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Hume and Smith, Truth and Experience

2.1 Friendship Is in Feeling a Connection

According to Dugald Stewart, it is not clear when Hume and Smith met, possibly during Smith's first years at Oxford University in 1749[1] or in 1752.[2] They maintained a warm friendship from that very moment until the death of Hume, in 1776.

Hume's personality may be known by his own words. Rasmussen comments that Hume counselled a young friend in 1735 that "there is nothing to be learnt from a Professor, which is not to be met with in Books… I see no reason why we shou'd either go to a University, more than to any other place, or ever trouble ourselves about the Learning or Capacity of the Professor".[3] This quote is a sample of the way in which Hume understood language and knowledge. David Hume spent the years from the ages of fourteen to twenty-two in independent study, immersing

[1]See Rasmussen (2017).

[2]Dugald Stewart in Smith (1980, Vol. II): EPS, Scott (1992). See Ross (2007).

[3]Rasmussen (2017, 18). Cited from David Hume to James Birch, 18 May 1735, in E. C. Mossner, "Hume at La Flèche, 1735: An Unpublished Letter", *University of Texas Studies in English* 37 (1958): 32.

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E. Trincado, *The Birth of Economic Rhetoric*,
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himself in works of philosophy and literature. Due to this study, he went into a “disease of the learned”: morbid introspection became auto-intoxication, the “vapours” or lowness of spirits, a disease of the mind which he vainly imagined was restricted to the idle rich. Hume became worried over some scurvy spots that broke out on his fingers.[4] “I found that I was not able to follow out any Train of Thought, by one continued Stretch of View, but by repeated Interruptions”.[5] He only recovered from the disease of the learned by activity and conversation as “the free Conversation of a friend is what I would prefer to any Entertainment”.[6] In the process of recovering from “the disease of the learned”, Hume worked as a merchant’s clerk in Briston, but he soon found the post “totally unsuitable”. According to Rasmussen, Hume seems to have been found equally unsuitable by his employer: he was fired for correcting his master’s grammar.[7]

Regarding Smith’s personality, Carlyle said that “Smith, though perhaps only second to David [Hume] in learning and ingenuity, was far inferior to him in conversational talents… He was the most absent man in company that I ever saw[8]”. The term that seems to appear most frequently in descriptions of Smith’s demeanour is “absent”. Carlyle adds, though, that Smith’s travels abroad in the 1760s eventually “cured him in part of those foibles.[9] Like Hume, he preferred the company of a few select companions to large groups; and he also made friends very easily due to a sort of bonhomie. Similarly, Hume occasionally exhibited a kind of amiable distractedness. For instance, he was sometimes observed to stare vacantly into the distance, a habit that would later unnerve Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

[4]Mossner (1980, 66–80).

[5]Mossner (1980, 70). See also Mossner (1980, 66) and Livingston (1998).

[6]David Hume to Michael Ramsay, 4 July 1727, in HL, I, 9.

[7]Rasmussen (2017, 21).

[8]Carlyle (1860, 279).

[9]Ibid., 280.

2.2 But Allure Is in Differences

In the important recent contribution by Rasmussen, the author gives a very good report of Hume and Smith's friendship.[10] Rasmussen seems to assert that Smith was a Humean, only with some little questioning points of what Hume defended. According to Rasmussen, Smith regarded Hume's theory as the most accurate yet developed but still a bit reductive or incomplete.[11] According to the author, Smith thus sought to correct and extend Hume's views to provide a more comprehensive picture.[12] We will claim that this interpretation is a misunderstanding of Smith's motives. As Matson comments, Rasmussen does not offer a convincing argument as to *why* Smith would give a one-sided presentation of Hume's thinking (for instance, suppressing the role of agreeableness in his theory).[13] Actually, Smith was very clearly criticizing Hume and presenting an alternative theory, something of which Hume was perfectly aware.[14] Thus, he reproached Smith in a letter written in 1759: "Robertson's Book [History of Scotland, 1759] has great Merit; but it was visible that he profited here by the Animosity against me. I suppose the Case was the same with you".[15]

Smith was devoted to the construction of a full social theory whose basis confronted the foundations of Hume's theory, or at least theories that assumed that men act searching for utility. Some scholars still label Smith as a utilitarian or a "contemplative utilitarian".[16] Others, though, acknowledge that Smith was a "non-utilitarian", for instance, Haakonssen and Vivenza, and recently Fleischacker, Montes and Griswold.[17] Many even claim that

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[10]Rasmussen (2017, 18).

[11]Smith (1976), TMS VII.ii.3.21, 306, and VII.iii.3.17, 327

[12]See also Hanley (2016).

[13]Matson (2017).

[14]Raynor (1984).

[15]Corr. 44.

[16]Campbell (1971) and Campbell and Ross (1981) or, more recently, Ross (1995, 167).

[17]Haakonssen (1981, 135), Vivenza (2001, 97–104), Fleischacker (2004, 145), Montes (2004, 51, 114–122), and Griswold (1999, 540). For the utilitarian principles in Smith, see Levy (1995).

Hume was not a utilitarian.[18] So, labelling them as utilitarian is really misleading. Obviously, the word utilitarianism has some negative connotations that many try to avoid and nail down. Then, we need to distinguish here between the restrictive way utilitarianism emerged just after Hume and Smith were dead. Undoubtedly, neither Hume nor Smith were utilitarian in this way, as a Philosophical Radical of the nineteenth century such as Bentham, James Mill, etc. But it is not to be doubted that Hume became famous as a defender of the theory of impressions and as the consideration of utility as a central element of morality and social sciences.[19] Smith knew this, and, although he may have admired Hume for championing the search for truth, "against those ideas of the rest of humanity", he criticized Hume's philosophy from the earliest of his works.

According to Smith, human action is not based on the love of a mental system of utility, that is to say, a structure that their memory retains of longed-for pleasures and pains feared. But Humean passions are, precisely, based on that structure: on the habit of the association of ideas, threatened by the desire for survival and, in short, by the death instinct. Hume said that we are carried away irremediably by the pleasure instinct, but it is "the good" for men; the pain instinct, which we cannot avoid either, is "the evil" for men. So, as Hume himself tells us, men are slaves of their own passions.

2.3 A Literary Strategy

There is some controversy regarding whether Hume is a sceptic or a non-sceptic. In his final years, in 1775, Hume appended a warning to the second part of his complete works. There he seemed to renounce his *Treatise* and expressed the desire to be remembered by the Essays:

> Most of the principles and reasoning contained in this volume were published in a three-volume work called Treatise on Human Nature: a work

[18] Wand (1962), Botwinick (1977), Darwall (1995), Ashford (2005), and Reichlin 2016.

[19] For the emergence of utilitarianism, see Halevy (1928), Rosen (2003), Plamenatz (1966), Darwall (1995).

> that the author projected before leaving the University and which he wrote and published much later. But, the author has realized that it was not satisfactory, and his mistake as they have seen the light too early. For that reason, he reconstructs everything in the following articles where he trusts that some oversights in his previous reasoning and, above all, in the expression, are corrected. In any case, several authors have honoured with answers to the author's philosophy, they have dealt with directing all their artillery against that youthful work that the author never recognized, they have pretended to have triumphed and imagine having obtained great advantages over it: a very contrary to all the rules of openness and fair play, and an obvious example of the artifices of the controversy that intolerant fervour is believed to be entitled to use. Therefore, the author wishes that only the following articles be considered part of his philosophical principles and feelings.[20]

Despite this "plea", T. H. Green continued to assert in his introduction of 1874–1875 that Hume was a sceptic. Morris says that the famous warning should not be taken very seriously[21]: perhaps Hume wanted to ingratiate himself with his contemporaries and popular opinion. According to Morris, there is no substantial difference between the various works of Hume. The muted reaction to this warning seems to endorse this idea. When he claims that "the majority of the principles and reasoning contained in this volume were published" in the Treatise and that "it reconstructs everything in the following articles, trusting that some oversights will be corrected in its previous reasoning and, above all, in the expression", this does not seem to repudiate his previous philosophy. This is reinforced by a letter from Hume to Gilbert Elliot that said "philosophical principles are the same in both … I only complete them, cutting and simplifying some questions".[22] And in "My own life", Hume says that the Treatise did not have a substantial problem: perhaps Hume's warning wished to highlight this fact.

[20]Hume (1964a).

[21]Morris (2004).

[22]Hume (1969a), Letter 1: 158.

The question is that Hume was much saddened by the indifference of the great public to his philosophical works, and this he blamed on his impiety and irreligiosity. Hume decided that it would be worth his while to spend some time "castrating my Work, that is, cutting off its noble parts, that is, endeavouring it shall give as Little Offence as possible". He declared that "this is a Piece of Cowardice, for which I blame myself… But I was resolv'd not to be an Enthusiast, in Philosophy, while I was blaming other Enthusiasms".[23] However, this enthusiasm was not indifferent for some and, unbeknownst to Hume, a young Smith was reading his works in Balliol College, where he studied. Smith is reported to have complained to friends that Oxford authorities once discovered him reading a copy of the Treatise and they subsequently confiscated his book and punished him severely for reading it.[24] "The reverend inquisitors seized that heretical book, and severely reprimanded the young philosopher".[25]

Hume reconsidered his literary strategy in the wake of the disappointing reception of the *Treatise*, and he soon turned to essay writing. He abandoned dense, complex argumentation and endeavoured to serve as a self-appointed "Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation", bringing the fruits of philosophy, literature and history to a wider audience. "Learning has been as great a Loser by being shut up in colleges and Cells and secluded from the World and good Company".[26]

He followed the traditions of authors that tried to circulate their ideas through essay writing, such as the French author Michel Montaigne. In 1580, Montaigne created a literary genre by publishing his *Essais* on a variety of themes ("Of laziness", "Of liars", "Of friendship", etc.) in an informal, personal style and to entertain. Later, many essays of this type appeared, from the hand of major writers such as Francis Bacon, John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. But

[23]Hume (1969b, 3), 2 December 1737, to Henry Home.

[24]Rae (1895, 5).

[25]Review of Adam Smiths's Essays on Philosophical Subject, in *Monthly Review*, Vol. 2 (January 1797): 60.

[26]Hume (1964b, 534–534), Of essay writing.

the essay form was by the time of Hume popularized by Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Richard Steele (1672–1729). Their collaborative journalism seemed a perfect vehicle for Hume's bridge-building effort. Steele took on the job of editing the official newspaper, the London *Gazette*. Then, he started *The Tatler* in 1709, which, rather than focusing on news, offered essays on a variety of topics: theatre reviews, essays on clothing and manners and so on. *The Tatler* was immediately popular. In an age when much print publication was bitterly political, it was non-partisan. Addison contributed several essays.[27] It was almost immediately followed by *The Spectator*, which was published every day except Sunday. Both journals were widely read, often being offered to students as examples of clear, vigorous English prose.[28] The sociologist Jürgen Habermas called this "the bourgeois public sphere", a domain of society separate from the state or the royal courts where middle-class people came together to debate social issues.[29]

Hume consciously followed this model of informal essay. From 1741 until his death, Hume added up to 47 different essays to his collection and he eliminated some of them. Over time, they became more formal, both in style and content. Hume expresses his hope that this collection of essays would be of interest to both enlightened and common sociable people. In the introductory section of his first Enquiry (1748, originally called Philosophical Essays), Hume also explicitly states that his essays are a good forum for discussing the philosophy of everyday life—against the harsher abstract philosophy.

The *Political Discourses* of Hume also caught Adam Smith's attention immediately. Actually, Smith first used the essay form too, during his years at Oxford, composing a remarkable work titled *The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries*, comprising three related essays. The first part of this work is generally referred to as *The History of Astronomy*. The work was published five years after Smith's death when his friends and literary executors, Joseph Black and James Hutton,

[27] Addison (1854).

[28] The Open Anthology of Literature in English.

[29] Habermas (1989).

included it as part of a posthumous collections of Smith's *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*.

Smith often went to Edinburgh "and he took an active part, along with his friends, in promoting some of those projects of literary, scientific and social improvement with which Scotland was then rife".[30] In January 1752, just a few months after arriving in Glasgow, Smith helped to found the Literary Society of Glasgow, composed largely of professors of the university. They met weekly to discuss the members' works in progress or recent publications by others and at the third meeting, Smith read an "Account of some of Mr. David Hume's Essays on Commerce".[31] The political Discourses had appeared no more than a month or two before, and the close timing suggests that Hume may have shared the work with him prior to publication.[32]

The fact that Smith chose to focus on Hume's work in his first presentation to the Literary Society is a visible sign of admiration for Hume. Precisely at that moment, Hume needed support for a post at the University, a support that Rae conjectures he finally gave him.[33] It would certainly have been strange for him to draw attention to the popular publication of an individual whose candidacy he had just opposed.[34] Actually, in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and belles lettres*, Smith seems to have recommended Hume's *History of England* to his students as the only modern history free of "party spirit".

However, the efforts of Adam Smith and other friends to achieve the Chair of Logic at Glasgow University for Hume were, again and again, unsuccessful. Smith suggested to William Cullen, professor at the University of Glasgow, that they wait to "see how the public receives" Hume's candidacy and he said, "I should prefer David Hume to any man for a colleague but I am afraid the public would not be of my opinion; and the interest of the society [i.e., the university] will oblige

[30]Rae (1895, 101).

[31]See Duncan (1831, 132) and Coutts (1909, 316).

[32]Rasmussen (2017, 61).

[33]Rae (1895, 101).

[34]Rasmussen (2017, 62).

us to have some regard to the opinion of the public".[35] This remark is read by scholars as the first of many instances of Smith's excessive prudence with respect to Hume and his irreligiosity.[36] However, we do not know of any further action Smith may have taken regarding Hume's candidacy. Cullen, the recipient of the letter, ended up backing Hume, as a letter from Hume himself gratefully acknowledges.[37] Besides, Smith said that he preferred Hume, whom he had met a little earlier, to any man for a colleague, so we see that friendship and admiration for Hume were already at the heart of Smith's action. The Chair of Logic was ultimately filled by James Clow, who would surely give students the "right"—religious—principles (the same thing happened with Edinburgh's Chair of Ethics, which was filled by William Cleghorn).

The Hume–Smith correspondence begins with a letter that Hume wrote to Smith in September 1752, just before the start of Smith's first full year as holder of the Moral Philosophy chair. This does not seem to be the first message between Hume and Smith: Hume mentions that Smith's previous letter was delayed due to being wrongly addressed as Smith had not yet learned of Hume's recent move. Hume often complaints about Smith not having visited him. However, Smith came to Edinburgh periodically to attend meetings of various clubs and societies.

The most influential society in the Scottish Enlightenment was the Select Society, formed in May 1754. Hume and Smith were both founding members. Hume was its treasurer for some time. They met every Wednesday. All topics were acceptable for debate "except such as regard Revealed Religion, or which may give occasion to vent any Principles of Jacobitism".[38] As Rasmussen explains, Smith took the chair in the second meeting and talked about bounties on the exportation of corn and Hume on December 4 talked about national characters. The Select Society grew to over a hundred members, but it collapsed in the early 1760s. By the mid-1750s, Hume's reputation for irreligiosity had

[35]Adam Smith to William Cullen, November 1751, in CAS, 5–6.

[36]Rasmussen (2017, 53).

[37]David Hume to Wiliam Cullen, 21 January 1752, in HL I, 163.

[38]Mossner (1980, 281).

started to ruin his public image and the next few years would see him excluded from another joint undertaking by the literati—the launch of the *Edinburgh Review*—as well as an attempt to expel him from the Church of Scotland. Smith took a leading part in the launching of the *Edinburgh Review*, a biannual periodical beginning in 1755 and devoted to reviewing new Scottish literary works. He contributed to the first two issues, which were the only two issues in its eighteenth-century manifestation. But in 1802 Francis Jeffrey began to publish a magazine of the same name, which went on to have a long and distinguished career. Hume was not invited to join in the undertaking.

In 1755, the club formed the *Edinburgh Society for Encouraging Arts, Sciences, Manufacturing and Agriculture* in Scotland. Hume and Smith were both appointed to the committee on "belles lettres and criticism" that awarded a prize for the best treatise on taste.

2.4 Adam Smith's Piety

Scholars have been much attracted by the question of Smith's religiosity. They inquire if he actually was a pious man or not, especially considering that David Hume was one of his closest acquaintances. It is clear that Smith was not pious, at least not a devotee of some institutionalized religion. Besides, he did not like to show off his beliefs or give moral guidance to his students or the general public. Smith must have spoken with Hume about the church and they may have agreed in their criticism of and contempt for the pious character of some of their colleagues and friends. When Hume writes to Smith (in 1759, July 28), he discusses the Voltaire *Candide* saying it "is full of Sprightliness and Impiety, and is indeed a Satire upon Providence, under Pretext of criticizing the Leibnizian System". It is also interesting to note that Dugald Stewart discreetly omitted this sentence from his transcription of Hume's letter, along with a sentence that refers to bishops as "Retainers to Superstition".[39]

[39]Stewart in Smith (1980, 297–298).

Also, in 1745 John Douglas, an Anglican clergyman (later Bishop of Salisbury) published a refutation of Hume's views of miracles in a book taking the form of a letter to an anonymous friend. Douglas was a Balliol classmate and friend of Smith's and it has often been supposed that Smith himself was the publication's anonymous addressee. The addressee is said to have "reasoned himself… into an unfavourable Opinion of the Evidences of Christianity" partly as a result of the arguments advanced by Hume but also partly as a result of "Objections, which are peculiar to yourself and not borrowed from Books". Douglas spends over four hundred pages trying to bring Smith and other friends "back to that Religion which you seem to have forsaken".[40] However, there is no evidence that Smith read the Criterion, as it is absent from the catalogue of Smith's library.

Another piece of evidence is that Rasmussen comments that Smith had signed the required Westminster Confession of Faith before occupying his post at the university, but one of his first actions when he arrived there was to ask to be freed from the customary duty of prefacing each day's class with a prayer.[41] The request was denied, but the prayers that Smith ended up offering had a flavour of "natural religion".[42] He also managed to dispense with Hutcheson's usual practice of convening his students on Sundays to impart "a discourse suited to that day".[43] According to Ramsay, it was widely suspected that Smith's "principles were not sound" both because he was "very guarded in conversation" and because of "the company he kept"—an obvious allusion to Hume.[44]

However, Smith tried to keep apart from Hume in religious matters. He seems to have refused to invoke Hume's name in his works because of his discomfort regarding his friend's reputation for impiety, but, as

[40]Douglas (1754, 1–2).

[41]Rasmussen (2017, 462–463).

[42]For a letter revealing Smith's obvious irritation at having to perform Easter exercises at the university, see Smith to William Johnstone, March/April 1752–1763 in CAS, 326.

[43]John Ramsay, 463. See also Grahamm (1908, 153).

[44]John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, in Allardyce (1888, 462–463).

Rasmussen comments, this explanation is not persuasive.[45] It is not only Hume's name that Smith refrains from citing: he rarely identifies any of the philosophers with whom he engages in the text because he wanted to appeal to the reader's everyday experience rather than to some old debates and to make the work accessible to as broad an audience as possible.

Smith's criticism of institutionalized religion does not seem to be accompanied by a criticism of the religious sentiment. He tried to find some psychological reasons for the construction of the idea of God and in this, he also arrived at a different conclusion than Hume. In the eighteenth century, these differences and subtleties could not be understood: public opinion was intolerant of even small doubts on established religion. Obviously, this is not so in the twenty-first century. And we may say in the twenty-first century that subtle differences in Hume's and Smith's approach to religion were due to major differences in their philosophies. Let us explore those differences.

In his *History of Astronomy*, which is widely believed to have been written between 1744 and 1750, Smith considers that polytheism emerges in the first stages of society as "Fire burns and water refreshes… by the necessity of their own natures; nor was the invisible hand of Jupiter ever apprehended to be employed in those matters".[46] Even in the most primitive ages, the more "beautiful and agreeable" irregularities of the natural world, such as rainbows, could have produced uncomprehending "transports of gratitude". Then, the first sentiment towards nature is gratitude—or fear in the case of terrible phenomena. Hume joins Smith in positing that the earliest religions were polytheistic and that the idea of a single God arrived on the scene comparatively late, but he goes on, as Smith had not, to offer an extended comparison of polytheism and monotheism, to the great detriment of the latter. He shows that polytheistic religions tend to be more tolerant, more conducive to real (as opposed to monkish) virtue, and more credible. Pious individuals seek to go beyond ordinary morality, to

[45] Rasmussen (2017, 87).

[46] Hume (1980), EPS, II, 48. See Macfie (1971).

suppress their natural inclinations, in hopes of preparing for the future world. This tend to subvert the normal operations of sympathy. In *The Natural History of Religion*, which was published in 1757 and composed probably in the early 1750s—several years after Smith's the History of Astronomy was completed—Hume locates the roots of religious belief not in reason but in a combination of ignorance and passions, but this time such passions are hope and fear. It is doubtful that Smith influenced Hume on this score, as Hume did not learn of the existence of the principles until 1773. It is possible, however, that they discussed these issues in conversation or correspondence which has been lost, but it seems more likely that they wrote independently. Afterwards, Hume shared the *Natural History of Religion* with Smith prior to its publication. Actually, according to both of them, rather than turning to a separate invisible being to explain each event, primitive people sought an overarching explanation, and thus gave birth to philosophy or science—and to monotheism. This was part of the desire to explain the world as a coherent whole.

Hume agrees with Smith that people turn to the idea of a God in order to gain a sense of control over the world around them, but he insists that against the first intention, religion tends to increase people's fears and anxieties: religion creates a new and artificial worry about the possibility of an everlasting punishment.[47] Hume highlights the way in which religious "superstition" (essentially, Catholicism) "renders men tame and abject, and fits them for slavery", while religious "enthusiasm" (essentially the more rigorous strands of Protestantism) "produces the cruellest disorders" as it makes its way in the world. He claims that the various Christian sects had "engendered a spirit of persecution" that had proved to be "the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government".[48]

But here, as on many other occasions, Hume contradicts himself. He makes the notion of unintended consequences one of his great recurring motifs, much as Smith would do later in WN. An example is the

[47] Rasmussen (2017, 82).

[48] EMPL, 78, 77, 62.

way in which religion plays an unexpected beneficial role. He explains the ills perpetrated by organized religion, both Catholic and Protestant. But in *History of England* he manages to find some benefits coming from organized religion and even from religious fanaticism. As Duncan Forbes notes, Hume frequently adopts a kind of bifocal approach in the History, arguing that certain ideas and actions were simultaneously blameworthy at the time and justified in retrospect because of their salutary effect.[49]

> "The influence of the prelates and the clergy was often of great service to the public. Though the religion of that age can merit no better name than that of superstition, it served to unite together a body of men who had great sway over the people, and who kept the community from falling to pieces, by the factions and independent power of the nobles".[50]

The Church in this era also served as a patron of the arts and performed the invaluable service of preserving the previous literature of antiquity from total extinction. Even more surprisingly, Hume claims that during the Tudor and Stuart eras, religious fanaticism helped to further the cause of civil liberty. The extensive royal authority would not have been resisted if it were not for the courage inspired by religion. Puritan zealots, fearing God's judgement far more than the king or queen, were the only ones willing to stand up to them. Indeed, in the otherwise absolute rule of Elizabeth "the previous spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved, by the puritans alone; and it was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous and habits so ridiculous, that the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution".[51] This has been called "the consummate irony of Hume's career".[52]

In the part on Smith's theory, John Millar described his course on Moral Philosophy as consisting of four parts: natural theology, ethics, jurisprudence and political economy. The first part is the only one that is not published. Millar reports that he "considered the proofs of

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[49]Forbes (1975, Chapter 8, Sect. 2).

[50]Hume (1778, HE II, 14).

[51]Hume (1778, HE IV, 145–146).

[52]Herzog (1985).

the being and the attributes of God and those principles of the human mind upon which religion is founded".[53] John Ramsay of Ochtertyre reports that because of Smith's teachings, "presumptuous striplings" were induced "to draw an unwarranted conclusion—namely, that the great truths of theology, together with the duties which man owes to God and his neighbours, may be discovered by the light of nature without any special revelation".[54] This also challenges Hume's idea of knowledge: the everyday experience and moral sentiments give us a direct knowledge and God. However, the pious of the time were not pleased with Smith's approach to theology.

According to Smith, primitive peoples, unable to fit some phenomena within their narrow understanding of nature, would instinctively attribute them to the "direction of some invisible and designing power".[55] The first religions were, like later scientific theories, inventions of the imagination designed to explain the inexplicable and thereby satisfy the human mind. This belief in wilful deities was not solely produced by positive passions such as gratitude; it could be a consequence of terror that according to Rasmussen led to "the lowest and most pusillanimous superstition".[56] However, what needs to be considered is that according to Smith, a first sentiment towards reality is gratitude, something that Hume does not consider. For Hume, the direct passions, which include desire, aversion, hope, fear, grief and joy, are those that arise immediately from good or evil, which are for him pleasure and pain of the self; and he also groups with them some instincts of unknown origin, such as the bodily appetites and the desires that good come to those we love and harm to those we hate, which do not proceed from pain and pleasure but produce them. The indirect passions, primarily pride, humility (shame), love and hatred are created in a more complex way, but still one involving either the thought or the experience of pain or pleasure.

[53] Smith (1980), EPS, 274, Account. by Stewart.

[54] John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, in Allardyce (1888, 462).

[55] Smith (1980), EPS, 50; see also EPS, 112.13.

[56] Rasmussen (2017, 53).

However, both Hume and Smith coincide in asserting that morality is a human construction rather than one based on some sacred, mysterious or other worldly authority. The distinction between right and wrong does not emanate from a God's will but detached from us. So, Smith's idea that gratitude towards nature is a natural feeling not ascribed to animals, does not imply, as divine voluntarists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Samuel Pufendorf claimed, that moral standard is the product of God's will. Smith's gratitude does not mean a moral obligation to give in return or a possible punishment in case of not obeying some moral standards; it only means that reality and the others are there, and that if we want to leave reality appear, we need to sympathize with them—according to Smith, we love them as much as they are able to love you. As Rasmussen comments, the idea of an ordered world created by an intelligent designer was a staple of eighteenth-century religious belief, both deist and Christian. And nothing that Smith says rules out the possibility of there actually being an ordered world or an intelligent designer. But the only thing he acknowledges is that men feel gratitude—or fear—towards nature or life. Smith says:

"That system which places virtue in obedience to the will of the Deity, may be counted either among those which make it consist in prudence, or among those which make it consist in propriety. When it is asked, why we ought to obey the will of the Deity, this question, which would be impious and absurd in the highest degree, if asked from any doubt that we ought to obey him, can admit but of two different answers. It must either be said that we ought to obey the will of the Deity because he is a Being of infinite power, who will reward us eternally if we do so, and punish us eternally if we do otherwise: or it must be said that, independent of any regard to our own happiness, or to rewards and punishments of any kind, there is a congruity and fitness that a creature should obey its creator, that a limited and imperfect being should submit to one of infinite and incomprehensible perfections. Besides one or other of these two, it is impossible to conceive that any other answer can be given to this question. If the first answer be the proper one, virtue consists in prudence or in the proper pursuit of our own final interest and happiness; since it is upon this account

that we are obliged to obey the will of the Deity. If the second answer be the proper one, virtue must consist in propriety, since the ground of our obligation to obedience is the suitableness or congruity of the sentiments of humility and submission to the superiority of the object which excites them.

That system which places virtue in utility, coincides too with that which makes it consist in propriety. According to this system, all those qualities of the mind which are agreeable or advantageous, either to the person himself or to others, are approved of as virtuous, and the contrary disapproved of as vicious. But the agreeableness or utility of any affection depends upon the degree which it can subsist in. Every affection is useful when it is confined to a certain degree of moderation; and every affection is disadvantageous when it exceeds the proper bounds. According to this system therefore, virtue consists not in any one affection, but in the proper degree of all the affections. The only difference between it and that which I have been endeavouring to establish, is, that it makes utility, and not sympathy, or the correspondent affection of the spectator, the natural and original measure of this proper degree".[57]

As we see, Smith argues about an interaction between virtues, and, according to McCloskey, he is the last of the former virtue ethicists.[58] Both Smith and Hume consider that the foundation of moral laws is experience and sentiments towards nature. But one based those sentiments primarily on pleasure or pain of an image of the self, and the other on sympathy, propriety or gratitude towards nature.

Throughout the TMS Smith refers periodically to God and the idea of a providential order. But his references to a providential God are often "attended with circumlocutions, indirect speech and frequent use of the verb "to seem".[59] His theory does not rely in any way on religious premises or a divine will.[60] Smith rarely invokes "the author of Nature" (his favourite term for the deity) to explain the otherwise inexplicable.

[57]Smith (1976), TMS VII.ii.3.21, 306.

[58]McCloskey (2008).

[59]Rothschild (2002, 129).

[60]Macfie (1967, 102), and Fleischacker (2004, 44–45)

On the contrary, he recurrently invokes our emotional and intellectual needs to explain our belief in God and an afterlife. Still, as Rasmussen recognizes, Smith generally describes the religious impulse in sympathetic terms.[61] Religious beliefs and hopes often spring from what is best in us rather than what is worst. Religion is not a foundation of morals, but it provides support for it.

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[61]Rassmussen (2017, 101).

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