or seeks to avoid) problems of relativism by appealing to a sense of certainty that is allegedly intrinsic to the monological self.

4. *Rousseau*

Although Rousseau and Smith appear never to have met,⁴⁶ their lives touched on two occasions. The second is the more famous: Smith offered counsel to Hume when, in 1766, a notorious quarrel between Hume and Rousseau erupted.⁴⁷ It is the first which concerns us here: when Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* appeared in 1755, Smith wrote a lengthy and – although the exact tone is difficult to judge – enthusiastic review.⁴⁸

Smith's review of Rousseau is important partly because of specific issues which it raises⁴⁹ and partly because it invites comparison between Smith and a theorist for whom commercial society is living hell. The present section confines itself to what I see as the larger Smith/Rousseau picture.

Rousseau, I suggest, thought of existing society as society where the claims of natural law theory were made good. More, he thought – and, perhaps, he was the first to think – that the categories of the modern natural law tradition were steeped in the

44 *Concerning Scandals* p. 20.

45 *Ibid.*

46 See Rasmussen *Problems and Promise* pp. 6, 51-4.

47 Smith to Hume 6 July 1766: 'I am thoroughly convinced that Rousseau is as great a Rascal as you, and as every man here [in Paris] believes him to be; yet let me beg of you not to think of publishing anything to the world upon the very great impertinence which he has been guilty of to you' (A. Smith *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Liberty Classics 1987, pp. 112-3).

48 Smith's 'Letter to the *Edinburgh Review*', which contains his own translations of passages from the *Discourse*, was published in the *Edinburgh Review's* second (1756) edition. It is included (on pp. 242-56) in A. Smith *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, Liberty Classics 1982. For commentary, see – besides West and Rasmussen, already cited – J. Lomonaco 'Adam Smith's "Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*"' *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 63, No. 4 (2002).

49 The most detailed consideration of such issues is Rasmussen's in his *Problems and Promise*. Section 2 of my paper points to what I see as a weakness in his reading of Smith.

notion of private property. The first sentences of the *Discourse's* second part make these claims explicit:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders...would have been spared if someone had pulled up the stakes and filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and that the earth itself belongs to no one!'⁵⁰

The sentences refer directly to the modern natural law tradition's account of original property acquisition. Rousseau's imaginary scenario where an individual encloses a piece of land, declaring 'This is mine!', and his invocation of a world where 'the fruits of the earth belong to everyone', allude to Pufendorf's notions of a negative and positive community of goods respectively.⁵¹ His regret that the 'imposter' who carved out his own sphere met with acceptance makes clear his hostility to property-based thinking and property-based society alike.⁵²

In short, Rousseau in 1755 wrote as a critic of what (in 1962) C.B.Macpherson termed "possessive individualism". Here, I tread carefully because Macpherson declared that what makes individualism 'possessive' is the circumstance that the individual is seen as 'the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them'.⁵³ That is to say, a possessive individual is a self-owner or an individual who has property in him or herself. When I construe Rousseau as a critic of possessive individualism I mean, however, to employ Macpherson's term in a looser sense. In the *Discourse*, Rousseau does indeed reject the claim that the individual is a self-owner⁵⁴ but he rejects much else as well. All conceptions of the

50 J.-J.Rousseau *A Discourse on Inequality*, Penguin Books 1984, p. 109.

51 S.Pufendorf *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, London 1729, Bk. IV, ch. IV. Pufendorf's distinction between a negative and positive community of goods (summarised by Carmichael in J.Moore and M.Silverthorne, eds., *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Carmichael*, Liberty Fund 2002, pp. 92-3) is present in all but name in Grotius. See H.Grotius *The Rights of War and Peace*, Liberty Fund 2005, pp. 420-1. John Locke's account of labour acquisition in his *Second Treatise* employs (in ways whose nuances are controversial among commentators) the same conceptual scheme.

52 The passage quoted invites much more extensive comment than is given here. For example, it may be noted that the location of the passage is essential to its meaning: Part Two of the *Discourse* considers social existence (whereas Part One considers natural existence) and its opening sentences establish the frame, so to speak, in which social existence is to be seen. It is true that the story which Part Two tells is historically organised, but the significance of this circumstance is that history contains a crisis: once private property is introduced, through deceit and credulity, nothing in human life can be the same again.

53 C.B.Macpherson *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford University Press 1962, p. 3; cf. p. 48.

54 'Besides, since the right of property is only conventional and of human institution, everyone may dispose at will of what he possesses; but this is not the case with the essential gifts of nature, such as life and liberty, which everyone

individual as a being circumscribed by a proprietorial boundary – symbolically, the boundary of a 'piece of land' – invite condemnation, in Rousseau's view. All accounts of the individual which turn on the notion that 'I ascribe to myself a sphere for my freedom from which I exclude the other' – the words are Fichte's⁵⁵ – are suspect, owing to the property-inspired image on which they rest. It is, I suggest, Rousseau's rejection of the notion that the individual is by nature a *proprietor* (whether or not he or she is a *self-proprietor*) which brings natural law theorists such as Grotius and Pufendorf into his critical frame.

What relation obtains between themes implicit in the passage quoted from the start of *Discourse*, Part Two, and Smith's work?

First, Smith's and Rousseau's conceptions of *property* have perhaps-surprising affinities. In Rousseau's view, private property is a 'human institution' – see note 54, above – and comes into existence through endorsement by others of an encloser's claims. For Smith, similarly, private property originates in the circumstance that 'it will appear reasonable to the spectator' that fruit which an individual has collected should be used as the individual sees fit.⁵⁶ Neither the *act of enclosing*, itself, nor the *act of collecting*, itself, but rather the *response to this action by others* is, in the Smith-Rousseau view of the matter, the point at which property rights (or property claims) arise. Both theorists are, it seems, at pains to dissociate themselves from Locke's contention that property may be seen in terms of asocial labour-mixing. Oversimplifying a complex issue, we may say that Locke (whose notion of labour-mixing is monological) thinks of property as natural whereas Smith/Rousseau regards property (however "private") as a "public" and social category.⁵⁷

Second, Smith appears to endorse Rousseau's judgement that the human self is not to be pictured as a proprietor. In one respect, it is true, Smith's conception of the self and (some) proprietorial conceptions of the self run in parallel. When Locke, for example, says that 'every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*'⁵⁸ the self is referred to twice

is allowed to enjoy and of which it is at least doubtful whether anyone has the right to divest himself' (*Discourse* p. 128).

55 J.G.Fichte *Foundations of Natural Right*, Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 48. Fichte, it may be noted, approves of the notion of a 'sphere [*Sphere*]' and thereby gives almost classic expression to a notion which Rousseau (whom Fichte admires) rejects.

56 A.Smith *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Liberty Classics 1982, p. 459; see, to the same effect, p. 17. The figure of the "reasonable spectator", employed in both passages, and the figure of what Smith terms the *impartial spectator* – not so far discussed in the present paper – are one and the same. For now, it is sufficient to think of the impartial spectator as generalisation of other individuals' gaze or look.

57 Two respects in which my comment is an oversimplification may be mentioned in passing. (1) Although private property exists socially rather than naturally, it *presents itself as though* it exists in monological and natural terms (cf. Marx on commodity fetishism). It *presents itself as though* it may be comprehended by examining merely an individual owner and an individually owned (or individually laboured upon) thing. If this is so, Locke's weakness is that he takes the appearance of private property at its face value. (2) In his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith from time to time refers to property in seemingly Lockean terms (see e.g. A.Smith *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origins of the Wealth of Nations*, Liberty Classics 1981, p. 138). See (for discussion which broadly harmonises with what I have said about property's self-presentation) Fleischacker *On Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations'* pp. 192-3.

58 J.Locke *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 287.

over or in a double sense: as owner and as owned. Smith for his part states that 'when I endeavour to examine my own conduct...it is evident that...I divide myself, as it were, into two persons'⁵⁹ – and, here, a doubled or twice-over conception of the self appears. The parallel is real but, I suggest, of minimal significance. For an upholder of the idea of self-ownership, the self-to-self relation which underpins human individuality is a property relation. For Smith, by contrast, a self is mediated to himself or herself through interaction;⁶⁰ an understanding of reflexivity need not draw upon metaphors or categories of a property-inspired kind.

Having discounted the significance of a similarity (or seeming similarity) between Smith's thought and the notion of self-ownership, we are in a position to let what is distinctive to Smith's view of selfhood emerge in a clear way. If the individual *becomes* a self-reflective or “adult” individual through interaction, as Smith believes is the case, the boundaries which demarcate one individual from others are blurry rather than hard-and-fast. Stated differently, there *are no* such boundaries and what is unique to this or that individual is – borrowing Ferrier's notion of 'Moral Optics'⁶¹ – less a demarcated area than a distinctive phenomenological (and interactive) point of view.⁶² In sum: Smith's notion of the self as defined through interaction and property-based thought's notion of a self with boundaries – or a self *defined by* boundaries – stand at opposite conceptual extremes. If the modern natural law tradition thinks of the self as a proprietor, as Rousseau alleges, Smith no less than Rousseau breaks with the tradition and strikes out on his own.

Standing back from these comments, should we conclude that Smith in his discussion of interaction offers a defence of commercial society against Rousseau's attacks? Does Smith identify (or attempt to identify) resources in commercial society which, *pace* Rousseau, make possible a morally authentic life? In section 2 of my paper, I have suggested that such a conclusion is over-hasty. Rather than making his peace with exchange-based social existence, Smith in *TMS* outlines a notion of interaction (and of moral foundations) which may or may not be at odds with market-based life. We should, I suggest, beware of assuming that Smith's account of interaction *must* harmonise with commercial requirements. We should explore the possibility that interaction as understood in *TMS* is eroded and undermined, and pressed into social interstices, when market relations prevail. To Rasmussen's view of Smith as a theorist who highlights commercial society's promise, I respond by proposing that the account of interaction which lies at the basis of Smith's discussion is an invaluable critical – socially critical – resource.

59 Namely 'the spectator' and 'the agent'. The quoted passage is at *TMS* p. 113.

60 See *TMS* p. 110 as quoted at note 9, above.

61 See text at note 11, above.

62 I am reluctant to summarise what I take to be Smith's position by saying that the individual is socially “embedded”. The notion of embeddedness has connotations of determinism which are absent from Smith's picture of an individual who may raise points and objections in his or her distinctive voice.

5. Hegel

From the historical figure named “Adam Smith”, a number of currents in intellectual history can be traced. The most familiar is indicated when an entry in the *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* lists Smith as one amongst the 'precursors or early representatives of liberalism'.⁶³ Another is noted by writers who link Smith's thought to “bourgeois radicalism” and (some) strands in the French Revolution.⁶⁴ Still a third becomes evident when attention is focused on German thought. This three-item list of intellectual currents stemming from Smith is not, of course, intended as exhaustive; nor are the items on it seen as mutually exclusive.

The present section underlines connections with German theorising and, within German theorising, the work of Hegel. More specifically, the section links *TMS* and Hegel's 1806-7 *Phenomenology of Spirit*. By way of general background, I note that 'eminent German thinkers of the day had made themselves familiar with the writings of the Scottish Enlightenment' and that two eighteenth-century German translations of *TMS* appeared.⁶⁵ There is nothing in the least fanciful in the suggestion that Smith's work exercised a formative direct and/or indirect influence on Hegel's thinking.⁶⁶ My comments concern, however, not channels of influence but conceptual links.

The link which I wish to underline is that between Smith's notion of interaction and Hegel's notion of mutual recognition. My reason for highlighting this link, or similarity, is less to break fresh conceptual ground than to present Smith in a company where he is seldom seen. The notion of mutual recognition referred to by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* is, we may say, the lodestar of a tradition of critical social theory which unfolded during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My suggestion is that views pioneered in *TMS* contributes to this tradition.

I turn first to Hegel. In the *Phenomenology* and in earlier writings of Hegel's Jena period, the term 'recognition [*Anerkennung*]' – which connotes social acknowledgement – occupies a central place. Discussion in the *Phenomenology* brings the notion of *mutual* recognition into sharp focus: arguably, mutual recognition

63 Art. 'liberalism' in T.Mautner *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, Penguin Books 1997, p. 317.

64 See E.Rothschild *Economic Sentiments*, Harvard University Press 2002, pp. 52-5; Fleischacker *On Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations'* pp. 197-8, 213-4, 264ff.

65 N.Waszek *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of 'Civil Society'*, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1988, pp. 80, 266.

66 What H.S.Harris refers to as 'Hegel's first absolutely certain reference to the *Wealth of Nations*' occurs in Hegel's 1803-4 Jena lectures on the philosophy of spirit: see G.W.F.Hegel *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, State University of New York Press 1979, p. 248. (The phrase quoted is from Harris's editorial note on that page. The note continues by pointing out that Hegel, who read English, appears to have been using an English-language text.) The impact of *TMS* on Hegel is more difficult to document but, I suggest, nonetheless real.

is seen as a foundation or premise on which 'science [*Wissenschaft*]' rests.⁶⁷ Two points regarding Hegelian mutual recognition may be noted here. One is that, where recognition is mutual, recognition is given by individuals and, in addition, *what* is recognized is the freedom of actions which (other) individuals perform. (Freedom is understood in a sense involving self-determination.) The other is that recognition *in order to count as such* must itself be recognized: more specifically, the act of recognition must be recognized as a free act. An implication of this second point is that recognition which is 'one-sided and unequal',⁶⁸ as distinct from recognition which is mutual, undermines itself: only mutual recognition is self-consistent. Recognition (together with freedom) comes into its own when, in Hegel's words, individuals '*recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another*'.⁶⁹

Can Smith's conception of interaction be helpfully ranged alongside the notion of mutual recognition? I suggest it can. At the most general level, Smith and Hegel are talking about the same thing: when Hegel refers to a 'unity' of self-consciousnesses wherein each enjoys 'perfect freedom and independence',⁷⁰ or when he writes of an 'I that is We and We that is I',⁷¹ it is evident – I submit – that *interaction* is his theme. In more specific terms, Hegel and Smith see interaction as sustained by its own, internal dynamic. For Hegel, a to-and-fro dynamic of *recognizing* and *being recognized* is sufficient to keep interaction in play. For Smith, similarly, sympathetic imagination keeps in being a to-and-fro dynamic of *agency* and *spectatorship*:⁷² so to say, a good conversation proceeds under its own steam. The point about a self-sufficient dynamic is important, I note in passing, if interaction is to serve as a foundation where moral judgement (Smith) or 'science' (Hegel) is concerned.

A further similarity is that Smith and Hegel think of the human self as interaction-based. Argument linking Smith's view of the self to interaction has already been presented. In Hegel's case, the self is seen interactively when the *Phenomenology* states that 'a self-consciousness [a human individual] exists *for a self-consciousness* [Hegel means: *for another self-consciousness*]. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness'.⁷³ Again: 'self-consciousness [human individuality] exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being recognized'.⁷⁴ The second of these passages makes the logically strong point that *everything which the individual is* is at issue in interaction's flow. Smith may or may

67 By 'science', Hegel means (approximately) wisdom or truthful knowing. Note that, according to the title-page of its first edition, the *Phenomenology* itself is a scientific text. If the *Phenomenology* is scientific, and if science is possible only when mutual recognition exists, it follows that Hegel saw the 'public' to which the *Phenomenology* is addressed – see G.W.F.Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press 1976, p. 44 – as a public of a mutually recognitive kind.

68 Hegel *Phenomenology* p. 116.

69 Ibid. p. 112..

70 Ibid. p. 110.

71 Loc. cit.

72 See note 59, above.

73 Hegel *Phenomenology* p. 110.

74 Ibid. p. 111 (translation altered).

not have been willing to endorse the logically strong position.⁷⁵ In any event, the claim that he views the self interactively remains.

Can still-more-specific points usefully be raised in the context of a Smith/Hegel comparison? Again, the answer is affirmative. Once general similarities between Hegelian mutual recognition and Smithian interaction have been established, differences (which may or may not merely be ones of nuance) can be underlined. I note one such difference here.

The difference concerns the part played in an account of interaction by the notion of interactive roles. For Smith, a distinction between the roles of *seeing* (the role of an imaginative spectator) and *being seen* (the role of a situated agent) is vital to a discussion of interaction. Interactive roles may (or must) circulate swiftly and may (or must) be distributed equally— but, for interaction to *be* interaction, a distinction there must be.⁷⁶ For Hegel, interaction does indeed involve a distinction between *recognizing* and *being recognized* but what matters most, if recognition is to be consistent, is that recognizer and recognized count as free. When freedom is recognized freely, then and then alone does recognition (together with freedom) exist in a non-self-contradictory form. The contrast here drawn between Smith and Hegel may at first sight seem slight. However, it may be sharpened by presenting it as a question: must interaction be seen in terms of role-definitions? Smith in *TMS* considers that such is the case. Hegel in the *Phenomenology* stresses freedom (in the sense of self-determination) and downplays the notion of roles.

The significance of the contrast just drawn between Smith and Hegel becomes apparent if its terminology is altered. So far, the present paper has said made no reference to the idea of a division of labour. Breaking this silence, I suggest that a *technical division of labour* (between “seer” and “seen”) is, in Smith's view, essential to interaction.⁷⁷ For Hegel, a realm of mutual recognition is a realm where individuals acknowledge one another directly – and a division of labour no longer obtains.

6. *Habermas*

If Smith is construed as a liberal individualist, the area of conceptual overlap between

75 That Smith *may* have been willing to endorse the strong position is suggested by a specific reading of *TMS*, namely, one where 'propriety' is understood not as a specific virtue but as (so to say) a lens through which *all* virtues are to be seen. (Compare *TMS* pp. 16-9 with p. 25.) Whether 'propriety' in *TMS* can *consistently* be understood in this fashion is a point not discussed here.

76 Without it, there is at most contagion of sentiments 'as in strings equally wound up' (Hume). See note 8, above.

77 I stress the term “technical” (in contradistinction to “social”). Famously, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* discusses the merits and demerits of 'commercial' society where a social division of labour is present: an individual is *a* butcher, *a* brewer, *a* baker and so on. Interaction as described in *TMS* presupposes no such division of labour: all that is involved is a “technical” division between interactive roles which can (or must) be circulated swiftly. Interaction perishes – or, at least, becomes moribund – if any one individual becomes “seer” or “seen” by life.

his thought and the thought of Jurgen Habermas is partial at best. If, however, Smith is seen as (primarily) the author of *TMS* and if his notion of interaction is emphasised, a point of connection emerges between his writings and Habermas's early work. The present section notes this connection, touches briefly on the theme of foundations and sketches a manner in which Smith's notion of the *impartial spectator* may be seen.

A summary of the relevant strand in Habermas's thought sets the scene for discussion. In his 'Wahrheitstheorien' of 1973, Habermas endorses the notion of a consensus theory of truth.⁷⁸ By a consensus theory of truth I understand a theory according to which truth consists in (some sort of) agreement. Evidently, not *every* agreement can count as an instance of truth: if it did, extreme relativism (and thence extreme scepticism) would be consensus theory's unavoidable result. For Habermas, agreement counts as truth when, and only when, it is reached under the conditions of an ideal speech situation.⁷⁹ A speech situation counts as *ideal* when communication within it is impeded neither by 'external contingent influences' nor by communication's own 'structure'.⁸⁰

How may the 'structure' of communication impede communication itself? What must communication be like if impediments immanent to communication are absent? Two passages in which Habermas addresses such questions suggest a basis for comparison with Smith. The first comes from the 'Wahrheitstheorien': 'the communication structure gives rise to no constraints only if there is a symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all participants in the discourse to choose speech acts and carry them out'.⁸¹ The second, which is more-or-less equivalent in meaning, comes from a lecture-series given by Habermas at Princeton in February-March 1971: 'Only if there is a symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all possible participants to choose and perform speech acts does the structure of communication itself produce no constraints'.⁸² The passages illustrate, first, the centrality of *interactive roles* to Habermas's understanding of a speech situation. For Smith, likewise, the notion of interactive roles is vital. Habermas, it is true, thinks of such roles in terms of speech act analysis – the roles which he has in mind are those of questioning, stating and so forth – whereas Smith distinguishes merely between “seer” and “seen”. This difference notwithstanding, it is clear that Smith and Habermas are not merely talking about the same thing. They are talking about the same thing in the same way.

78 J.Habermas 'Wahrheitstheorien' in H.Fahrenbach (ed.) *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion*, Pfullingen 1973/unauthorised “samizdat” translation: 'Theories of Truth by Jurgen Habermas' (anonymous translator) pp. 6, 8, 10, 15-6. My page references are to the samizdat edition. The later Habermas turns away from consensus theory – see, for example, J.Habermas *Truth and Justification*, MIT Press 2005, pp. 8, 36-42, 250, 257 – but his reasons (good or bad) for doing so do not concern me here.

79 'Wahrheitstheorien', samizdat edition pp. 30-5.

80 Ibid. p. 31.

81 Ibid. p. 32. For commentary, see T.McCarthy *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*, Polity Press 1984, p. 306.

82 J.Habermas *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, Polity 2001, p. 98.

Such a comparison is admittedly general: but there is more to be said. Above,⁸³ I have ascribed to Smith the view that, as interaction unfolds, one and the same individual plays the part of *the individual who sees* and *the individual who is seen*. One and the same individual plays both parts, whether together or in sequence. Taking this line of thought a stage further, we may suggest that interactive roles (or “parts”) circulate as interaction takes place. If the interaction is unconstrained, the parts or roles circulate as the interaction itself – which is to say: exploration of the subject-matter in hand – dictates. If unconstrained circulation is in play, then (in Habermas's terminology) the chances of playing specific parts have a 'symmetrical distribution'; nothing in the 'structure' of interaction impedes interaction *per se*. A reader will already have sensed where my Smith/Habermas comparison is leading: Smith's conception of interaction, when interpreted in the manner here suggested, almost uncannily resembles Habermas's conception of an ideal speech situation.

What should we make of this resemblance? Here, I suggest that we take advantage of a perspective which it offers on a (so far as the present paper is concerned) hitherto-not-discussed theme in *TMS*. The theme is that of the *impartial spectator*: having advised us to see ourselves as others are likely to view us, Smith goes on to comment that the morally concerned individual 'regards himself, not so much according to the light in which they [viz., others] actually regard him, as according to that in which they *would* regard him *if they were better informed*'.⁸⁴ The morally concerned individual – or, in Smith's terms, the individual who loves 'praiseworthiness' rather than 'praise'⁸⁵ – submits him or herself to the judgement of a spectator whose view and whose knowledge is detached from local prejudice. In a well-known passage, Smith describes the 'supposed impartial and well-informed spectator' as 'the man within' and as 'this demigod within the breast'.⁸⁶ Such formulations suggest that the impartial spectator is to be pictured as an *individual* – albeit an *impartial individual*. In a moment, I shall suggest that such a picture is misleading.

What relation (if any) obtains between Smith's notion of an impartial spectator and Habermas's notion of an ideal speech situation? My answer to this question comes in two stages.

First, I propose that the notions arise in response to the same conceptual need. The need is that for an *identification of foundations* and (stating the same thing in different terms) a *rebuttal of scepticism*.⁸⁷ In Habermas's case, the notion of an ideal speech situation is introduced to explain how, and when, *agreement* may count as

83 In section 1, final paragraph.

84 *TMS* p. 116 (emphasis added).

85 See *TMS* pp. 113-4.

86 *Ibid.* pp. 130-1. (Why 'supposed'? Smith, I take it, refers to the circumstance that the impartial spectator does not – perhaps, cannot – have *de facto* existence. Terms emphasised in the passage quoted at note 84, above, likewise emphasise counterfactuality.)

87 On foundational-*cum*-sceptical questions, see (all too briefly) section 2, above.

truth. For Smith, the notion of an impartial spectator serves to show how judgements concerning normative values (represented, in Smith's terminology, by judgements about 'praiseworthiness') may be made. For both writers, a move to what Habermas terms 'idealisation'⁸⁸ is motivated by a concern to show how scepticism's challenge may be met.

Second, I propose that a common conceptual need is only part of the story: Smith's account of an impartial spectator and Habermas's account of an ideal speech situation are not merely *alternative answers* to the question of how a common need may be met. They are, rather, versions of the same answer – or the same answer formulated in alternative terms. Both writers think of interaction (or, metaphorically, “conversation”) as capable of being conducted across categorial boundaries – and as able to reach binding results on conceptually fundamental issues.⁸⁹ Smith's claim that issues of 'praiseworthiness' (rather than merely of 'praise') may be addressed in moral discussion⁹⁰ implies a belief *that* conversation be conducted across categorial divisions. Habermas's notion of open conversation conducted in an ideal speech situation is, in effect, an attempt to show *how* cross-categorial discussion may proceed. So to say, Habermas's notion of an ideal speech situation fleshes out the account of interaction that *TMS* provides. Carrying this line of thought a stage further, we may suggest that Smith's impartial spectator is best seen not as an individual (however allegedly “impartial” the individual may be) but as a pattern of social relations; more specifically, it is best seen as the pattern of social relations which an ideal speech situation presupposes and brings into play.

Standing back, we may concede that numerous questions arise from what has been said. Not the least of them is that of how interaction relates to its 'ideal' form. In reply to this question, I offer two observations. One is to the effect that 'ideal' interaction *is* and *remains* interaction, just as (in Habermas's words) 'the design of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied with the structure of potential speech'.⁹¹ Actual and ideal forms of interaction are, to be sure, distinct⁹² but nothing is gained (and the thought of Smith and of Habermas is falsified) if a wedge is driven between them.

My second observation is that 'ideal' interaction need not be seen as a merely conceptual – perhaps, a transcendental – presupposition of interaction in the everyday

88 Habermas *Truth and Justification* p. 18.

89 By *binding results* I mean (a) results which *should*, logically, be taken to be binding and (b) results which are fallible. As conversation proceeds, results which should be taken as binding may change over time.

90 Does Smith indeed claim this? I think he does: moral discussion has purchase on issues of 'praiseworthiness' *via* the notion of the impartial spectator, and the notion of the impartial spectator has interactive roots. Occasionally, commentators see Smith's notion of an impartial spectator as a move *away* from the notion of interaction – see J.Dwyer *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, John Donald 1987, ch. 7 – but this approach I take (without argument) to be a mistake.

91 J.Habermas 'Toward a Theory of Communicated Competence' in H.P.Dreitzel (ed.) *Recent Sociology No. 2*, Macmillan 1970, p. 144.

92 In a 'commercial' society (we may say, rounding out our Smith/Habermas comparison) the former is most often an alienated version of the latter.

world. The later Habermas appears to think of the ideal/actual relation in this way. An alternative view is that the everyday interaction anticipates, in a proleptic fashion, not-yet-existing social relations.⁹³ Which view does Smith favour? On the one hand, we may note that, like the Rousseau of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Smith envisages no transition beyond the 'commercial' present: notions of prolepsis appear to be excluded. On the other hand, however, the circumstance that Smith left the notion of the impartial spectator in a merely metaphorical condition⁹⁴ may be seen as indicating unhappiness on his part with a concept-based or “transcendental” approach.

7. Concluding comments

I have set Smith alongside a range of reputedly “non-Smithian” theorists in order to bring out the diversity of viewpoints from which *TMS* can be seen. Calvin, Rousseau, Hegel and Habermas are not, of course, the only non-Smithians (or seeming non-Smithians) who can be compared with Smith in a theoretically productive way. They are, however, theorists in whose company sometimes surprising features of Smith's thought springs to light.

Comparison of Smith with Calvin and Rousseau highlights the extent to which Smith breaks with monological traditions of European thought. One such tradition is Calvinism itself. Another is the modern natural law tradition, whose focus upon the figure of the private proprietor Rousseau opposed. In place of the solitary and (see note 38, above) 'Cartesian' conception of selfhood which is common to Calvinism and natural law theory, Smith presents a dialogical view of the self to which interaction with others is the key. The suggestion that Smith is a dialogical theorist is carried further in my sections on Habermas and Hegel.

Besides commenting on conceptions of the self, my paper has at various points raised questions about how conceptual foundations are to be seen. My suggestion is that, for writers whose thought is dialogical, questions about interaction and questions about conceptual foundations are inextricably linked: interaction *is* the foundation on which truth claims rest. This is so in regard to Hegel for whom (I have proposed) 'science' rests on mutual recognition. It is so in regard to Habermas, for whom validity claims may be redeemed through the intersubjectivity which goes forward in an ideal speech situation. And it is so in regard to Smith. Smith's *TMS* is, I suggest, the first in a series of European works where discussion of interaction has a foundational – that is, a scepticism-rebutting – role.

93 Habermas employs the notion of *anticipation* in his 'Wahrheitstheorien' (p. 34) and in his Princeton lectures (*On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction* p. 103. See McCarthy *Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* p. 310. I do not attempt to unpack the precise meaning of Habermasian *anticipation* here.

94 See quotations given at note 86, above.

In sum: three hundred years after the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published, Smith returns a deeply human answer to the question of how the demons of scepticism which plagued Calvin might be overcome. Dialogical thought which unfolds in the centuries that follow deepens Smith's answer and thinks through implications of his claims.

September 2011