

THE ECONOMY OF FLESH: A READING OF ADAM SMITH'S THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS

ECONOMÍA DE LA CARNE: UNA LECTURA DE THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS DE ADAM SMITH

Jonathan Pimentel Chacón
Escuela Ecuménica de Ciencias de la Religión
Universidad Nacional

Resumen

El artículo presenta una lectura del libro de Adam Smith (1723-1790) intitulado *Teoría de los sentimientos morales* en la que se enfatiza su carácter teológico. Al enfocarse en cómo representa Smith al “salvaje”, los procedimientos que sigue para pensar la encarnación y los vínculos que establece entre teoría económica y economía teológica, se introduce un modelo para leer el pensamiento político de Smith.

Palabras clave: Adam Smith, economía teológica, teoría de los sentimientos morales, encarnación, teoría económica.

Abstract

This article presents a reading of Adam Smith's (1723-1790) *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that demonstrates its theological adscription. Focusing on how Smith represents the savage, the means by which he theorizes the question of incarnation and the ways he links economic theory and theological economics, I introduce an entire model for how to read Smith's political thinking.

Keywords: Adam Smith, Economic Theology, Theory of Moral Sentiments, Incarnation, Economic Theory.

Introduction

The achievement of happiness is the organizing principle of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. By organizing principle, I mean that even the conflict or tension between selfishness and preoccupation with others is inscribed within the assumption that each human being procures its own happiness. The idea of happiness organizes Smith's philosophy as his proposal is based upon the idea of a fully developed humanity and not some sort of open justification of social domination. This article follows this hypothesis through a reading that emphasizes Smith's theological discussions. Throughout the article, I demonstrate that there is no contradiction between moral and economic theory. Furthermore, I show that the continuity of morality and economics is possible due to Smith's understanding of God. Smith's project effectively has as its center the assumption of God's immanent participation in history. From this assumption comes his proposal of an economy of the flesh. I argue that Smith's understanding of flesh presents a fundamental interpenetration of theology and economic theory. For him, flesh is a vicious and powerful element that must be incarnated, and not destroyed, within the human body and the social and political body.

One of Smith's basic ideas is that human beings naturally tend to surpass or overcome the limits of their nature. Although this can appear at first sight as a contradiction, for Smith nature is in permanent digression with itself. The eccentricity of human nature, its rebellion against itself, is what makes it possible even for the "greatest ruffian" to experience a discomfort within himself. This natural discomfort is the result of a "clash:" while trying to affirm and preserve its own life, human nature also at the same time manifests "sorrow from the sorrow of others." Human nature splits itself, tries to affirm its individuality but, at the same time, moves itself towards the other by attempting to carry itself beyond its "own person." Thus, this clash and division is experienced by the person as a manifestation of the tendencies of his or her nature. The person does not have control of these movements that modify his or her existence from its core.

Smith presents the person as a sensible *topos* in which nature encounters itself at an economic disjuncture: how to conserve the person's life at the same time that he or she moves herself to experience the life of others.¹ There is a second disjunctive, namely that nature does not have or cannot provide persons with the capacity to fully embrace

¹ See Göçmen (2007) for further discussion.

the suffering, joy, or pain of the other person, for "our senses will never inform us of what he suffers" (Smith 9). The others remain unknowledgeable as sensible beings to a person's senses as they are entirely concentrated on themselves. Being a sensible being implies, for Smith, being closed off to others. A person is sensible or aware only of themselves and of the experiences of their existence. They recollect or capture experiences in order to preserve their own lives.

Smith thus distinguishes between senses and imagination. The senses, because they are attached to the immediacy of the person's self-experience, lack exteriority. It is only through imagination that a person can experience, or at least have a sense of, the intimate life of the other. The distinction Smith proposes seeks to connect sensibility and imagination; he states that it is from the data provided by the senses that our imagination enables us to "place ourselves" in the other person's situations. Smith's notion of self is of a capsule of sameness that can be accessed only by the power of imagination. The relationship with the other is always based on a procedure located within the person: as a result of sensitive stimulation the self can imagine the sensible experiences of another person. Imagining is, in its most basic meaning, an attempt to transmigrate—to relocate one's own

center amid what is suffered by other persons in their bodies. However, Smith also presents an inverse process, one in which it is not the intentionality of the person that makes intimacy possible, but their own damaged self:

Persons of delicate fibres and weak constitution of body complain that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in their correspondent part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner (Smith 10).

Although the hierarchical relationship between sensible experience and imagination appears, this description introduces another dimension. What interrupts and irrupts within the realm of a person's self-closure is the uncontrollable damaged other. It is not the intentionality of the self that constitutes its field of experiences but the lacerated body of the "wretched." The self's secure dwelling in its world is taken into the deepness of terror by an anomalous body that resists the apprehension of the self's gaze. Damaged

bodies, as rebelling angels (Milton 3) pierce the “delicate” person's bubble of selfhood, rebelling against the “throne and monarchy” of the person, distancing itself from anything that surpasses its own satisfaction. Misery and pain concentrated in another person's body prompt this immediate corporeal response. Smith's ulcerated bodies rebel against the predominance of the spectator. It is not the spectator who arranges the surroundings but the unpredictable smells, texture, and voracity of the wounded other. It is not the spectator's interests and attentiveness that modify its sensibility and imagination but the unfathomable yet irruptive concreteness of the “beggars”-Smith's all-embracing designation to evoke the foreign and monstrous.

For Smith, nevertheless, the beggars are apparitions without context. Their wounds and fetidness are sudden irruptions that are thought to be unrelated to the landscapes of the “delicate person.” Smith describes the experience of the production of pure bodies and corporeal disgust. The beggar is pure battered physicality; it lacks, for Smith's spectator, the components of a full person. It is precisely the beggar's condition of putrid body, its unrecoverable otherness that produces repulsion: it is a *nudum hominem* (Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ*, 8). This notion initially refers to a Christological dispute: was Jesus merely clothed

as a man or was he an angel with the appearance of a man? Smith's bare man is the one that is indistinguishable from its wounds, basically *terrenae carnis* (Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ*, 7). The bare man enters, producing terror into the field of possible corporeal experiences of Smith's spectator because it is terrestrial flesh. The spectator is obligated to experience in its own body what is commonly not regarded or, more precisely, not experienced. Therefore, Smith's bare man (*nudum hominem*) or beggar causes in the “delicate person” an unintended variation in its sentimentality. The reverse of Smith's bare man is the body of the man of God or “uomo di Dio,” and refers to that which is perennially fragrant and clean.

There was fear and weakness, dizziness and guilt on the one hand, and on the other, the yearning for warmth, plenty, good health, and most for all for well-being and the body's safety. The delician paradise was a great votive casket full of dreams, desires and hidden fears [...] The nostalgia for the lost Eden kindled the desire for what was missing: above all for the body's permanence, the total efficiency of its working parts: eyes without their worldly spark, strong teeth, an abundance of years (Camporesi 265).

Camporesi's description, although not related to Smith's context or work, nonetheless expresses the atmosphere

of Smith's introduction to his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* with its combination of gazes, odors, and unexpected presences. It points to the manifest tensions that permanently question Smith's project.² His project is fundamentally a daring and permanent series of anthropological speculations and an attenuated materialism.³ And these speculations and seeds of materialism have, as I argue here, a point of inflection in the emergence of what Smith considered to be its exterior, that which signals the limits of its own clean and united self,⁴ a strong and fundamental assumption about the deity's design of his world,⁵ and an explicit irrationalism that functions as ground for his economy of flesh and, as part of the same, to create a philosophical framework that enables the matching between satisfaction and punishment. Albeit ubiquitous throughout Smith's philosophical interventions, it is in Frankenstein where another and relevant sentimental texture of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is most clearly expressed:

I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished,

and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed on my clothes, endeavoring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams (Shelley 36).

Those are the words of Victor Frankenstein describing a "dreary night of November" when he managed to create life. With his "instruments of life," Frankenstein transforms a lifeless thing into a catastrophe that breathes. Smith's own attempt to create and administrate life has a tone of despair and wild dreams. He is witnessing the opening of millions of new eyes and the consumption of countless lives at the time that his deep ideals of masculinity and commerce appear to be in contradiction. When Smith proceeds to create life that intention underlies his continuing and elastic notion of nature, and every time he feels that he is achieving it, he realizes that his world is dusk, ruins, and miserable splendor. Here Smith appears not merely as the untamed proposer of markets and domination but as a dream of a dream. With *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* one can access an

2 See for similar reading about the atmosphere of Smith's reflection see Vincent Bissonette (2012) and David Marshall (1984).

3 See Ronald L. Meek (1976; 2000).

4 For the context of this process see Margaret Hunt (1993).

5 Kleer (1995); Clarke (2007).

unusual zone of social conflicts as they are expressed in the form of philosophical inquiries. Form, as important as it can be, cannot be distinguished from the combination of formation and dissolution of existential spheres that both embrace and reject individuals. Smith is capturing and communicating his wild dreams. He is forming plans and strategies to surpass their most dangerous implications and trying to prolong their most joyful possibilities. In order to do that he had had to expel the demons that haunt the divine character of his society. Although it does not do so immediately, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* eventually reveals itself both as a lament and an affirmation whose center are theological procedures thought to be capable of recollecting and suppressing the abnormalities, excesses, and waste of life without destroying it completely. The economy of flesh points toward an incarnational mode of life that does not negate flesh but subsumes it within different bodies.

The Wretched

It is because of this interest in subsuming differences that the figure of the wretched plays a central role in Smith's philosophy. The wretched being, that laughs and sings, is closed, cloistered off, and lacks the language and strength that are necessary to refer (to give reason) to its situation.

The figure of the wretched one must be understood as a form to designate "the pure carnality" insensible to itself, lacking itself, hidden to its same presence as a productive unit. The wretched being is possessed by its despair and erring; it laughs and sings, according to Smith, because it has forgotten its own location. The wretched are infants that cannot access their roots: their pain and wounds block and cancel their condition as spectators. As the mother responds to the infant's crying, the wretched one, the closed carnality, depends on the other's gaze and requires its maternal warmth in order to survive. It is a stationary flesh, trapped in time and in its mute pain. The wretched is an exhausted physic. It does not have a future; it lacks humanity. Thus, because it does not feel fear or anxiety, in significant ways it is not in the world. The world, nature, its anatomy possessed it. It cannot even attain the condition of despair. It does not know about its mortality; it ignores its future and its extinction. Its laughs and songs are screams from the deep and an exposure of its broken body. It is an empty body, a deepness from which something familiar arrives; it is also part of the spectator. Because of that the wretched does not belong to death of life. The sun burns its skin, the light illuminates its face, but the wretched one cannot establish relationships. The spectator would say that the wretched one shares the condition of the dead,

as one who has been deprived of all its sensible experiences, of the company of others, of being recognized as life that lives. Hence, the wretched is like the cold of the tomb. The textures, cadence, and vital rhythms of life are closed to it; it makes noises while it is a prey of its not developed self. That flesh that screams in the middle of the streets will not be forgotten, because it irrupts into the spectator's gaze and introduces an anomaly.

The "wretched poor," in contrast to the dead, is not in repose. It is in permanent movement; it is intense noise, flesh that extends itself to touch all borders. No one remembers or suffers on behalf of the wretched, yet its proximity to the world of the spectators produces discomfort. Smith affirms: "The most important principles in human nature, the dread of death – the great poison of happiness, but the great restraint upon the injustice of mankind; while it afflicts and mortifies the individual, guards and protects the society" (Smith 13).

The wretched one does not fear death; it cannot because it ignores it as it ignores itself. It is not happy; neither does it practice justice, because it is not an individual. Because of all this the wretched does not protect or guard society. Instead, lacking spirit, it returns all its weakness to society. Its apparition itself posits an economic

question: What must a society do with those who lack the condition of individuals? Smith does not respond to this question immediately, but neither does he forget about it.

The mutual sympathy excludes, from the start, the damaged one because it supposes the encounter of two individuals, two beings that recognize themselves as carriers of humanity. To be more precise, the mutual sympathy occurs within or through practices of friendship and intimacy demarcated by the social division of labor. Sympathy can be expressed within the limits of intimacy, kept away from the interruptions of the different. Therefore, sympathy creates links while it establishes separations: its equilibrium consists in an exchange of pain and joy that can be understood and returned. Sympathy belongs to the circuit of exchange; it always expects a return, a surplus. Smith's theory also supposes an abysmal zone in which sympathy cannot be expressed. There are certain pains, anguishes, and joy that even inside the sphere of one's intimate circles cannot be embraced because the other's sentiments escape the foundational capacities of the spectator.

This sorrow or joy that the spectator cannot experience as the other for Smith constitutes excess. To him they are expressions of passion that surpass the limits of propriety because they cannot

be assumed by the spectator's gaze. For him, even in the intimate sphere, the only sphere in which sympathy can be expressed, emotional expression must fulfill the principle of reciprocity. This principle is the one that makes the regulated exchange of emotions possible. It functions as a guarantee that emotional stock can be conserved.

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic spectator they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper; and unsuitable to the causes that excite them (Smith 16).

The calculated exchange of sympathy has a social importance; for Smith the adequate regulation of individual sentiments makes the social continuum possible. The rupture of this delicate and primordial economic act holds within itself the possibility to create alterations in the spirit's movement. The propriety of affections is linked to the necessity and possibility of recognition and, along with this, to the production and reproduction of the social. The tense discernment about what is proper and what improper, as it is described by Smith, locates the life

of passions as an economic object. For Smith the expenditure of sentiments is the condition of possibility of any other economic operation or, more properly, of economics. The equilibrated disposition, that reaches its paroxysm in the attitudes of the martial spirit, is the state that makes sympathy possible. Everyone must take care of their passions, protect themselves from these passions, and take possession of them in order to be recognized as spectators. Despite all this, the spectator is not able to sympathize fully with the other that is within its intimate circle. This lack of sentimental formation is the cost of the economy of calculated exchange.

The spectator feels and suffers because he cannot be properly embraced in his emotionally limited situations, where he cannot retain his overflowing passionate heart. However, the spectator also wants to sing and laugh but he must do the impossible and overcome the sentimental torrent that damages the logic of return. Smith describes that vacuum in which the equilibrated sympathy cannot institute recognition. Because of that, we can best read his theory of sympathy as a meditation about loss, the lack expressed by the other that screams for "a more complete sympathy" (Smith 22). To this lack, imposed by the limits of propriety, Smith opposes the necessity to tamp down the discomfort that is generated by the spectator's gaze.

If there is not equivalence between compassion and original sorrow it is not because that is a feature of human nature. Smith does not describe a condition; rather he proposes a principle of political economy. The attempt to experience the other is blocked, according to his theory, because it incorporates an excess: it implies the interruption of the accelerated rhythm of self-satisfaction; it induces a break within the circuit of the market's production and expansion.

He explains: "In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectator" (Smith 22). With this, according to Smith, the wound produced by the impossibility of recognition is sutured. Every spectator must assume the inevitable incommensurability of its own sorrow and joy. This is one of the characteristics of Smith's spectator: to retire from the social life, putting above himself his despair and ecstasies, the sentimental excess that can surpass the social concord. The spectator is intrinsically broken; he recognizes his own condition of being human by trying to ignore that this sentimental economy hurts his life. In trying to suture the lack he has, the spectator cannot relate his own sentiments, those which are more significant, with his

social life. On the one hand he must depart from himself and on the other hand he must remain in silence with himself and listen, without feeling his sentiments. The presence of the other serves as a reminder to him that nothing must disturb the gray tone of the firm emotions. The "candid and impartial light," meanwhile, burns the mute intimacy of the spectator.

Being a master of oneself implies ignoring one's broken sentimentality every day. Within the ambit in which each spectator exercises sympathy, conversation about the surfaces of everyone's banalities is allowed. Because of that, the "poor wretched" one that screams, and the latent howl that dwells in each spectator, are beyond the limits of sympathy. Smith's spectator walks on the edges of his own catastrophe and believes that it is possible to survive within a society of radically lacking individuals. The spectator, in Smith's presentation, must choose sadness and concealment in order to produce wealth.

The spectator wants to be the master of an impossible silence. He wants to quiet what is more intimate through words; meanwhile his flesh is being devoured by a death that he does not know. This is a kind death that is not the secure one that produces just a modest fear. The tranquility of calculation makes the master a servant

of the silence and howls at those that are always interrupting the moderate conversations of friends. The words without intensity are the condensation and expression of “self-denial” and “self-government”: control of a fracture that must be cured by engrossment. From this perspective, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a theory of the intensity of the voice. What unhinges Smith's theory of moral sentiments are the demands and laments of the “sufferer” because in them the power of the master is revoked. They transform the sentimental geography and make it impossible to ignore them. But it is not just the noise that produces discomfort and disgust in the spectator; so too does the public exposition of fluids and grimaces. The flesh that struggles to express what weighs it down, particularly the weight of the prospect of death, represents for Smith an affront to sociability. It is the duty of the spectator to make his most intense experiences appear as neutral as a cold wind. The other exists just in the measure that this other is a copy of the spectator. Then selfishness is not surpassed but rather is located within a calculation: if the other maintains its propriety, the spectator can take of her, but she will take care of him. This is the meaning of Smith's sentimental exchange and reciprocity.

Love

Smith does not want to negate Christianity. Moreover, his reflection on love has Christianity as a framework. His understanding of love is central for his project of an equilibrated society: “As to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbor, or, what comes to the same thing, as our neighbor is capable of loving us (Smith 25)”. Smith starts here with a reference to Christianity, a reference in a strict sense: he does not attempt to think of love from its basis in Christianity but to depart from it. He locates his own concept of love as an initial instance that announces a non-contingent law of love. Nature's law subsumes Christianity's law and in subsuming it introduces a transformation. What is in question is not whether to love our neighbor but to love that neighbor as he or she can love us. Love, for Smith, must be contained until the last moment, until the other shows of what it is capable. Just at this moment the spectator loves. To love is to return, exchange, and exercise the power of a master. If Christianity, according to Smith, does not establish a limit to love, nature is a regulator of love's intensity. The spectator loves because it has been an initial gesture, an emotional expenditure that must be returned. Virtue is, paradoxically, to love without the expectation of return:

because of that Smith renounces loving the scream, the echoes, and the complaints of the corpses. Virtue contradicts calculation because it expects the magnanimous and this is, within Smith's system, the irrecoverable lost. Because of that, Smith maintains that this type of love is impossible for human nature. With this he introduces an understanding of love that is relived, at least formally, from failure and rout.

The Christian idea of love is a consideration about how to exist inside failure: love is announced when it has failed, it emphasizes that we have been loved first, and that there is occasion for retribution. Love is always a response to its own loss. It cannot sustain itself because it has fallen. This dirty and muddy love is, for Smith, indecent because it attempts the impossible. It tries to unlink itself from nature and society. It makes mediocrity tremble. A type of love that does not fear loss is furious passion that, as hunger, is voracious. Every passionate life is fundamentally carnal: "the true cause of the peculiar disgust which we conceive for the appetites of the body when we see them in other men, is, that we cannot enter into them" (Smith 28).

Body

The question of love has effects in Smith's conception of the body. At the core of his conception is the idea

of the body as uncontrollable thing that he cannot possess. The body is an insatiable assemblage of desires. It desires itself, to touch its texture, embrace other bodies, penetrate them and go out, and to wander looking for itself. The spectator cannot enter into the jumble of a body that shakes with joy. The spectator is a cold and distant gaze that does not boil. The body has appetites because it is alive, it does not consume objects but other bodies and the spectator's gaze. The body, while enjoying itself, is not productive. It remains, according to Smith, concentrated on its own sensible existence, forgetting about its social obligations, obligations such as the discipline of the factories and the marital bed. These bodily appetites are located outside the realm in which sympathy can operate.

The body is a heap of parts that demand to be satisfied. In this regard the body is, for Smith, the limited experience of being permanently affected by the world. However, the body cannot trespass itself. It makes circles, swings around itself, but it cannot recognize anything apart from its own existence. It is confined, as the poor wretched, to an existence without intimacy. Its insatiability, always increasing according to Smith, separates the body from what is more intimate and secret for others.

Imagination and Loss

The body does not know the monetary economy: "The person, who has lost his whole fortune, if he is in health, feels nothing in his body" (Smith 29). As an empty foundation, the body, therefore, does not belong to Smith's basic idea of sociability. The body's appetites obey a strict code: they do not require money to be satisfied. Imagination, on the other hand, says Smith, is attached to the monetary economy. For Smith what excites imagination is the absence or possession of money. The lack of money makes imagination construct states of radical solitude, shame, and misery. Money, to Smith, refers to the possession of human energy or life. It is money that provides identifications and that guarantees social recognition. Smith understands why the person who loses his or her fortune represents this loss as "the loss of his dignity." To possess money identifies those who have embraced the spirit of the time.

The content and activities of imagination he reduces to the accumulation and circulation of money. To him, an accumulation of money expresses dignity. In order to accumulate money, one must recollect and procure to extinguish one's corporeal appetites. From Smith's position there always will be an irreducible antagonism between money and body, between

dignity and wounds. Only the one who makes a docile body can accumulate the necessary money to ignore its own body. To forget the body is not a metaphor: the theory of moral sentiments is a theory for a delicate body that hides behind a modest smile. The monetary economy requires consuming, touching, and dissecting bodies. Hence, this economy asks: How can one fight against the body? Money itself is a body, hundreds of condensed and unsubstantial bodies. There is only one alternative to winning and that is bowing out without reserves of money. Money is, for Smith, that what erases memory.

Pain, Forgetfulness, and Economy

Money is not only an element of economic theory. It itself economizes the body's rage, its flesh. Nonetheless, imagination does not forget the separation and clash between body and money. It cannot erase from its profundities that money is bodies and that the ones carrying, taking, and dancing around money are also bodies. Imagination stalks the delicacy and propriety of the spectator, makes it return to its own blocked appetites. In so doing imagination opens economic theory to its social roots. It points to the fact that money accumulation is only possible from an exchange: the exchange of wounds for coins. Because these wounds are social, this means

that they are dispersed throughout the social body and concentrate its most terrifying effects there where the songs are more intense. If "a philosopher is company to a philosopher only; the member of a club to his own little knot of companions" (Smith 34), then the only thing universally recognizable, the only thing that links while breaking is money. This is so because the virtue of a philosopher, for Smith, consists in the creation of hermetic spheres that protect him from foreign screams. Money is what creates the territory of the virtuoso life: which consists in accumulating corpses concealed by prisons.

A prison is certainly more useful to the public than a palace; and the person who founds the one is generally directed by a much more just spirit of patriotism than he who builds the other. But the immediate effects of a prison, the confinement of the wretches shut up in it, are disagreeable; and the imagination either does not take time to trace out the remote ones or sees them at too great a distance to be much affected by them (Smith 35).

Prisons are patriotic creations because they, like surgical instruments, fulfill the function of extirpating the wretched from the public world. A prison's lugubrious appearance contradicts its vigor: the edification of a prison is the synthesis of public virtue.

The prison divides the social territory and so makes explicit the spiritual hierarchy of society. If prisons are horrible edifications it is because they take their shape from those who inhabit them. The goal of a man of virtue consists in being able to acknowledge the beauty amid the putrefaction of a prison, because the prison liberates society from its "germs" and stalkers. The walls of that edification are the encrypted book that the man of letters should read in the solitude of his room. There he can find the message that he must seal in his own sad body: the punishment and pain of the wretched are the cost of the security of his perpetual present. The question is not how to appreciate the monstrosity of the wretched but to consider one delimited subject: the institutions created to punish them, horrendous as they should be, are based upon a virtuoso judgment. If initially these institutions appear to be exterior to society, this is due to the agent's weakness.

Smith insists that society requires jail cells in which to throw its waste. For the philosopher, a prison is the most human of edifices. It condenses and expresses one of the nodal points of Smith's theory of moral sentiments: sympathy and compassion are limited, and its most ardent intentions, impossible. Protection by and empathy with intimate friends is also affected by this impossibility. Trying to conduct

oneself from an impossible horizon leads only to destruction and violence. With their iron and stone eating bones, prisons remind us that the world will never deserve a love beyond calculation. In a society surrounded by “wild beasts” such places of confinement are the luminous pleasures of a humanity that must love its executioners.

Ranks, Shame, and Punishment

After expressing his admiration for prisons and punishment, Smith develops a justification of the division of social ranks. He admits that there is a relation of necessity between poverty and pleasure—clearly not because he considered poverty to be beautiful. On the contrary: “we make parade of our riches and conceal our poverty (Smith 50)”. The man of rank is, above all, an exhibitionist, and expends himself without contention. In the act of exhibiting himself he believes that he is swallowing space, time, and souls. The primitive accumulation that permits this luxurious expenditure requires unrestricted punishment and moderation. Smith writes a nostalgic song to immortality: the great man should live forever. This sentiment, explains Smith, necessarily implies the rejection of anything that happens amongst the low ranks. Among them particularities disappear; they are the ones whose most profound desire is the long life of the great man.

The origin of the distinction of ranks and the order of society is the human propensity of loving the rich and powerful. In this point Smith's philosophy turns to be the lost voice of the “poor wretched”: the philosopher speaks for them in order to affirm that, despite everything, their loyalty will be always with the great man. Smith makes the low ranks pronounce a word, a promise: that they love hunger and punishment. The great man speaks for the condemned to corroborate the thesis that in an equilibrated society conflicts or disputes must not exist. Inside the healthy and pompous body of the triumphant man everyone should find a minuscule space to satisfy his or her own needs.

Reason, Philosophy, and Order

Smith continues his justification and exaltation of the class system by saying, “That Kings are the servants of the people, to be obeyed, resisted, deposed, or punished, as the public convenience may require, is the doctrine of reason and philosophy; but it is not the doctrine of nature” (Smith 53). Once again, a tension appears. Smith introduces the public equilibrium as the criterion by which to judge authority and sovereignty, reason and philosophy, hunger and social and existential despair. Although limited, this criterion is political and therefore admits interpretations and applications. It is

possible to understand that the organization of society will be what prompts political relationships. Therefore, reason must reach the highest limit of social tensions in order to satisfy its own expectations. Rational are those practices that are put into radical debate and can be transformed. The rationality of an action follows if it is effective or has a plausible capacity of contributing to public wellbeing. It is known that, for Smith, the public ambit includes only men from the high ranks. Independently of this, Smith opposes the doctrine of philosophy to the doctrine of nature.

The latter assumes authority as constitutive and inalienable. Once Smith establishes the natural (not rational) preeminence of the great man, he advises the “man of inferior rank” of how to distinguish himself in the public sphere. All this advice comes from what Smith denominates as the doctrine of nature. Reason must surrender itself to the doctrine of nature, he insists, because this doctrine is the foundation of the differences of rank.⁶ This is Smith's critique of reason. He is not looking for the rational. The basic argument of the contradiction between reason and nature Smith develops as an apology of nature and divine favor: “By 1776 when he published *The Wealth of Nations*, he does

not appear to have moved far from the stance adopted in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* where he maintains that success in business, like aristocratic birth, should be regarded as a sign of divine favor” (Israel 238). This apology serves as a structure of his economic theory. As a social application of this apology he proposes to those of low rank strategies to achieve excellence: they have to improve their technical skills, stretch their physical capacities to the limit, and wait with patience for death. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the “low ranks” must always be prepared to give their lives for the great man. This new (low ranked) man, the public man par excellence, should be ready for the battle because it is battle that allows him to be recognized as an honorable man.

These men have only their bodies to give testimony of themselves. In the empty landscape or war, amid corpses and the halt, the men of “middle and low rank” build their bloody future. Not only that, but he insists it is crucial that they die with pride. Because of that he develops a theory of sympathy to the miserable. They are the ones that will die in the place of the men of letters and monarchs. It is from this assumption that come Smith's cautions about the “man of fashion” (Smith 64). Men of fashion lack the physical and spiritual conditions to defend society. Yet they are no less

⁶ For a more detailed discussion see Israel (2011) and Hénaff (2002).

for that; indeed, Smith insists that we (presumably meaning lowly men, cannon fodder) never forget that fashion, the refined language of the salons, and good conversations require the brave and obedient masculinity of the men without honor.

Many a poor a man places his glory in being thought rich, without considering that the duties (if one may call such follies by so very venerable a name) with what reputation imposes upon him, must soon reduce him to beggary, and render his situation still more unlike that of those whom he admires and imitates, that it had been originally (Smith 64).

To those non-recognizable men, no noble sin or excess is allowed. Their vocation, if they aspire to recognition, is to assume fully the rigorous discipline of the factory, the martial spirit, and the shadows of happiness. For Smith the requisite for recognition is the obedience to nature.

Economic Objects

Smith establishes in the first part of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* the necessary conditions for a healthy and wealthy commonwealth. At the beginning of the second part there is a reflection about what Smith calls the "imaginary resentment of the slain" (69). His reflection assumes that death

destroys life without attenuations. The cold corpses cannot say anything to us; it marks the end of our responsibility to them and to all they could have desired and cared for. Phantoms do not exist; economy has only life as its object. And life is understood as the blood exchanged in the market by warm bodies. The dead, because they cannot reappear, must remain foreign to our hearts. An economy should not stop its march toward progress because of the unachieved dreams of those captive in graves. We must, Smith says, pay no attention to the vengeance of the offended, to sentiments that sway us in our daily tasks. Indeed, to resist death, or to conceive of its annihilation, belongs to the most important secrets of reason, he insists.

Smith proposes a theory of resentment that does not consider the complaints and blood of the dead. What underlies this theory is the doctrine of the just punishment, the necessity and usefulness of the punitive structure and its forms of social implementation. Without punishment, according to Smith, there can be no society and without accepting punishment as some sort of educative apparatus there can be no agents. Sympathy is not directed at individuals or specific events but fundamentally at what, for Smith, makes society possible. What is at stake in his theory of moral sentiments is the type of relationship that

must be established between law, punishment, and sentimentality. Every law must be inscribed on the body so that punishment can produce intimate satisfaction. Smith manages to cancel any possible rebellion against law and the doctrine of nature.

The Crypt and Writing

Smith does not propose a rational philosophy. Although he intuits reason, he prefers to escape from its conflictive character. Smith's writing pretends to seduce the future: honor is a possibility if one assumes it can protect the condition of being men and women. He speaks to the multitudes, asking them to be pure, and advising them that it is fundamental to avoid luxury and riches. As an alternative to palaces he offers a common place: the city, home, and the places of work. Gray and cold as they are, those are the spaces in and through which society grows and becomes interconnected and indispensable. Smith's reflections do not admit ambiguous interpretations: "The very existence of society requires that unmerited and unprovoked malice should be restrained by proper punishments; and, consequently, that to inflict those punishments should be regarded as a proper and laudable action" (77).

The theory of just punishment belongs to what Smith designates as "the

economy of nature." Within the context of his presentation "Of Merit and Demerit," Smith narrows the economy of nature to one goal: nature provides humanity with a basic tendency toward self-preservation and propagation. Smith understands that human beings want to persist in their existence, extend it through procreation (family), and even avoid thinking about their own extinction. The authentically human has an aversion to death that, according to Smith, lies at the frontiers of thinking. The authentic thinker is the one whose orientation is to preserve human life through planning and instruments. To think is to act according to the principle of the production and reproduction of the conditions that make life possible. The problem for Smith is that, once again, nature and reason do not coincide. The ends provided by nature reveal themselves as too immense for the means (reason) that humans have for reason's achievement. Though Smith's humans aspire in any way possible to continue their existence, they cannot do it by themselves. These men of weak reason and obscure futures cannot deal with themselves. The vulnerability of their reason transforms these beings into hungry animals. Smith knows that desire is not the result of lacking an object but that its dynamism precedes any specific object. Desire creates worlds and shadows. In throwing himself towards the satisfaction of his

desires and the enjoyment of its necessities, laments Smith, man forgets about the goals that "the great Director of nature intended to produce by them." (Smith 78).

Making Us Social

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with its own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face (Smith 110).

Smith's concept of human is a part of his complementary economy. It implies a strong disposition to work over one's flesh to produce a natural self. Because of this the bare man, the madman that sings, cannot recognize himself and feel shame (for he lacks culture). Solitude is, for Smith, an open door through which to become absorbed in one's own passions, a space in and through which one seeks pleasure as an end. Communication and language are consequently a defeat, a scar, and a memory of an intimate life in which there were other channels by which one could have shown one's humanity and been with others, whether that were by a kiss, a scrawl, or by drunkenness. The inclination of

the head, the tactile playfulness, and the unexpected disasters are subjected to a primordial punishment: the mirror and the eyes of the other. Smith's agent is broken at his core and divides himself to conclude the procedure of examination. The constant divisions and the resultant multiplicity function as the production of capital.

When I endeavor to examine my own conduct, when I endeavor to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of (Smith 113).

Smith's I has the peculiar capacity to interrupt the appearance given by the mirror. The I that examines, and judges suspends the artifice that allows the agent to participate in the social transactions as united. This unity is partially destroyed to make possible the judgment over the persona. This is the physical apparition that moves, makes and fulfills contracts, kills in war and exerts effort in the factories, and appears and disappears as a shadow exposed to noises. A defeated body and sentiments constitute the person; she or he is a labor force, a weapon of war, and a reproductive machine. However, as in the case of the

of recognition. The first point of his reflection deals with the religion of the desperate as they cannot achieve recognition in Smith's understanding of society. He clearly acknowledges that religion plays a primordial role in the rebellion of the poor. Because Smith's notion of recognition is impossible, the masses of condemned bodies look to the solace of religion.

The persons in such unfortunate circumstances that humble philosophy which confines its views to this life, can afford, perhaps, but little consolation. Everything that could render either life or death respectable is taken from them. They are condemned to death and to everlasting infamy. Religion can alone afford them any effectual comfort. She alone can tell them that it is of little importance what man may think of their conduct, while the all-seeing Judge of the world approves of it. She alone can present to them the view of another world; a world of more candor, humanity and justice that the present (Smith 120-121).

For the condemned the constituted world is an irredeemable place. For Smith, the condemned ones scream of innocence and rebellion cannot be attended to. The organization of social relations does not have space for reparation and doubt. Verdicts, judges, and trials cannot be contested. Philosophy, or more precisely the philosophical

techniques, acts like the copyist of the judge: philosophy writes and proclaims in the salons and universities that the condemnation to death is more than rational; it is the revelation of the organizer of nature. Yet as Smith recognizes resistance to annihilation persists—in the form of religion. Religion offers another world, one in which the legal structure trembles. From those irruptions arise, like wild plants, images and noises of a justice that does not require division and subjugation.

The judge that sees everything does not condemn and incites the imagination of another world. Within Smith's theory, religion has an anomalous status, but at its core it is indecent because it introduces the impossible into what he likes to think of as his closed world.

The Forbidden Name

The introduction of the religious anomaly helps Smith to emphasize that in the real world the religious judge does not have any power. The ambit of the judge is the wounded heart of the condemned person who longs for individual consolation. That world does not have the potency to interfere with the world designed by "The All-wise Author of Nature" (Smith 128). The religious world is evanescent, unsubstantial, a product of weakness and despair. From this perspective

bare man, such a person lacks his or her self. In one of the corners of his or her room the person, whether exhausted or energized, is taken to trial without knowing exactly of what he or she is accused. However, this trial does not occur in a space that is time determined; rather it functions as the *apriori* category of space-time. The productivity of a person presupposes the recurrent and constant judgment. The trial is happening always, because the person cannot be absolved.

The charges against the person continue to grow even if that person is trying to obey the director of nature. Every trial is suspended if the accused promises eternal loyalty to the director of nature and to its purposes. The division of the I or self is a way to maintain a prerogative: there is a point at which the spectator is always united. This unity is what Smith proposes for the society divided into ranks and for the social division of labor. If he admits that the human essence is the complex combination of its social relationships, then it is necessary to say that this essence is an uncontestable judgment against which are leveled secret accusations. The divided society embodies its cuts, domination, and modes of production all the while stalking the internalized judge.

Agent and Spectator

The one taken to judgment is the agent, the public figure that everyday lives out the doctrine of the creator. The judge is the spectator (the original idea) that acts in the world through its copy. Their difference cannot be abridged to "one is cause and the other the effect" (Smith 113). The spectator is the perfect version that, because of its condition of perfection, cannot relate directly to the everyday affairs of the world. This also has to do with its constitution as it does not have a body and therefore does not suffer alterations. The agent, copy, or residuum of the spectator is fundamentally a body that just intuits the spiritual life. Their relationship is necessary because Smith knows that the new economy cannot produce and reproduce itself without bodies. In its most pathetic version, the relationship between idea and bodies there is not forgiveness for the body and its needs. This is possible because, for Smith, bodies want to be recognized and embraced by the idea.

Religion: A World to Come

After his apology on punishment and his elaboration of obedience, Smith offers a reflection about religion. His objective is to differentiate between true and false religion. This differentiation continues his discussion about the limits and possibilities

it is possible to argue that religion is not a complex of beliefs but a horizon that must be practically and partially reached. How then does one create a new world? The "Author of Nature" on the other hand makes social relationships the highest goal of human life. The author has left the world entirely to the disposition of men so they can judge themselves. Politically this means that it has sanctioned Smith's divisions as transcendental. First, men judge and condemn each other, and then they condemn themselves. The demigod never forgets. If the internal judge is afraid to condemn itself and this is one of the motivations of Smith's reflections, a demigod rises against it. Against this demigod struggles another root of human nature: a hope and expectation for a coming world. Smith writes from within an agonic struggle. The effective and factual social relationships face the also real and unfathomable expectations of a non-calculated and novel space that come from the rebellion of the poor. From the ruins and scraps of desperate men appears an afflicted nature.

As a response to this, Smith proposes to keep loving life: "The poor man must neither defraud nor steal from the rich, though the acquisition might be much more beneficial to the one than the loss could be hurtful to the other" (Smith 138). If the thirsty and hungry poor person decides to

steal or, more precisely is obliged to do so in order to preserve his life, he must put the love of life above the love of self. Any individual necessity, not even the drive to self-preservation, can be considered as more valuable than the interest of the majority. The demigod is the one that gives a message: do not resist, be a man. To die Smith considers as divine virtue; it is what makes the poor be closer to God.

Deity and Spectator

Smith's philosophy of moral sentiments is a theological enterprise throughout. As a part of this enterprise he creates his own understanding of a true religion. Therefore, religion also has its double. For Smith there is another religion which is part of the sequence of law, punishment, love, and death. In this religion it is the deity itself that inscribes morality in every heart. Within the realm of this deity there is no other possible world. Smith's world finishes its cycle: it announces that it starts from facts and ends with an explicit theology. Nonetheless, from the beginning of his moral philosophy, Smith proposes a theology. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments'* form of exposition implies that there has since the beginning been an encounter between nature and deity. In contrast to his idea of human reason, Smith's divinity is all-comprehensive and self-founded. It is on this

basis that Smith writes his philosophy. Smith's deity is theological in one precise and concise sense: it is a presence whose apparition depends upon and is made possible by writing. It does not differ from the word that represents it. This religion and its deity are necessary to reinforce the sense of duty. The obligation is not to the divinity but to the happiness of the commonwealth. This deity does not require anything because it has deposited its entire being into justice and its "vicegerents." Smith equates the historical and contingent reality with the law of a God.

As a part of this equation Smith locates the vicegerents of God inside every person; he understands the social conflicts and struggles as if they were a battle against God. In this labyrinth of tensions that Smith is always touching upon and from which he wants to escape, his last play is to put God on his side. It is in the immanent heaven that everything can be remediated. Smith's false alternatives are either to cooperate with God to achieve happiness or to rebel against it: "By acting otherwise, on the contrary, we seem to obstruct, in some measure, the scheme which the Author of Nature has established for the happiness and perfection of the world, and to declare ourselves, if I may say so, in some measure the enemies of God" (Smith 166). And this God is always stalking, ready to punish, and eager for revenge. Its body

is the body of the philosopher. Smith returns to one of the most important questions of his moral philosophy as a result of his reflection about God. The question can be considered strictly soteriological.

Flesh and Savages

The question to which Smith returns is: what are the conditions, exercises, and economization that everyone must practice in order to fulfill God's plan? Smith's response is based upon an alleged "comparative anthropology." One of the categories that organizes this comparison is self-denial. Smith compares his own anthropological situation with what he denominates "savages and barbarians" (Smith 205). These are beings that close themselves to any risky passion because they are in permanent danger. Their primordial condition is that of the weak that hides from the other, and that attempts not to be perceived. Their being is always about to be destroyed. They are never satisfied with themselves. Their misery, that for Smith is congenital, does not allow them to develop a personality and societies. In the strictest sense the savages, as the wretched, cannot develop such things because of their constitutive weakness. The savage is a solitarian without a possible salvation; it is completely turned towards its broken self.

Such savages cannot have encounters with others because their own life is ungraspable to them. Among the savages sympathy has not been developed; they have, therefore, another nature. The savage, says Smith, falls into its solitary silence and does not get out of it. If for Smith noise is a mark of damaged humanity, silence is its scar of inferiority. If one is fully human, that humanity, the philosopher emphasizes, must be expressed through moderate talking. This means permanently exposing oneself, constantly revealing oneself to others. The spoken word is the place in which the person is solidified. Through speaking a person exposes him or herself to the judgment of others. The spoken word serves as evidence of the state of one's secret places. Smith introduces an analysis of language as juridical device: the act of speaking weakens the security artifices within the speaker that introduce a conflict with duty and God. In speaking, the agent shows everything to its accusers. Talk is always the economic norm that Smith misses in the savages. Among themselves, explains Smith, they are indifferent.

To silence, savages add distance from every stimulus. Smith, who writes from a colonial imaginary, creates what can be called sensible blocking of the conqueror: since when they are being tortured the savages do not express the natural emotions of a

person, the conqueror cannot demonstrate his or her own sensibility. For Smith, conquest and torture do not affect the sphere of human sensibility because the conquered other, given its alleged insensibility, shows its empty heart. Smith understands conquest as a pre-sentimental activity in which what are being hurt are merely objects, raw material. Savages are thus another modality of the bare man. Here a question of political importance that has been discussed, among others, by Achille Mbembe, must be introduced:

I do not intend to go back over such problematic of continent as "invention", since the history of that imaginary has been firmly established and its wellsprings laid bare. I am, rather, concerned with two issues, two sides of a coin. One is the burden of the arbitrariness involved in seizing from the world and putting to death what has previously decreed to be nothing, an empty figure. The other is the way the negated subject deprived of power, pushed even farther away, to the other side, behind the existing world, our of the world, takes on himself or herself the act of his or her own destruction and prolongs his/her own crucifixion (Mbembe 173-174).

Smith's colonial and fantastic take on others is sustained by a ferocious inventiveness. However, Mbembe's double issue is an attempt

to understand why the conqueror and his philosophers try to destroy what is not even supposed to exist. This is a question about the motivations of a philosophy that declares both the inhumanity of savages and at the same time expresses certain nostalgia about its alleged primitive and original characteristics. It is more appropriate to refer to the instances rather than motivations through which a philosopher pretends both to negate the existence and capture a savage or barbarian. In the case of Smith, it is, as I shall explain in what follows, some of those fixations and fantasies that populate the philosophical delirium.

The Sound and Fury

For Smith the basic theological and economic contradiction is between the savage and God: "every savage is said to prepare himself, from his dreadful end: he composes for this purpose what they call the song of death, a song which he is to sing when he has fallen into the hands of his enemies, and is expiring under the tortures which they inflict upon him" (Smith 206). Smith's savages compose songs. Their intimacy and interior appear not to be accessible. Their voices remain distant, open to a future that does not belong to the torturer. The savage murmurs a melody that guards its life from the fire and makes present the multitude of lives that make its

songs possible. All music speaks; it says multiple things that are not always immediately understandable. The torturer, whose voice the philosopher pretends to be, gets frustrated because the burning body is not his property, and because the bloody lips of the savage conceal what is most important. Torture has as its purpose to make the condemned live enough to declare that they surrender. To surrender to the torturer has a direct relationship with the imperative to obey the spectator. In each case what is at stake is accepting the infinite power of God. The songs that the savage sing are suspires against death, the songs introduce a battle with God. Smith's dream is that all the impoverished, accused, and tortured learn how to defeat their weaknesses for them to remain firm when the fire consumes them.

For Smith, conquest and colonization are hazardous turns of fortune that demonstrate, amid cruelty, the noble character of the savage. To the question of the uniformity of human nature Smith adds this apparent tension: the braveness of the savage. Smith laments that it is a feature that has been weakened in and through civilized societies. The philosopher keeps the hope that it will be possible to combine the love of God and the availability for death. The economic theory and anthropological speculations are linked in order to ask even more of the condemned:

“The hardness demanded of savages diminishes their humanity, and, perhaps, the delicate sensibility required in civilized nations sometimes destroys the masculine firmness of the character” (Smith 209). The previous declaration is awkward. The savages are from the outset not considered as humans. The relationship between the civilized and the savage, inside Smith's work, is organized from the assumption of a radical difference that is never called into question. The angle that interests Smith is not the “loss of humanity” but the question of the destruction of masculinity.

The Gentleman's Nostalgia

The savage, a rhetorical figure, provides the place in which the human is a combination of laconic heroism and monetary accumulation. The rupture between matrix and body, origin and present marks Smith's anthropological genealogy. As in the case of the division of labor, in which he recognizes its deadly effects on the workers, Smith makes the “original masculinity” of the savage an object of philosophical remembrance.⁷

This is the reason why Smith's theory of moral sentiments is an artifact that creates differences and encrypts them.⁸ The production of

differences, in this case concentrated on the savage, is cryptic. The savage, as a rhetorical place, is the intentional oblivion of what exceeds the gaze of the spectator. But Smith does not stop there. He estimates that it is even necessary to cancel the nostalgia. Smith turns against himself and his fantasies about beings that have the war inscribed in their skin. The philosopher creates an itinerary that serves as a philosophy of history: the origin of the human, conserved still by the savage, is found in the inclination towards action and care of silence. When history, that subsumes savages as ashes, reaches its highest productivity the roots of humanity are put at risk.

Thus, Smith writes a requiem for the savage whom he cannot but condemn to perpetual servitude.⁹ At the core of this condemnation is the project to include these men by ignoring who they are, and seeing them solely as a labor force: “One who, in flying from an enemy whom it was impossible to resist, should throw down his infant because it retarded his flight, would surely be excusable; since, by attempting to save it, he could only hope for the consolation of dying with it” (Smith 210). Smith interprets the abandonment of children, in the context of persecutions and killings, as the expression of an ancient tradition. With this he negates

⁷ See(Sebastiani 6-9).

⁸ For this procedure see Tinland(2003).

⁹ For a more developed discussion of this see Forman-Barzilai (2010).

the tension and radical loss that are implied by deciding to let a child die. The gentleman reader of so-called historical documents cannot admit that while reading about far away tropical people he is also provoking escapes and death: "Thus, there is no violence in a colony without a sense of contiguity [...] Furthermore colonial violence is linked to the exercise of language, to a series of acts, gestures, noises" (Mbembe 175). Reading and writing are also those gestures in and through which Smith belongs to the imperial and colonial enterprise.

Take care of yourself: Distance and Obedience

Smith concludes that everyone must take care of himself. This maxim meshes with Smith's idea about the constitutive sentimental narrowness of the human. To face this condition, which for Smith is natural, it is necessary to create small units of care. These unities have as their norm to reduce distance and to intensify sentimental exchanges. Besides that they preserve social peace: "The distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, are in great measure founded upon the respect which we naturally conceive for the former [...] The peace and order of society is of more importance than even the relief of the miserable" (Smith 226). This principle is extensively developed in the section

entitled "Of Universal Benevolence" and "Self-Command." As a whole these two sections conclude Smith's theological economy by offering the meta-theoretical conditions for *An Inquiry Into the Wealth of Nations*.¹⁰

Throughout the development of his theory, Smith does not conceal a deep sense of unsettledness. He is aware that the solid can and, effectively is, vanishing into the air. He can grasp and even show some of the conflicts of a world that is being fractured by conquest, impoverishment, and commercial trade. The spectacular mobility of the world that Smith is trying to contain makes him create a mega-economic criterion: it is imperative for everyone to surrender to the Universe. Smith's model is, once again, that of the soldier who is willing to give his life. This imperative of cheerful sacrifice must be read as a total politics of life.

The Invisible Hand

The following passage announces and explains in advance Smith's invisible hand in *The Wealth of Nations*:

He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public, nor knows how much he is promoting

¹⁰ John Millar, a student of Smith at the University of Glasgow, was the first to point to this transition. See Millar (2006 [1771]), 264-265.

it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention [...] By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it (Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Wealth of Nations*, 477-78).

Men's sole responsibility is to take care of themselves and their sentimental circles or units. The passage of *The Wealth of Nations* accents the individual's actions within the market. As he establishes certain relationships and makes choices, he is creating the conditions of possibility for the invisible hand to lead him to promote the security of his society. This invisible hand is none other than the God from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The God that oversees the universe introduces its hand in human society in order to promote unexpected implications out of self-interest. The message is the same although presented in different contexts and languages. The role of God and the invisible hand is that of conducting irrationality. There is in Smith, a form of soteriological longing. But in Smith's case the economic relationships and economic theories are not what directly offer salvation.

Smith proposes a continuum that could be arranged in such a way that the authentic human beings, organized as a society, could achieve happiness not because of social practices intended to produce it for everyone. There are irrational and insensible beings that remain far from God's hand. Because there is no rupture between Smith's moral and economic theories, Smith develops a theory of the incorporation of bodies within society.

Becoming a Body

Individuals must become a body, transform themselves into bodies, and accept their bodies. To be incorporated, as flesh, into social dynamics and institutions requires everyone to be a unitary body that works, speaks, judges, and loves its country but fundamentally its own self-interest, which Smith identifies as God's own providence. Now it is possible to see that in Smith's narrative the poor are precisely those that are not possessed by corporality.

In Smith's system there is no separation but the presence of a body, which is a transparent ensemble that permits the production, distribution, and accumulation of life. For Smith, life is the flesh that in Tertullian appears as be provided of inclinations and temperatures that make difficult for its capture and control. Because of that Tertullian creates a flesh without

action, density, and passion. This explains Tertullian's interest in the question of Mary's virginity. In assigning a passive flesh to Jesus (*genere non vitio*) or more precisely in creating a theory of a damaged flesh, Tertullian creates the soteriological body, which is flesh controlled by the divine substance. He creates a body that consumes flesh while he locates it as an accessible and sensible present object. Incarnation, the process in and through which flesh is taken by a body, is an agonistic struggle against the carnal *actus*: what Smith does is attempt to go to the densest and deepest part of the person in order to subsume its potency.

A body is not something that one carries or brings with oneself; to assume a body, as Smith demonstrates, supposes a trajectory. The body that Smith refers to is not simply the body of an animal *oeconomy*. Smith's is a reflection about the body that pretends to transform or to take the place of the organic body. The pilgrim walks, advances, but because his body hurts, he has a hope inside him. To produce and achieve his hope he must struggle against his basic productive tool: his corporality.

Smith's bodies are thought to be reduced to the performance of basic tasks whose projection they cannot decide. Family, friends, and the country are also micro-productive bodies. Inside these bodies circulate and

produce the words and gestures that make the market possible and excited. The market ultimately belongs to and is protected by God, says Smith. Its quotidian life is composed of the different body-performances, all of them separated by degrees of magnanimity and honor.

The rest of the spheres of action that Smith assigns to the "weak man" must be understood as derivations of self-interest. The limits of the care for others Smith has established in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as resignation and honorable masculinity. As a wound that spreads itself over the skin the world of Gods, demi-gods, and vice-regents that Smith instituted as ground for his philosophy reiterates a message: you must be a man until the end.

Economy of Flesh: Dawn and Vice

Even when they adequately interpret Smith's project, some readers still miss some of its most important theoretical moves.

Far from theorizing a self-regulating market that would work best with a minimalist state or with no state at all, *The Wealth of Nations*, no less than the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the unpublished *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, presupposed the existence of a strong state that would create and reproduce the

conditions for the existence of the market, that would use the market as an effective instrument of government; that would regulate its operation; and that would actively intervene to correct or counter its socially or politically undesirable outcomes (Arrighi, 42-43).

The description inserts Smith's philosophy into the scheme of the relationships between state and market. It is accurate as it highlights the effective tendency at the surface of Smith's political economy. What it lacks is that it does not consider the foundational and theological area that in fact prompts Smith's narrative. What is theorized first by Smith is the transition from bare life (plural and moveable flesh) to bodies. Smith proposes an economy of minimal flesh that transforms flesh into strong and healthy bodies. These bodies are not all given by nature. What nature provides is an anatomical structure and a complex system of affections that must be transformed into agents and vigilant spectators. Incarnation becomes in this lineage a decisive security and health device to suppress the latent rebellion of impassible flesh: "More than an expulsion of flesh, this concerns its incorporation into an organism that is capable of domesticating flesh's centrifugal and anarchic impulses." (Esposito 164). Although accurate, this assertion does not go to what is the precise ambit in which the economy

of flesh originates and extends itself: the assumption that there is in flesh a component, ubiquitous and intrinsically vicious, that must be identified and economized. This assumption allows the development of a series of techniques, therapeutic practices, philosophical interventions, and social and political sanctions whose intention is, at least in the case of Smith, to accumulate that territory called man. Smith reminds us that there is no man without a God. Without a God there will just be flesh. Therein laid the problematic relationship between the economy of flesh and incarnation.

Economy of Flesh and Incarnation

Esposito's argument will serve as an introduction to the question that I shall develop in another discussion: "With regard to the distinction (and also opposition) vis-à-vis the logic of incorporation: while the incorporation tends to unify a plurality, or at least duality, incarnation, on the contrary, separates and multiples in two what was originally one." (Esposito 167). The fundamental problem of this argument is that it does not understand that the flesh of incarnation is not "identical to ours;" (Esposito 168), it is indeed a material flesh, but it does not carry the predisposition for contamination that ours still contains. It must be sub-jetivized, reduced to the condition of being one with God. In this sense the

operations of incarnation and Smith's economy of flesh remain within the same space as both claim to be dealing with an object-subject that requires being, intensively economized. The semantic and theological field in which Smith's economy of flesh exists ranges from questions related to the loss of masculinity to the tone of the voice. Thus, flesh is the antipode of the human being, although it cannot be destroyed entirely. In this sense, Smith's project reveals the flesh's return to God.

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