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**TO BE AND TO APPEAR TO BE:
ADAM SMITH'S RESPONSE TO MANDEVILLE AND ROUSSEAU ON THE PROBLEM OF
THE MORAL STATUS OF SELF-LOVE**

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**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS ECONÔMICAS
CENTRO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO E PLANEJAMENTO REGIONAL**

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Cedeplar – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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RESUMO

Este artigo defende a hipótese de que a teoria da simpatia e do espectador imparcial de Smith foi desenvolvida como uma resposta ao problema do estatuto moral da sociabilidade fundada no amor-próprio, tal como legado pela antropologia egoísta defendida por Mandeville e denunciada por Rousseau. Diferentemente daqueles que enxergam completa oposição na relação entre Smith e Rousseau, isso significa que o primeiro concorda com a crítica do segundo à antropologia de Mandeville. Não obstante, argumenta-se que, na visão de Smith, Rousseau estava equivocado ao incorporar uma psicologia de inspiração mandevilliana em sua descrição do funcionamento da sociedade moderna, uma vez que ela não explica corretamente o comportamento e a interação humana. Nesse sentido, as frequentemente enfatizadas simpatias de Smith pelas críticas de Rousseau à sociedade comercial devem ser mitigadas, na medida em que estas se fundam numa visão amplamente equivocada da sociabilidade baseada no amor-próprio.

Palavras-chave: Adam Smith; Sociabilidade; Amor-próprio; Comércio; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Bernard Mandeville.

Classificação JEL: B10, B11, B12.

ABSTRACT

This paper defends the hypothesis that Smith's theory of sympathy and the impartial spectator was developed as a response to the problem of the moral status of sociability founded on self-love, as bequeathed by the selfish anthropology advocated by Mandeville and denounced by Rousseau. Differently from those who see complete opposition in the relationship between Smith and Rousseau, this means that the former agrees with the latter's criticism of Mandeville's anthropology. Nevertheless, it is argued that, in Smith's view, Rousseau was wrong to incorporate a Mandevillian-inspired psychology into his description of the workings of modern society, since it does not correctly explain human behavior and interaction. In this sense, the often emphasized sympathies of Smith for Rousseau's criticisms of commercial society should be mitigated, inasmuch as the latter are founded on a mostly mistaken view of the principle of sociability based on self-love.

Key-words: Adam Smith; Sociability; Self-love; Commerce; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Bernard Mandeville.

JEL Classification: B10, B11, B12.

INTRODUCTION

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Adam Smith joins a debate about the nature of human sociability, establishing a critical dialogue with different thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, among them Mandeville and Rousseau. In this debate, sociability is understood as the qualities and attributes of human nature that dispose individuals to live together, to relate peacefully to one another and to promote mutual good offices. The problem of sociability also takes the form of a reflection on the foundation of moral distinctions, social obligations and society itself.

In the case of Smith's moral philosophy, the decisive issue is to think about the ethical foundations of self-love and commerce. A large number of interpreters stress that this is done mainly on the basis of a critique of Mandeville's selfish theses on human nature and sociability (Colletti, 1972; Hundert, 1994; Winch, 1996; Force, 2003; Hurtado, 2004; Cerqueira, 2008; Hont, 2015; Douglass, 2017; Griswold, 2018; McHugh, 2018; Bee, 2021), although for some, Smith's theory of commercial society would ultimately be too close to Mandevillian premises (Hirschman, 1977; Dupuy, 1987; Hundert, 1994; Kerkhof, 1995; Hurtado, 2004; Douglass, 2017). Among all these, there are those who also recognize the importance of Rousseau for Smith's theoretical development, with some ascribing to them completely antagonistic views of man and society (Colletti, 1972; Ignatieff, 1984; Hurtado, 2004; McHugh, 2018). Whereas others seek to bring them closer, to varying degrees, highlighting the possible influence of Rousseau's diagnosis of the evils of inequality and self-love on Smith's thinking, despite their major divergences (Force, 2003; Rasmussen, 2006; 2008; Hanley, 2008; 2009; Hont, 2015; Stimson, 2015; Griswold, 2018)¹. Sagar (2018a), in turn, holds that Rousseau's ideas were not an important influence to Smith's theoretical development and did not pose a serious challenge to his thought, since they were neither novel nor sophisticated in comparison to Mandeville's and Hume's moral theories.

This paper defends the hypothesis that Smith's theory of sympathy and the impartial spectator was developed as a response to the problem of the moral status of sociability founded on self-love, as bequeathed by the selfish anthropology advocated by Mandeville and denounced by Rousseau. Differently from those who see complete opposition in the relationship between Smith and Rousseau, this means that the former agrees with the latter's criticism of Mandeville's anthropology and the idea of a sociability based on self-love oriented exclusively to private gain and to obtaining the esteem of others at any cost. Rousseau's critique of Mandeville's idea of society can be considered important for Smith – contrary to Sagar's (2018a) statement – inasmuch as it made explicit the moral and political consequences of Mandeville's conception of sociability. Nevertheless, in Smith's view, Rousseau was wrong to incorporate a Mandevillian-inspired psychology into his description of the workings of modern society, since it does not correctly explain human behavior and interaction. In this sense, Smith's often emphasized sympathies for Rousseau's criticisms of commercial society should be mitigated. For Smith, these criticisms are founded on a mostly mistaken view of the principle of sociability based on self-love.

In short, in Smith's view, if Mandeville's theory of the psychology behind commerce and exchange were correct, then Rousseau would be right in his eloquent denunciation of the moral and

¹ See also Paganelli, Rasmussen, and Smith (2018), which contains a collection of articles on Smith and Rousseau.

political evils of civilization. However, for Smith, Rousseau was wrong because, quite paradoxically, he was too much adherent to Mandeville's thought he wanted to criticise.

The first section analyzes Smith's understanding of Mandeville's and Rousseau's theses on the foundations of society and human interaction out of a consideration of his comments in the *Letter to the Authors of the Edinburgh Review* (1756). The aim is to show how, in Smith's reading, Mandeville's anthropology strips sociability of an authentic ethical content, serving as the basis for a pernicious representation of society, and how Rousseau draws on this premise to craft a "sublime" critique of civilization. The second section shows how Smith elaborates his theory on the moral foundations of sociability from a critical engagement with Rousseau's critiques of the Mandevillian conception of man, comparing the respective notions of pity and sympathy. The third section aims at explaining how this theory unfolds into a theory of conscience, and how the latter is articulated with an idea of society as a self-instituted order ruled by moral laws that emerge spontaneously out of the sociability based on self-love. In the fourth section, we seek to show how the notion of the impartial spectator can be understood as a response to the moral problem posed by Mandeville's understanding of the role of the desire for esteem as a vehicle of socialization and the formation of conscience, and to its consequences for human personality and morality, as denounced by Rousseau.

1. MANDEVILLE AND ROUSSEAU IN THE LETTER TO THE AUTHORS OF THE EDINBURGH REVIEW (1756)

In 1756, Smith sent an anonymous letter to his friend Alexander Wedderburn, then editor of the newborn *Edinburgh Review*². His general aim was to suggest to the editors that they broaden the scope of the journal, which originally contemplated critical reviews of Scottish and English works published in the previous semester, so that they would also consider works published on the continent, and include only Scottish works that were "tolerably decent"³. Smith suggests that, by considering relevant works from the continent, the editors would contribute to raising Scotland's reputation among nations that cultivate the letters and sciences. This task would not be very laborious, for it was mainly in England and France that something of originality and relevance had hitherto been produced in literature, natural philosophy⁴, and moral philosophy (EPS, 242-3). To illustrate his point, he sets out to analyze and compare some major recent contributions from those two countries.

At the end of the *Letter*, in reviewing the major French contributions in the field of moral philosophy, Smith stresses the importance of Rousseau's recently published "*Discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality amongst mankind*" (1755; *Second Discourse*) (EPS, 249-250). Smith claims that Rousseau's work was inspired by the second volume of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*,

² This document is part of the third volume of the Glasgow Edition of Smith's works (*A Letter to the Authors of the Edinburgh Review*, pages 242-256), entitled *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Smith, 1980; hereafter EPS). References to it will be made as follows: the abbreviation of the work followed by a comma and the page number in question (e.g., EPS, 251).

³ On the general content of the letter, see Lomonaco (2002).

⁴ In the case of natural philosophy, medicine, chemistry, astronomy, and mathematics, Smith states that Italy and Germany also made important contributions, while the main French contribution, Cartesian philosophy, had been quickly refuted and replaced by the Newtonian system (EPS, 243-4).

published in 1729, except that in the *Second Discourse*, “the principles of the English author are softened, improved, and embellished, and stript of all that tendency to corruption and licentiousness which has disgraced them in their original author” (EPS, 250). He then goes on to compare the ideas of the two authors.

It is above all the problem of sociability that is at stake in the parallels that Smith draws between Rousseau and Mandeville, as well as in the three passages from the *Second Discourse* that were translated and inserted at the end of his commentary (cf. EPS, 251-4). Smith was interested in the way in which both conceived human nature and elaborated a natural history of sociability and society (see also Griswold, 2018, p. 97). We will try to show that his commentary on the relationship between the two is very illuminating of the movement he himself makes in TMS in developing the moral foundations of sociability.

First of all, it is important to underline the central issue of sociability that is at stake in the book of Mandeville discussed by Smith in his *Letter*. The second volume of *The Fable of the Bees* is precisely the one in which Mandeville develops his views on the foundations of sociability⁵. As stressed also by Smith, Mandeville (1988, ii.177, 180-5) states that human beings do not have a natural inclination to live in society. According to him, their desire to live together is based on the concern for their own happiness, or on the desire to better their own condition, in view of their helplessness to satisfy their own needs alone⁶. Therefore, in his view, what makes human beings sociable is their concern for themselves, and not for others⁷.

According to Mandeville, the foundation of society is human needs, or natural and moral want (*ibid.*, i.344-5, ii.348-350). Self-love, understood primarily as the desire for moral superiority, alongside material needs, is the vehicle of sociality: pride, or desire for esteem, is the passion mobilized in the process in which individuals are taught to bend their selfish affections, to obey social rules, and to practice good offices (*ibid.*, ii.65, 74-5). Socialization involves the concealment of selfish motivation behind a “specious cloke of sociableness”, the artificial veil of civility and politeness, through which individuals relate to one another. In other words, the process of becoming sociable entails a split between being and appearing, which makes men closed and hypocritical beings (*ibid.*, i. 234-5, 349). This means that sociability is merely apparent: individuals dissimulate good behavior to gain others’ esteem, but are often willing to deceive others for their own benefit when they can do so without being discovered.

Therefore, in Mandeville, social intercourse, or human “commerce” (in the broad sense), is emptied of any authentic moral content. This is not only because it is driven by vices - such as avarice, envy, and pride - and because virtues are only apparent, or disguised in view of a selfish end. But in the sense that, ultimately, human motivation is not inspired by properly moral principles, but by the desire to be esteemed superior at any cost. The practice of virtue, of what is right and just, is not an end in itself, but a means to the attainment of pleasure.

⁵ See especially the fourth, fifth and sixth dialogues of this work.

⁶ Unlike Hobbes, Mandeville (1988, ii.180) explicitly refers to the condition of mature men, not to early childhood.

⁷ It should be remarked that Mandeville gets into a long consideration about the conjectural history of society and sociability, which will not be considered here since it does not bear directly on the main point of the article.

From this selfish foundation, Mandeville arrives at the division of labor and exchange: as soon as property is secured by a recognized authority, men, guided by the desire to improve their condition, begin to divide labor and exchange their products (*ibid.*, ii.284). Society is constituted by the services that individuals render to each other, through mercantile exchange, in view of their own interests, which makes money not only necessary, but more important than moral virtue for the functioning of society (*ibid.*, ii.349). This indicates the way in which Mandeville was founding a discourse on commerce on principles compromised in moral terms - and, in that sense, inadequate as a source of legitimation of commercial society. It is interesting to note, however, how, in Smith's view, Rousseau explores this aspect and elaborates, out of Mandevillian insights, a "sublime" - albeit exaggerated - critique of civilization (EPS, 251).

To justify his hypothesis of influence between Mandeville and Rousseau, Smith stresses some similarities in their thoughts, highlighting, however, important differences that lie at the basis of the theoretical move made by the former. For both, men have no natural inclination to live in society, and despite their antagonistic descriptions of the state of nature, which lead them to think differently about the exit from this state, they both similarly describe the slow process by which men became sociable beings. Both think similarly about the origins of laws and, moreover, describe society as a space ruled by unsociable passions, such as the desire for superiority. However, Rousseau makes an important criticism of Mandeville regarding the conception of pity, in that he re-establishes the possibility of the moral virtues, whose existence had been rejected by the Dutch (EPS, 250-1). Here is an extract of what he says in the *Letter*.

Dr. Mandeville represents the primitive state of mankind as the most wretched and miserable that can be imagined: Mr. Rousseau, on the contrary, paints it as the happiest and most suitable to his nature. Both of them however suppose, that there is in man no powerful instinct which necessarily determines him to seek society for its own sake: but according to the one, the misery of his original state compelled him to have recourse to this otherwise disagreeable remedy; according to the other, some unfortunate accidents having given birth to the unnatural passions of ambition and the vain desire of superiority, to which he had before been a stranger, produced the same fatal effect. Both of them suppose the same slow progress and gradual development of all the talents, habits, and arts which fit men to live together in society, and they both describe this progress pretty much in the same manner. [...] Mr. Rousseau however criticises upon Dr. Mandeville: he observes, that *pity*, the only amiable principle which the English author allows to be natural to man, is capable of producing all those virtues, whose reality Dr. Mandeville denies. (EPS, 250-1).

According to Smith, Rousseau turned Mandeville's principles into a critique of civilization through an antagonistic description of the state of nature, replete with rhetorical artifices, and a "philosophical chemistry" concerning the role he assigned to pity in his description of human nature.

Namely, the fact that Rousseau (2002, p. 84, 108) makes pity one of the fundamental principles of human action, alongside the impulse of self-preservation (*amour de soi même*)⁸, enabling the self-regulation of passions of natural men⁹. Thereby he could criticize Hobbes' and Mandeville's view of human nature, describing the natural state as a state of peace and isolation, and natural men as independent beings, with few needs and without any inclination to harm others.

As implied by Smith's interpretation of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau's (2002, pp. 119-124) narrative suggests that man's selfishness and unsociability are historical products, arising gradually with the development of human faculties and social cooperation. For him, pity, a feeling of aversion to the suffering of others, which drives natural beings to the aid of their fellows, is insufficient to unite individuals: society is the result of accidents that drove them to coexistence oriented to the satisfaction of basic needs¹⁰. The grouping of human beings gave rise to the emergence of language and cooperation, gradually awakening reason and comparison among individuals, and with it self-consciousness through the perception of the opinions of others, which made them increasingly anxious to be seen and recognized by others. The awakening of self-love (*amour-propre*), understood essentially as the desire to be esteemed superior, gave rise to a growing spiral of psychological needs, which, with the advent of private property, led individuals to seek riches as a source of distinction, being at the root of the division of labor and social inequalities.

Therefore, for Rousseau, what holds human beings together is not pity, but above all the desire for esteem and superiority, *amour-propre*, which arises together with social cooperation. The pursuit of distinction through wealth makes individuals dependent on the opinion, labor, and services of others, breaking the material and psychic independence of natural men, as well as placing them in a state of competition and antagonism in society. As in Mandeville, dependence on others causes a split between being and appearing (*ibid.*, p. 122), which makes social men false beings, willing to deceive others for their own benefit. Not by coincidence, these ideas appear in a relevant passage from the *Second Discourse* that was translated by Smith in his *Letter*:

[...] *To be and to appear to be, became two things entirely different; and from this distinction arose imposing ostentation, deceitful guile, and all the vices which attend them. Thus man, from being free and independent, became by a multitude of new necessities subjected in a manner, to all nature, and above all to his fellow creatures, whose slave he is in one sense even while he becomes their master; rich, he has occasion for their services; poor, he stands in need of their assistance; and even mediocrity does not enable him to live without them. He is obliged therefore to endeavour to interest them in his situation, and to make them find, either in reality or in appearance, their advantage in labouring for his. It is this which renders him false and artificial with some, imperious and unfeeling with others, and lays him under a necessity of deceiving all those for whom he has occasion, when he cannot*

⁸ On this, see Force (2003, pp. 34-5) and Rasmussen (2006, pp. 632-3; 2008, pp. 66).

⁹ See also Rousseau (1999, pp. 78-9).

¹⁰ See the description of the process in Rousseau (2002, pp. 112-9).

terrify them, and does not find it for his interest to serve them in reality. To conclude, an insatiable ambition, an ardor to raise his relative fortune, not so much from any real necessity, as to set himself above others, inspires all men with a *direful propensity to hurt one another*; [...] in short, with *concurrency and rivalry* on one side; on the other, with *opposition of interest*; and always with the *concealed desire of making profit at the expence of some other person*: All these evils are the first effects of property, and the inseparable attendants of beginning inequality (EPS, 252-3, our emphasis).

Here, Rousseau critically describes the unsociable sociability of human “commerce”. Mutual social dependence causes individuals driven by *amour-propre* to interact by seeking to persuade others at any cost - “whether in reality or in appearance” - that it is in their interest to exchange on the terms proposed, implying a willingness to deceive others for their own benefit. This empties the moral content of exchange as a form of human interaction. Moreover, in Rousseau’s view, the division of labor, the advance of technology, the arts and sciences, and the production of wealth - therefore, civilization - is achieved through inequality, oppression, and unhappiness. This “paradox” was already present, although without the character of a critique, in the well-known Mandevillian maxim. In the words of Colletti (1972, pp. 205):

‘Private vices’ are ‘public benefits’ — this means not only that good is born of evil, that the immorality of individuals, their egoisms in competition with one another, produce culture and the ‘civilizing’ of society as a whole; it also means that wealth is born of poverty [...], well-being from distress, that what produces prosperity is wage labour; or again that the wealth of a nation consists of a mass of toiling poor.

Against Mandeville, “the most passionate detractor of human virtues” (Rousseau, 2002, pp. 106), Rousseau denounces the contradictory character of progress and criticizes, from a republican perspective, what Kant (2016 [1784], pp. 8-9) would later call men’s “unsociable sociability” (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). As Smith points out in his *Letter*, Rousseau assumes Mandeville’s anthropology to show the harmful moral and political effects arising from relations of social dependence founded on inequality and the sociability of *amour-propre*. Among them, as mentioned, are the threat to the integrity of the moral personality, the creation of oppressive inequalities, and the institution of an antagonism of interests that severs the political body¹¹.

¹¹ Pocock (1975, pp. 502-5), for example, states that, in the 18th century, Rousseau was the one who most forcefully denounced the contradictions between virtue and culture, personality and society, with which most Enlightenment thinkers were trying to live, and which characterize the “Machiavellian moment” of that time.

2. THE CRITIQUE OF MORAL EGOISM: PITY, SYMPATHY AND SOCIABILITY

In the *Letter*, Smith sets out to give a descriptive reading of Rousseau's contribution. On the one hand, as seen, he recognizes some of the moves made by the latter in relation to Mandeville, such as the divergent description of the state of nature and, most importantly, the idea that there is an amiable passion in human nature that serves as a foundation for moral virtues, which allows him to criticize the Hobbesian-inspired conception of human nature. On the other hand, Rousseau would have accepted the Mandevillian description of the sociability of civilized men, using it as the basis of a "sublime" but excessive and partial critique of commerce (EPS, 251)¹². The partiality of this critique can be explained by the literary style used by Rousseau, rhetoric (EPS, 251)¹³, which, as noted Stimson (2015, pp. 356-8), is characterized by the attempt to persuade the reader by emphasizing the sides of the problem that endorse the argument one wants to establish and downplaying or underplaying the sides that are contrary to it (LRBL, i.149-150). In this sense, in his description of the state of nature, Rousseau would not have adequately considered the negative aspects of the life of "savages", and his criticism of commerce and inequality would underestimate the benefits derived from the division of labor and civilization¹⁴.

This reading helps us understand Smith's move in TMS to think about the moral foundations of sociability out of a critical revision the premises of Mandeville's moral egoism. In Smith's view, Rousseau was right to criticize the anthropology of egoism and to recognize that it cannot found a good social order; and, nevertheless, he was wrong to incorporate it in his description of modern society. As we shall see, Smith tries to show precisely why Mandeville's conception of the psychology behind the sociability of self-love is mostly wrong. But he does so not to reject this sociability at all, but to requalify it and rehabilitate in moral terms a discourse on society that was originally developed by authors close to the selfish tradition. Once this revision is made, an important part of Rousseau's criticism of the contradictions of commercial societies becomes obsolete.

Smith's criticism of the doctrines of moral egoism, or the "systems which deduce the principle of approbation from self-love" (TMS VII.iii.1), among which those of Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Mandeville, are well known. Alongside Hutcheson and Hume, Smith argues that self-love is not the only motive of human action, nor the founding principle of moral distinctions; there are in human nature genuinely sociable affections and principles that make one to be disinterestedly concerned for the happiness of others (TMS I.i.1.1). Sympathy is one such principle, which enables the individual to put himself in the other's shoes, imagine what he or she feels and eventually feel with him or her, understand and evaluate their moral conduct in a disinterested way (TMS I.i.1.3-5, 10, I.i.3.1, VII.iii.1.4)¹⁵.

¹² According to Rasmussen (2018, pp. 253), this is what he means when he says that Rousseau's republican spirit had been "carried a little too far" (EPS, 251). See also Winch (2002, pp. 301).

¹³ In our reading, this comment carries a critical tone. In this sense, we differ from Force (2003, pp. 23-4), for whom this comment is merely factual, i.e., Smith would be stating that the goal of Rousseau's discourse is to persuade at all costs.

¹⁴ In the essay *Of the Imitative Arts* (IA.24), Smith characterizes Rousseau as an author "more capable of feeling strongly than of analysing accurately".

¹⁵ It is worth noting that moral judgment depends not only on the immediate identification of feelings provided by sympathy, but on conscious reflection and the use of reason (TMS III.4.8, VII.iii.2.6-7). On this, see Macfie (1967, pp. 64-5, 67), Griswold (1999, pp. 85, 88), and Montes (2004, pp. 47-8).

In short, sympathy is an imaginative and reflexive capacity, by means of which the subject can project himself into another's perspective and circumstances and thereby form an idea of his feeling, being led (or not) to feel something similar, though to a lesser degree of intensity (TMS I.i.1.2). This is a non-selfish principle (TMS VII.iii.1.4), both in epistemic terms - it involves a genuine effort to imagine oneself being the other, and not merely a projection of oneself - and in moral terms - the ability to feel for others in a disinterested way, or to be genuinely concerned about the happiness of others (Griswold, 1999, p. 78-9). This capacity is at the core of the Smithian view of men and sociability, as well as of his theory of the origin of moral distinctions and social obligations¹⁶.

It is interesting to note how, in the first paragraphs of TMS, Smith arrives at the concept of sympathy starting from the concept of pity, in an implicit reference to the discussion made in the *Letter*¹⁷. The opening of the work leaves little room for doubt:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it (TMS I.i.1.1).

As some interpreters have noted¹⁸, this indicates that, in a sense, the conception of sympathy can be understood as a critical development of Rousseau's concept of pity¹⁹. In our reading, however, pity is only a starting point for Smith, being recognized as a feeling that attests to the existence of genuinely sociable principles in human nature, but which is insufficient to found sociability, given that the latter is not primarily based on human misery, and that pity is a weak and short-lived feeling (LRBL ii.241), not constituting a motive capable of inspiring social agency. In this sense, Smith quickly draws

¹⁶ The concept of sympathy suffers some semantic variation in Smith's text. Besides the meaning of a capacity that allows moral judgment, the term is sometimes used to designate the solidarity (fellow-feeling) of the spectator with the agent, or even a "correspondence of feelings" between both, produced from the imaginative exchange of perspectives (Cerqueira, 2008, p. 76). On the semantic of sympathy, see also Haakonssen (1981, p. 51) and Brown (2016). Montes (2004, p. 47-8) notes that it is a mistake to reduce sympathy to fellow-feeling, since it requires knowledge of the causes and circumstances of the action, involving reasoning and imagination.

¹⁷ This is also Stimson's (2015, pp. 358-9) and Griswold's (2018, pp. 130) opinion.

¹⁸ Authors such as Winch (1996, pp. 72-3), Force (2003, pp. 19, 24, 28-9, 31-4), and Hont (2015, pp. 20-1, 33) stress the similarities between these concepts, suggesting that reading the *Second Discourse* probably indicated to Smith that a generalization of pity was the way forward - although one should not overstate the hypothesis of influence, since Smith's ideas were already relatively developed at that time (see Sagar, 2018a). Berry (2004), Hurtado (2005), Stimson (2015), and Griswold (2018, ch. 3), meanwhile, emphasize the differences between sympathy and pity, arguing that it makes more sense to think of the former as a critical response to the latter.

¹⁹ In our reading, it is not a matter of Rousseau's influence on Smith, but of understanding what the Smithian conception represented in relation to that of Rousseau's pity. The central influence, without any doubt, is Hume's (cf. Rasmussen, 2017, pp. 90-4).

attention to some distinctions between sympathy and pity, the first of which consists in the fact that sympathy is not restricted to feelings provoked by another's suffering, but comprehends all passions (TMS I.i.1.4). In practice, sympathy contains pity, and Smith mobilizes the former to explain the latter.

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever (TMS I.i.1.5).

The second distinction is that sympathy does not depend on a direct vision of the expression of a passion in another²⁰. Although in some cases it may arise from such a vision, in others, the direct perception of certain passions, without the knowledge of the circumstances which aroused them in the person observed, may occasion antipathy and moral disapproval, as in the case of unsociable passions (TMS I.i.1.6-7). Smith's thesis is that sympathy arises not so much from the sight of a passion in the agent as from knowledge of the circumstances that provoked it (TMS I.i.1.10).

As Griswold (2018, pp. 105-6) has noted, these distinctions highlight that sympathy is qualitatively different from pity. The former is a capacity grounded in imagination, which involves a degree of reflection and epistemic access to the feelings and motives of others, whereas the latter is a pre-reflective, pre-discursive, and pre-imaginative feeling²¹. Sympathy is more complex than pity, not only because it encompasses all feelings, but because it involves imaginative operations that institute the possibility of a range of complex phenomena, such as the illusions of the mind upon the subject, which affect in a relevant way one's behavior²², and, as we shall see, morality itself.

It should be noted that these characteristics of pity, as represented in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, make it a weak feeling, in a double sense. First, because it is insufficient to found sociability. In fact, on this point, Mandeville and Rousseau perfectly agree: for both, there is no innate principle of sociability in human nature; it is artificial, in the sense that it is acquired historically and involves unnatural passions²³. Secondly, pity is weak in the sense that it is overwhelmed and stifled in civilization by the competition for superiority and esteem, and is incapable of founding moral sentiments that can restrain the impetus of *amour-propre*. Therefore, for Rousseau, spontaneous interaction driven by self-love is deceitful, devoid of genuine moral content, and potentially disruptive (Sagar, 2018b, p. 158, 177).

²⁰ In *The Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume (2009, pp. 404: T.2.2.7.4) states that pity depends on the direct sight of the object.

²¹ Berry (2004, pp. 455-6) and Hurtado (2005, pp. 717) stress that the psychological mechanism of pity does not involve the imaginative exercise of projecting oneself into another's perspective, body, and person that is characteristic of sympathy, so that the spectator remains in his or her own person.

²² The illusive effect of imagination upon the subject occurs because the imaginative exchange of perspectives allows the spectator to sympathize with passions that do not actually exist in the person observed, but which are provoked in the former by his projecting himself into the latter's circumstances and imagining what he would feel if he were in fact the latter, despite what he actually feels. Or because the spectator can project himself onto inanimate objects, such as book characters and the dead (TMS I.i.1.11). On this, see Griswold (1999, pp. 86-9) and Stimson (2015, pp. 364).

²³ According to Griswold (2018, pp. 97-102, 107), Smith drew attention to the fact that Rousseau does not deny the Mandevillian idea of the selfish principle as the root of sociability, but merely historicizes it by removing it from natural man.

As stated, Smith does not disagree with Rousseau on the idea that pity alone does not explain sociability and morality. Ultimately, sympathy supplants pity as a principle that characterizes men as beings disposed to sociability, and that does not wither but develops with civilization²⁴. As we shall see below, sympathy not only allows for the regulation of self-love, but gives it an ethical content, distinguishing it from Rousseau's desire for superiority, and thereby making the search for recognition and competition in Smith of a non-disruptive character²⁵. Moreover, it is remarkable that Smith mobilizes this principle to explain (and legitimize, albeit in a qualified way)²⁶ social stratification, since it disposes individuals to sympathize with others' joy and prosperity, and thus to admire and respect the rich and powerful (TMS I.iii.2.1, 3) – in contrast to Rousseau's critique of artificial inequalities among men.

At this point, it is important to note that while sympathy is a sociable, or at least non-selfish, principle, it should not be understood as a principle of action, opposed to self-love. Sympathy is qualitatively different from self-love: it is primarily a capacity allowed by the imagination, and not a particular feeling; in this sense, it is also distinct from benevolence, a sociable passion. Therefore, sympathy does not make men benevolent beings, but, as we shall see below, makes it possible to regulate the natural unbalance of their feelings through the constitution of moral feelings. In its absence, human beings would be nothing but “wild beasts,” “and a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions” (TMS II.ii.3.4). Be that as it may, the most important principle of action for Smith remains self-love, though a specific kind of it, namely the desire for moral recognition (cf. Bee, 2021).

In thinking of sympathy as a principle of sociability, Smith is not engaged with the question of the institution of the social, like Mandeville and Rousseau. For him, life in society is taken as a given of experience (Winch, 1996, p. 70), and on every occasion when he refers to some isolated individual living outside society, it is clearly a conjecture or thought experiment²⁷. What is at stake is not how sociability arises historically, nor a conjectural history of society, but the process by which individuals become sociable as they interact spontaneously in society (that is, without the positive interference of government or the church). Smith shifts the discussion to explain how individuals naturally produce distinctions and moral rules in society from the operations of sympathy, independently and logically prior to any political or ecclesiastical authority.

3. SYMPATHY, IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR AND MORAL ORDER

As a principle of sociability, sympathy constitutes the foundation of morality: it is through it that individuals become moral and self-conscious beings (Cerqueira, 2008, pp. 74-5). This occurs through two simultaneous and mirrored processes: i) individuals form moral distinctions and learn to

²⁴ See Stimson (2015, pp. 358-9), Griswold (2018, pp. 96, 101) and Berry (2004, pp. 456).

²⁵ On this, see Griswold (2018, pp. 124-5) and Sagar (2018b, pp. 176-8). Dupuy (1987, pp. 316-7, 339) and Force (2003, pp. 42, 165-8), on the other hand, bring Smith and Rousseau closer together on this point.

²⁶ The legitimization of inequality, carried out in an effort to point out a source of stability in the social order, is not done without reservations, given that Smith adds that the disposition to sympathize with the rich and powerful is “the greatest and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (TMS I.iii.3.1).

²⁷ See TMS III.1.3, IV.1.8 and IV.2.12

judge from their own feelings as spectators of others' conduct (TMS I.i.4.9); ii) they gradually become sensitive to others' opinion of their conduct and begin to regulate their own passions so as to express them within the level appropriate to the approval of other spectators (TMS III.1.5; Griswold, 2018, pp. 105). In this process, the possibility of a moral self-assessment of our feelings and actions depends, in a way or another, on the perception of what are the feelings of others (TMS III.1.2). This is what is meant by Smith in the following thought experiment:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects which he cannot easily see, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind (TMS III.1.3).

This conjecture is intended to show that moral distinctions, as well self-consciousness, only take place through living with others. Society originally provides the individual with the "mirror" - the opinion and moral feelings of others - through which one becomes morally conscious of one's own feelings and actions. To the extent that the subject becomes aware of others' opinions about his conduct, he begins to wonder whether in fact he deserves their applause or censure. In order to evaluate himself impartially, he must strive to examine his own conduct from a distance, imagining how it appears to others (TMS III.1.5). Moral conscience is formed through this process, which involves the formation of an internal mirror, through which the subject can see his own actions²⁸:

We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct (TMS III.1.5).

To evaluate one's own behavior, one performs a distancing from oneself and seeks to see oneself through the eyes of others (TMS III.1.1), something that is only possible through imagination. This imaginative effort founds self-reflexive sympathy, in which the agent observes and evaluates himself as if from the perspective of another spectator. This engenders a kind of internal duplication between the person who acts and the person who judges one's own conduct; the latter is a projection of the

²⁸ For a historicized explanation and consideration of the originality of Smith's theory of conscience, see Raphael (1975, pp. 87-94).

imagination that fulfills the function of an internal judge, potentially impartial by the fact that he judges from a certain distance from himself and has full knowledge of the circumstances that lead the subject (himself) to act. This is the concept of the “impartial spectator” (TMS III.1.6, III.2.30), which designates moral conscience, and which represents the way in which individuals evaluate themselves by striving to view their own behavior as if they were external, disinterested spectators.

Gradually, by becoming self-conscious and observing the behavior of others, individuals form general rules regarding right and wrong, or what should or should not be done in particular situations (TMS III.4.7). They are based “upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve, or disapprove of” (TMS III.4.8), and are formed through inductive processes of reason (TMS VII.iii.2.6). Once formed in the mind, general rules can be used as criteria of what is just and unjust, and habitual respect for them instills in individuals a sense of duty, by which most of humanity regulates its conduct (TMS III.5.1). Thus, the rules founded on human feelings become moral laws themselves, sanctioned by conscience (TMS III.5.6), which delimit duties of justice and beneficence prior to any positive law or religious commandment.

Therefore, from the explanation of the formation of moral conscience mediated by sympathy, Smith arrives at the conception of an order governed by moral laws. As mentioned, the genesis of moral distinctions, social obligations, and conscience is explained through the imaginative and mirrored “exchange” of feelings and perspectives of individuals who interact seeking recognition from others. From a political point of view, this means that individuals spontaneously produce the moral criteria relevant to the life in community, that is, without the tutelage of a sovereign or ecclesiastical power. This conception of a self-instituted order, in turn, means that moral conscience and social obligations become an object of investigation, not being taken as something inscribed in human nature, but explained from social interaction.

4. TO BE AND TO APPEAR TO BE: SMITH'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF THE MORAL STATUS OF SELF-LOVE

Smith's explanation of morality and conscience as socially constituted phenomena risked relativizing the source of moral criteria and social obligations. This is because he explained the distinction between right and wrong, just and unjust, as well as virtuous conduct, without recourse to an absolute moral criterion, but from the feelings and opinions of mankind, and the desire for the esteem and sympathy of others²⁹. Now, Mandeville had done something similar by reducing human motivation to the desire for praise, or vanity (TMS VII.ii.4.7). In practice, he had reduced moral conscience to the desire to gain esteem at any cost, eliminating the possibility of a genuinely virtuous motivation, which represented, in Rousseau's terms, the enslavement of socialized man to opinion. This thesis appears in one of the passages of the *Second Discourse* translated by Smith in the *Letter*: “For such in reality is the true cause of all those differences: the savage lives in himself; the man of society, always out of himself;

²⁹ On this, see Hont (2015, pp. 29-32), who presents some of the most important criticisms of Smith's moral theory made by Adam Ferguson, Thomas Reid, and Dugald Stewart.

cannot live but in the opinion of others, and it is, if I may say so, from their judgment alone that he derives the sentiment of his own existence" (EPS, 253).

Aware of this fact, Smith sought to bypass the idea, advocated by some "splenetic philosophers", that moral motivation is reducible to the desire for unmerited esteem, or vanity (TMS III.2.27). Smith tried to show that, by becoming aware of others' opinions about his own conduct, the moral subject begins to reflect on the extent to which he really deserves their applause or censure (TMS III.1.5). The judgment and regulation of one's own conduct is mediated by the desire to be worthy of others' approval, as distinct from the simple desire for esteem (TMS III.2.1-2)³⁰. This implies that the individual does not judge his feelings and actions primarily based on the opinion of real spectators, but has as his main reference what he admires in the actions of others, or what is worthy of the esteem of an impartial spectator. In this case, what motivates him is a love of self-approval, or a love of virtue (TMS III.2.8), which instills in human beings the desire to be - and not just to appear to be - sociable.

Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren. She taught him to feel pleasure in their favourable, and pain in their unfavourable regard. She rendered their approbation most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake; and their disapprobation most mortifying and most offensive. But this desire of the approbation, and this aversion to the disapprobation of his brethren, would not alone have rendered him fit for that society for which he was made. Nature, accordingly, has endowed him, not only with a desire of being approved of, but with a desire of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men. The first desire could only have made him wish *to appear to be fit for society*. The second was necessary in order to render him anxious *to be really fit* (TMS III.2.6-7, our emphasis).

We see here, again, an implicit dialogue with Mandeville and Rousseau. As seen, the Mandevillian schism between being and appearing implied, in Rousseau's terms, the corruption of the human being³¹, the reduction of sociability to an instrument of egoism, as if individuals lived together only because of the material advantages they obtained and the pleasure of seeing themselves esteemed superior at any cost. Individuals would be essentially selfish and only apparently sociable, regulating their own conduct not according to what is right and just as ends in themselves, but only for the pleasure of obtaining esteem and material benefits from others. As is clear from the passage above, in Smith's view, the desire for esteem alone is incapable of making human beings fit for life in society.

The theory of the impartial spectator and the distinction between the desire for esteem and the desire to be praiseworthy can be seen as an attempt to answer the question of the moral status of

³⁰ It is important to note, according to Raphael (1975) and Hanley (2009), that Smith developed this aspect of his theory of the impartial spectator throughout his life, and made substantive changes to the editions of TMS, particularly the second and sixth editions.

³¹ See Hanley (2009, pp. 30-1, 41-2).

sociability³². Smith criticizes Mandeville precisely for the fact that he reduces moral motivation to vanity, or the desire for undeserved esteem (TMS VII.ii.4.7). In contrast, he distinguishes vanity from the desire for deserved esteem - the desire for true glory, which can also be called the *desire for moral recognition* - and from the desire to be worthy of others' esteem, also referred to as the desire for self-approval, or love of virtue, which does not involve the desire to *actually obtain* public esteem (TMS VII.ii.4.8-10). As Bee (2021) argues, for Smith, the main driver of moral behavior and sociability is the desire for moral recognition, that is, the desire to obtain the others' esteem on the basis of meritorious qualities³³. This is essentially the *desire to better one's condition* (TMS I.iii.2.1, WN II.iii.28), as well as the moral motive behind exchange (Bee, 2021, pp. 124-131). That is, for Smith, exchange-based commercial interaction is not founded on the desire to persuade others at any cost, but on the desire to gain the other's recognition of one's own merit, which would be confirmed through the exchange of equivalents.

Likewise, Smith emphasizes that the pleasure derived from moral recognition, or from the perception that spectators sympathize with our meritorious qualities, is immediate, or pre-reflexive (TMS I.i.2.1). That is to say that the pleasure elicited by the experience of mutual recognition is not derived from an interested calculation - as if it was a result from the subject's reasoning that the sympathy of others will guarantee him benefits in the future. This means that the pleasure associated with sociability is not selfish or instrumental, provided that by selfishness is meant the search for advantages derived from things that are *useful* to us, *without regard for the moral feelings of others*³⁴. In other words, sociability and the desire for recognition do not have as their purpose a simple utility or material advantage.

In this sense, Mandeville is wrong to assume that individuals want to appear to be what they are not in order to satisfy their selfish desires and interests, which would make them false and disingenuous, willing to deceive others in order to gain their esteem and feel superior at any cost. In Smith's view, most seek to be what they appear to be, or appear to be what they really are, that is, they seek to gain the esteem of others based on qualities that they really possess. The moral subject, although dependent on the opinion of actual spectators, is not a slave to it, in the sense that he does not submit to it at any cost, but can preserve the authenticity of his personality and the independence of his judgment to the extent that he adopts as a criterion the opinion of impartial and disinterested spectators.

According to Griswold (2018, pp. 125, 128), this means that although self-consciousness depends on consideration for the opinion of others, this does not impugn one's moral authenticity, but is its condition of possibility. So that dependence on the opinion of others in general does not translate itself into the constitution of a false sociability, characterized by deceit, manipulation, and hypocrisy (as

³² That, as noted by Stimson (2015, p. 361, 364), is tied to the question posed by Mandeville about the absence of a normative distance between one's judgment of his own conduct and the opinion of others. On this, see also Hundert (1994, pp. 227) and Griswold (2018, pp. 123).

³³ According to Smith, the desire for unmerited esteem is restricted to a few vain individuals, or to a few moments in one's moral experience, whereas the love of virtue, that is, the desire to be worthy of the approval of an impartial spectator without the need to gain public esteem, is restricted to a few wise men (TMS III.2.7, 11, 28; Bee, 2021, pp. 122-3).

³⁴ This is the definition of a natural good, according to Hutcheson (2004, pp. 85-6), in distinction to a moral good, understood as the pleasure derived from the observation of actions endowed with moral value. Cf. Cerqueira (2008, pp. 65). Smith sometimes seems to operate implicitly with this distinction. Cf., for example, TMS I.iii.2.1 and IV.2.12.

in Mandeville and Rousseau), or by isolation and an unsociable competition for status. On the contrary, it allows the sociability of self-love to acquire a truly ethical content, in which individuals seek in the opinion of others the confirmation of their own judgment as to their value and the value of what they produce.

5. CONCLUSION

Rousseau's critique of the selfish anthropology is relevant for Smith, insofar as it illustrates the harmful consequences of the Mandevillian idea of society. At the same time, however, Rousseau's critique of commerce and civilization is largely unfounded because it is based on a mostly mistaken moral psychology. Rousseau would be correct if Mandeville's theses on sociability and self-love were correct; in this case, human "commerce" would not have a genuine moral content, since the competition for status and superiority driven by the desire for approval disposes individuals to deceive others for their own benefit. Interaction would be the realm of false appearances and the veiled opposition of interests, being devoid of an ethical content of its own.

For Smith, on the contrary, sociability acquires a genuinely moral character insofar as the object of self-love is the deserved recognition of others. Smith's theory of sympathy and the impartial spectator is a response to Mandeville's idea of the desire for approval as the vehicle of sociability, as it is insufficient to make human beings fit for life in society. In Smith's view, there is no split between essence and appearance in the process of socialization: human beings actually become sociable as they seek to be that which is worthy of the esteem of an impartial spectator. Society and human "commerce" are thought of as an order governed by moral laws, arising from sociability itself and thus having a relative autonomy from political and ecclesiastical authority.

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