An Excursus on Adam Smith's Use of Sympathy and the Impartial Spectators

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Abstract

In the present paper, I investigate the use of sympathy and the Impartial Spectator in Adam Smith's moral philosophy. My aim is not only a critical reading of Smith's text but also to draw a historical perspective in which the two concepts evolved right into the 21st century. First, I distinguish three modes of constructing the relationship between the individual subject and the others of the community the subject belongs to. The first option is to define the individual in terms of the community, the second is to postulate a relatively autonomous individual who makes a contract with the community. The third is to conceive of both as mutually determining within a dynamic system. Smith tries to steer between the first two, while the third is developed in contemporary evolutionary and ecological approaches. Next, I will try to show that Adam Smith's effort to ground moral judgment and behaviour on his idea of sympathy as a kind of imagination of what others feel and think, by means of an intermediary, the Impartial Spectator, runs into a paradox or vicious circle. Next, I offer a kind of solution to the regress of the irreducible distinction between morality and ethics. Then I extrapolate the idea of the Impartial Spectator to the problem of the radical Other, or alien, as it is developed in contemporary French phenomenology. Finally, I briefly apply the idea of the alien to fields other than philosophy such as anthropology, social networking, and ecology.

Keywords: individual, community, sympathy, empathy, morality, ethics, imagination, the Other, alien, anthropology

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Introduction: on the individual/community relationship

I propose to reconsider the use of two concepts in Adam Smith's moral philosophy: the role of sympathy in judging other people's feelings and behaviour, and the idea of the Impartial Spectator in relation to the wider social context in which the subject's judgment is assessed and, if needed, tempered. My main aim is to situate Smith's description of sympathy and the Impartial Spectator within the framework of contemporary cognitive and social theory of emotions in terms of the abstract relation between individual and community. It follows that the present paper is not a historical analysis of Adam Smith's complex moral and economic system of thought, but an investigation of the relevance of his thought in contemporary ethical thinking. The main thrust of my argument is that any moral, or as it will turn out later, ethical description, normative or otherwise, must be cast in the form of the I-Other relationship, irrespective of how the other is to be interpreted. This is so because as Merleau-Ponty (1969) argues, the alien other is so-to-say eradicable from the otherwise singular subject. Morality, however, is a social experience. As Smith himself states, no moral rule can be defined for a Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island unless he arrives there with a baggage of social training. Thus, the opposition between ethics and morality, which is one of my cornerstones here, makes sense only for a socially concerned individual and not for someone untinged by society whatsoever. I use the I-Other relationship as a stand-in for the human subject's larger social relation on the condition that it is only him/her who can come to ethical consciousness. In contrast to being morally concerned, the individual subject becomes ethical in being related to the singular other within a face-to-face encounter. My idea is that, despite his social concern, Smith put his finger on the ethical potential of a moral being with the introduction of the Impartial Spectator as a kind of control over the subject's moral judgment.

I start with a threefold description of how the relationship between individual and community can be – and was historically – constructed. The alternatives derive logically from the structural combination of the two constituents. The first option is to define the individual in terms of the community, that is, other people. The individual is then originally a communal being. It is a conception that both political conservatives and socialists believe in and profess. But it is very close to what evolutionary biologists emphasize by saying that we all belong to the same species, so much so that the sense of belonging to a social group may be even more fundamental than the fight for food or sexual partner and the strive for survival. Note that the fight for survival is the individual's concern, while group membership is an aspect of social evolution. As David Hume (1983, p. 74-75) put it: „*The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it*". Communal man makes all effort to fit into society, acting in harmony with others and, if any conflict arises, is ready to negotiate and settle disagreements. „[O]*ur psychology evolved to*

promote within-group cooperation; We are biased toward those with whom we have, or expect to have a positive partnership." (Waal, 2009, p. 115) Communal man would be highly praised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau for his/her „innocence", i.e. unselfishness, beneficence, and cooperation. Innocence is like having a clean slate on which new (social) experiences can be written. „*Man is not born antisocial. He enters the world innocent, unself-conscious, unmoral, and with an inborn capacity for sociability. It is from society that man acquires his higher mental and moral life.*" (Wispé, 1968, p. 443) Furthermore, communal man is not only shaped by others but is reflected in and by them. It is by empathy, by „entering into the other" that one can get to know his/her true self. „*We not only learn to make us ourselves into objects, as earlier, but through empathy with 'related natures,' i.e., persons of our type, what is 'sleeping' in us is developed. By empathy with differently composed personal structures we become clear on what we are not, what we are more or less than others.*" (Stein, 1989, p. 130) Seeing ourselves in the eyes of the other is an essential constituent of the 20th-century idea of the Self, not only in psychology but in philosophy as well. Edmund Husserl claims that the life of the individual is for-the-other and with-the-other. (Cf. Zahavi, 2014) By the time of the beginning of the 20th century, the term „empathy" had either displaced sympathy or reduced it to the status of a near-synonym. Sympathy had almost a thousand years of history before giving in to empathy when in 1906, the American psychologist, Robert Titchener introduced it in an English translation of the German Einfühlung that another psychologist, Theodore Lipps had already popularized. The special meaning of sympathy that Adam Smith made use of was thus obliterated. I will come back to the problem of empathy/sympathy further below.

The second way to define the individual/community relationship is to start with an independent concept of the individual equipped with integrity and autonomy. It is the liberal political idea of self-interest, often dubbed with a negative slant, „self-love". Each individual may become the other's rival to accomplish self-centred aims. It is not far from the orthodox Darwinian idea that individual organisms are constantly fighting for survival. It is this individual who made the social contract in the 17th century with other individuals, thereby curtailing his/her own liberty. In contrast to the overwhelming sense of belonging and empathetic understanding that characterize the members of the community in the previous case, the self-interested individuals are left to their own devices to know what other individuals feel, think and intend to do. It is what gave birth to the philosophy of the other mind. In cognitive science, such an effort is called mind-reading. Without accounting for how separate individuals understand each other the second alternative would hardly be viable. I soon come back to this problem.

To round up, I add a third alternative to the individual/community dilemma but not because it could be related to anything Adam Smith had said. Modern evolutionary theory and contemporary ecological thought argue for a much more dynamic relationship between individual organisms and communities. They coined the term organism-cum-environment which stands for a mutually determining relation, that is, co-evolution wherein the individual, the human and non-human environment,

and their relationship are constantly changing. The dynamism of their relationship manifests itself in natural selection and adaptive processes. It does not behave as a closed system but an open one which relatively quickly reacts to both environmental changes and genetic modifications. In contrast, individual or community-based systems are extremely slow in adapting themselves to changes whatsoever.

However, it must be noted that social phenomena should not be reduced to a mechanical opposition between individual and community. The threefold distinction above is certainly an abstraction, which I use as a reference point in discussing Smith's sympathy. For „[w]*herever you find life as a society there you will find life as individuality, and vice versa. I think, then, that the antithesis, society versus the individual, is false and hollow whenever used as a general or philosophical statement of human relations*". (Cooley, 1902, p. 24) Belonging to a community is an inherent part of our human life and it provides security. No wonder that generally, the individual recognizes the values of the community and identifies his own integrity with that of the community and does not question the commonly accepted values even if they are detrimental to his/her well-being. Thus, as the anthropologist, Margaret Mead reports, Samoan teenage girls seem to accept sexual abuse from teenage boys who, in turn, are socially expected to abduct as many girls as they can. (More about the case further below.) Sometimes people are ready to put up with almost anything that their social identity demands, simply because it is what they got accustomed to. Their main line is so-to-say to maximize the validity of the social contract. Any renewal or reformation of a social community happens very slowly while the cultural and technological evolution is fast, which may or may not quicken up social change. Social stability is also indispensable for Adam Smith when he makes it clear several times that the welfare of the state depends on the condition that everybody fulfils his/her job at the place assigned to them within the social order. Though it can be surmised that Smith derives this condition from the idea of division of labour, there is no denying that the stability of social order is a major condition for the maintenance of any community.

However, Smith's main concern is the individual who makes moral judgments and as such must have its own integrity. But instead of maximizing that integrity, Smith introduces the Impartial Spectator as a kind of control mechanism who checks the subject's judgment from the community's point of view. Smith's actual individual spectator has a kind of autonomy, but if he/she is biased by love, friendship, prejudice or any other subjective attitude, the Impartial Spectator sets it right in the name of the community's objective self-interest. Though Smith does not explicitly derive his Impartial Spectator from society, the way it functions is a kind of balancing between the two conceptions of the individual/community relationship presented above. To be fair, one may counter that to Smith, the Impartial Spectator does not represent the society's interest, but stands for a kind of common sense. However, the fact that the Impartial Spectator is imagined as a kind of self-control by the actual observer, adds further gist to the idea that the social other is strongly implicated in whatever the observer in question thinks and adjudicates.

1. The sympathy/empathy dilemma

Underlying the different forms of the individual/community relationship is the problem of getting to know the others, understanding their thoughts, feeling their emotions, etc. No communal planning, no joint action, no sympathizing can be achieved without the prior, at least partial, integration of emotions and/or thoughts of the parties involved. And not only that. The individual's self-identity, personhood or *Self* is shaped fundamentally by the way he/she perceives and *cognizes* the other. The relation between the subjective „I" and the objective Other is, however, a two-way street, rather than a mechanical opposition. Either opting for the communal man or the autonomous individual, we have to deal with one of the hardest problems in philosophy: the problem of other minds. In the present context, it boils down to the following two questions: In what sense does the existence of others determine my own existence and my identity? And: How can I know that there are others beyond myself? Either self-identity is, at least in significant parts, a „borrowed robe", to quote Shakespeare's Macbeth, in that it is moulded by the demands of the community, be them genetically driven or culturally and historically inherited, or it has its autonomy curtailed by the existence of others as codified in the social contract in the form of constitution or any other Act.

When Adam Smith put forward his idea of sympathy as the basis for moral theory, he inevitably ran into the problem of integrating the individual within the community. He did not ponder on it, but without further ado introduced a third element into his sympathizer/sympathized relationship: the Impartial Spectator. For the sake of simplicity, and as I anticipated above, I will associate Smith's sympathetic relation with the „I"/Other relationship of modern phenomenological and existential philosophy as it was ushered in by Martin Buber's seminal book, *I and Thou*. While Buber and the philosophers of ethics in his wake took it to be an individual and personal face-to-face relationship, Smith, as concerned he was with the welfare of the state, intercalated a third person in that relationship as a reliable source to supervise the observing subject's task in imagining, assessing and judging the targeted individual's disposition to act. In this section, I will try to show that Adam Smith's effort to ground moral judgment and behaviour on his idea of sympathy as a kind of imagination of what others feel and think, by means of an intermediary, the Impartial Spectator, runs into a paradox or vicious circle.

By the time of Adam Smith, the term „sympathy" had acquired a variety of meanings. Starting with Aristotle who noted that someone seeing someone else yawn will yawn too, it became common knowledge that moods and emotions like depression, fear or sometimes joy and reactions like yawning, fleeing, eating, etc. are mirrored by spectators. It is usually summed up with the term of emotional contagion. The discovery of mirror neurons in the early 90s seemed to explain such phenomena with the presence of neurons in the human brain which are activated not only when the subject does something, but also, though to a lesser extent, when he/she perceives someone else doing it. Later, when mirror neurons were found in other brain areas where emotions are processed, emotional conta-

gion seemed to have been explained as well. At a lower, sensory level of cognition, mirror neurons are said to be responsible for both mimicking and simulating others' feelings and instantaneous reactions. Many things are learned this way during evolution from primates to humans. However, scholars soon started to extend the explanation to more complex behavioural reactions and thought processes. Thus, though cognitively „higher" activities like burials, feasts, fashion, and other traditions and habits are culturally determined, the underlying role of mirror neurons went uncontested. Moreover, mirror neurons are claimed to explain also the psychological reactions of the spectator of a film or the reader of a book when they cannot help but identify, partly or entirely, with the character's personality, way of thinking, attitudes, social and cultural values, etc. To sum up: our genetic pool including the presence of mirror neurons may account for the basic similarities of the Humean communal man.

On the other hand, idiosyncratic higher-order processes like imagining, intending, reflecting, etc. are also fundamental in sympathetic relations, but they are much more difficult to „mind-read" since they are individual-based rather than community-based. Many scholars have seriously doubted that a single scientific discovery of mirror neurons can explain such a wide range of cognitive phenomena. However, in order to ground the individual's moral relation to the other and thus to the community, we need to be able to account for more than simple contagion. No wonder that Adam Smith's examples for sympathy covered almost the entire range from both lower and higher-order cognition. At this point, a specific aspect of both the community-based and the individual-based approaches should be noted. Since the first approach tends to suppress individual differences to highlight the integration of the individual within the community, it plays down the distance between them in favour of their proximity or similarity. Thus, Derek Parfit, a leading contemporary moral philosopher, following Arthur Schopenhauer, contends that for the objectivity of the moral principle, individual differences should be downplayed. In contrast, the second approach preserves the distance between individuals, the „I" and the other, in the sympathetic relationship so that identifying is not an option for them. However, as I pointed out earlier, it is not an either/or case. Listen to how Adam Smith describes the situation when a spectator observes somebody else's state or action and tries to comprehend what it means to feel or act that way. „*By the imagination, we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.*" (Smith, 1976, p. 9 – italics mine)

Smith's formulation is not without ambiguities. First of all, he says that the spectator enters the other's body and even becomes the same person to some degree. But to what degree? The idea that emotion-driven moral judgment requires the recognition of the person's motives, psychological attitude, and even his/her Self, may have been a key factor in shaping the concept of empathy at the turn of the 20th century. How empathy almost totally displaced sympathy was the result of a

conceptual inaccuracy. Understanding someone's state is not the same as identifying with it. Neither does it require it. Following Smith, I can perfectly understand the pain another feels because of the loss of his/her son without feeling the same pain. The rise of empathy may also be due to the intellectual climate of the turn of the 19th century when descriptive psychology was being replaced by psychoanalysis. The original term, *Einfühlung* was introduced in German aesthetics by Robert Vischer in 1873, influenced by Johann Gottfried Herder and Herman Lotze. Later on, Lipps described it as identity with something external, as a kind of „liberation" from the „real I". (Cf. Debes, 2016) In the same vein, Wilhelm Worringer went so far as to claim that abstraction in art alienates the Self from itself. When empathy takes over the role of sympathy, Smith's spectator's integrity is totally engulfed by the object's self-identity. However, a closer look at Smith's text reveals a crucial difference. While in empathy we strive to relive and understand through imagination what the other person feels in a given situation, when sympathizing in Adam Smith's sense we imagine what we ourselves would feel in that situation. Sympathy differs from empathy precisely in that it preserves the distance between the observer and the observed while empathy brings them as close as possible. Sympathy is not aimed at abolishing the distance; on the contrary, emotional identification is in fact to be avoided. The preservation of distance may have been one of the reasons why Smith introduced the Impartial Spectator to compensate for the bias toward relatives and friends. Smith thus circumvented the problem of identification inherent in empathy. For nothing guarantees that what we imagine to experience is close in any sense to what the other feels in the given situation. But if so, how can we hope to compare the two experiences at all? Since Smith's moral conception is based on that comparison, he seemed to have run into a deadend. That he managed to avoid it was due to the Impartial Spectator.

2. The Impartial Spectator

To be fair to Smith I should note that sympathy does not require that we *share* the same experience with the other person. How can we share what the other feels simply by imagining ourselves in their place? There is no guarantee that what we imagine to feel has anything to do with what he/she feels in reality. Let alone if „[s]*ympathy, 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*". (Smith, 1976, p. 10) Moreover, there is no necessary connection between emotional sharing (that is to become an important part of empathy) and moral approbation. And vice versa, we can be empathetic in situations which are far from being moral. An especially disparaging consequence of the fact that empathy replaced sympathy in the 20th century is that the focus shifted from understanding the other to the emotional and psychological identification of the spectator with the person who is being judged. For to make any judgment of somebody's state or action requires that we are familiar with the situation, personal history, motives, and whatnot. Instead of emotional contagion, we need to know, or as cognitive philosophy would say, read mind.

The Impartial Spectator is an abstraction of both flesh-and-blood spectators and the necessary knowledge relevant to approbation. He stands for a kind of objectivity that no real spectator could match. My contention is that Smith needed the Impartial Spectator to avoid the problem of comparing the observer's imagined and the observed person's real experience. For morality presupposes a kind of neutral point of view, which overwrites any partiality toward relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Without such neutrality, community morals cannot be grounded. Thus, „[u]*tilitarians tend to recommend empathizing with others as a way of overcoming our partiality toward our friends and family"*. (May, 2017, p. 176) Although Smith may not have been a straightforward utilitarian, for he believed that the common good is the product of the invisible Hand rather than that of a kind of „altruistic" benevolence of each individual, it does not affect the critical arguments below.

There are three serious problems with such a conception. First comes the question: with respect to whom is such a spectator neutral? Is there a standard to which neutrality is measured? Obviously, it must be the specific real spectator whose judgment is in question and not all members of the given community. Remember that the Impartial Spectator is in effect imagined by the original flesh-and-blood spectator who imagines to be in the place of the other whose emotions or actions are being judged. That is, the Impartial Spectator is embedded in the scope of the imagination of the real spectator. It is as if the Impartial Spectator were my ideal, the personification of a kind of self-control. But then in what sense can it be im-partial? And how can he/she knows the relevant information for the approbation of the other person if I do not have that knowledge? Or if I do have it, why do I need to abstract from my position?

A second problem is generated by the neutrality of the Spectator itself. Smith does not specify the community to which the Impartial Spectator belongs whose point of view it mediates and relative to which it is neutral. On the contrary, the Impartial Spectator knows more than any other individual can know of both the observer and the observed, so he/she cannot be the spokesman of the community whatsoever. For all these reasons, we can extrapolate the condition of neutrality by postulating that the Impartial Spectator must be neutral with respect to all relevant individuals. But if it is so, it is entailed that the spectator is neutral to potential strangers as well. That is, the Spectator should not be partial to any single community but enforce the point of view of all mankind, i.e. the human race as such. For how can a judgment be „true" if there are others toward whom it is still partial? Imagine the Impartial Spectator rules that one should not absolve one's friend of a crime because he/she is a friend. But is it not the case that the ban extends to less familiar members, or even to unfamiliar ones? Should the spectator not absolve anyone just because he/she belongs to the same flock? Or inversely, can the spectator condemn someone out of animosity or because he/she belongs to another, possibly antagonistic, group? And if it is so, is it not the case that the Impartial Spectator is neutral also with respect to those who are alien to the community? (Naturally, the extrapolation can be extended further to non-human species pointing toward animal ethics and even hinting at post-antropocentrism.)

The third problem is, however, the most crucial. If the idea of the Impartial Spectator can be extrapolated to an almost infinite degree, what guarantees the *moral* character of the actual observer's approbation or disapprobation? If the idea of community is too elusive, whose point of view is the most decisive to be personified by the Impartial Spectator? Apart from some concrete cases like the respect for the rich, fashion, common law, or social rank (they are all culturally determined categories), Smith does not specify the type of community whose viewpoint would determine the (moral) condition of the Impartial Spectator's approbation or disapprobation. Hume, in contrast, presupposes that there is a common point of view that is accessible to everybody concerned, whom I take to constitute the relevant community. Although Hume's postulation is not without fault either, I would like to refer to Sayre-McCord's detailed analysis, which argues that the different contexts of knowledge to which the Impartial Spectator inevitably must recur for the sake of neutrality threaten an infinite regress. If the actual spectator imagines an impartial spectator to be fair and square in judgment (approbation or disapprobation), would it not be the case that the impartial spectator embedded in the imagination of the actual observer should imagine a third, a second-order, impartial spectator as a guarantee of impartiality? And is it not that the latter spectator should imagine a fourth, third-order, spectator... and so on?

We may want to cut the Gordian knot by elaborating on the Humean idea of a common shareable viewpoint. We may recall the original meaning of the Greek word, συμπάθεια (sympatheia) meaning the state of feeling together, which is a far cry from its Latin inscription, compassio, and the English translation, compassion. (Cf. Schliesser, 2016) To put it briefly and in a simplified way, sympathy refers to a relation among elements, things, events, and features that both belong and act together even at a vast distance like the universe. The said relation is imperceptible by the human perception system, so much so that even in 1686, „*Leibniz compares Newton's account of gravity to sympathy, as a kind of >inexplicable quality<*". (Schliesser, 2016) The aspect of belonging together across vast distances represents both the common viewpoint in Hume and the common law in Smith. But it is precisely this requirement that leads to the infinite regress of justifying the "objective" or communal character of approbation (or disapprobation) that I described briefly above. When we feel sympathy, we feel something common even if we are far from each other. We do not enter each other but remain distinct and separate yet form part of the same constellation. It can be a community, a society, the Globe or even the universe. That means actual impartiality is no more and no less than partiality with the individual observer's actual community and their values. It links the spectator up with the community. The Impartial Spectator is the projection of the community, who provides with respect to which judgments and actions are assessed as morally acceptable.

But who or what can be the ultimate warrant of our morality? For many philosophers and scientists, it is God who does not require any further justification. The Gordian knot or the regress is snipped in the bud. It is Descartes's solution to the Dream Argument in his Meditations, which threatened with a similar regress. But

with God or without God on our side we can still ask: can we be sympathetic with a stranger of whom we know almost nothing? If yes, we, together with the Impartial Spectator, break down the wall that protects our community. Note that any appeal to an Impartial Spectator who belongs to the community from which the stranger is excluded would be in vain. If not, we would automatically ban all ethnographers from our community since they attempt precisely to get to know the foreign, the culturally unknown. In contrast, according to modern cognitive approaches, we can feel empathy for people only if we have also experienced what they did. „*Empirical research suggests that people with similar life experiences, such as childbirth and parental divorce, are not always more accurate at determining how another feels in the same situation compared to those without such experience.*" (Zahavi, 2017, p. 36) It may be so for the general public in ordinary situations. Meeting someone who is radically dissimilar from us constitutes a cultural challenge. For instance, it is well known that Indians and black people who had been transported to Europe in the 17th century were exhibited in cages in marketplaces or later on in bars and saloons all over contemporary France. (Think of the famous story of Saartjes Baartman, who was forced to expose her „barbaric" body and mimic savagery in the early 18th century, as if she represented the missing link between apes and man.) However, there are phenomenologists who would open the door before the stranger in the name of empathy, which in my view is far closer to the meaning of sympathy as I tried to show. Thus, the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl writes: „*Just as something past as past can only be given originarily through recollection, and something in the future only through anticipation, something alien as alien can only be given originarily through empathy. Originary givenness in this sense and experience are identica*l." (Husserl, 1959, p. 376 cited in Zahavi, 2017)

But can we indeed get to know the alien *and* remain faithful to the community we belong to? Can we be *morally* justified in that? I firmly believe that the alien can never be conceptualized along the line that pits friends against aliens, which is often exemplified by a citation from the Bible: „*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad*" (Matthew 12, 30). Who or what is alien cannot be known in terms of such binaries unless it is reduced to our own concepts, ideas and especially past experience. Such reduction would be a violation of those who are radically different from us. Instead of the reduction, let me briefly outline an alternative which is based on an original difference between morals and ethics.

While morals are plural and inherently tied to the community, ethics is fundamentally individual or singular. To talk about individual morals is inherently contradictory, as it is revealed in the often-cited example of Robinson Crusoe. A person on an abandoned island cannot set up (moral) rules for himself/herself unless he/she has learnt them previously while living in society. The difference between morals and ethics is elaborated in detail in Braidotti (2006, p. 16): „*Ethics is therefore the discourse about forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of being, whereas morality is the established sets of rules.*" Braidotti derives the ethi-

cal imperative imposed on the individual in his/her singularity from Gilles Deleuze's writings. What is relevant here is that an ethical life is the pursuit of what enhances and strengthens the subject as a force without reference to transcendental values (morality), but in the awareness of one's interconnection with others. Ethics means the promptness to react in a given situation. It is the ability to respond to the alien as it appears face-to-face to the subject. The term is derived from the verb „to respond", which presupposes that we are originally addressed by someone. We are in the accusative, says Emmanuel Lévinas, we do not choose to be addressed, we are born that way because when we are born, we always occupy somebody else's place. Responsibility means a double relation with the other: the „I" is responsible to the other who addresses him/her and is responsible for something that demands a reaction. (Cf. Waldenfels, 2011) Since we are positioned in proximity, we are responsible to the other, and since we are addressed by coming face-to-face, we are responsible for him/her. Though the idea is fraught with references to Dostoevsky and Blaise Pascal, we can take it as a metaphor for encountering the stranger whom we cannot reduce to what we have experienced in the past. Ethics is a huge topic that I cannot cover here. Besides, Bernhard Waldenfels, Emmanuel Lévinas, and other French phenomenologists like Jean-Luc Nancy, argued for an originary responsibility with which an individual is born into this world. According to Lévinas, ethics is primordial, i.e. it precedes ontological and moral questioning. The ethical subject is irreplaceable and non-substitutable. Responsibility so-to-say takes the individual hostage. While the par excellence ethical question is how to relate to the radical other, that is the alien who comes from well beyond the community, the crucial moral question is, as it was for Hume and Adam Smith, how to harmonize common welfare with the individual's well-being. Equipped with the difference between morality and ethics, we are in a better position to understand how and why an individual's moral concern may give way to ethical consciousness. The crucial step is the critical consideration of the objectivity of moral judgment and questioning of physical, cultural and social boundaries, which leads to an opening-up, an *apeiron*, toward exteriority in an unlimited sense. It does not mean a rejection of the sense of moral judgment, on the contrary, it presupposes it. A Robinson Crusoe without moral training would probably be a genuinely wild man incapable of welcoming any Friday. The crucial step is to radicalize the concept of sympathy, inversely to its modern variety of empathy, in the form of an intimate relationship of „I"/Other, in which both terms are singular and neither of them is replaceable.

3. Empathy as moral utopia

Two forces behind the scenes help harmonise individual and common welfare, the utopian dream of early capitalism. First, there is the economic „force", the „Invisible Hand", which regulates that all the „small" achievements that each and every man accomplishes doing their job with propriety at the workplaces assigned to them add up to the overall welfare of the people. Small goods generate the

great good. This is so because „[i]*n what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they* [the poor, the lowly] *are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for*". (Smith, 1976, p. 185) Although Smith emphasizes the propriety of action and that neither the rich abuse their labourers nor the poor turn against them in violence, a more economic explanation is given by the evolution theorist, De Waal (1996, p. 28): „*What makes the invisible hand metaphor so powerful is the idea of simultaneous micro and macro realities: the reality in the mind of each individual is not the same as the reality that emerges when many individuals interact.*" That the resulting macro reality is indeed morally good and that out of smaller good things a great good is created is, however, a different story. We are familiar with various hypothetical and real cases like the pasture paradox when each farmer of a village is willing to graze one cow more than the other farmers do. Since the size of the pasture remains the same, the more cows are grazed the less fat a single cow grows, until there are so many cows grazing on the field that paradoxically they would gain no weight at all. Or there is the bad habit of littering the environment because we are disposed to dump anything right away when we find it useless irrespective of where we are. The habit soon leads to the accumulation of garbage at the most visited places like the beach, monuments, or natural sights. In both examples, everybody does what is personally good for him/her at a micro level, while their actions add up to an unwanted negative result at the macro level.

The other factor that may contribute to the harmony of individual and communal goods is man's basic cognitive and emotional architecture. Remember Hume's thought that every man thinks and feels the same way. At the beginning of the 19th century, the ideal of the unity of individual and communal identities became widely accepted. Note how Max Scheler (2008, p. 16) talks about empathy: „*The true sense of emotional unity, the act of identifying one's own self with that of another, is only a heightened form, a limiting case as it were, of infection. It represents a limit in that here it is not only the separate process of feeling in another that is unconsciously taken as one's own but his self (in all its basic attitudes), that is identified with one's own self.*" We can understand now why empathy has replaced sympathy in modernity. Such a close identification, however, is almost pathological. No wonder that Scheler himself refers to hypnosis and religious trance as par excellence cases. The phenomenon of Stockholm syndrome can be equally added. In contrast, sympathy requires that we find an Aristotelian middle in merging our point of view with the agent's.

But how can that „middle" be set if one's morality forbids one to take up arms while his/her religious, political or any other community issues a general alarm? Can we „harmonize" the meekness of Jesus with the militancy of Peter? What is the „right" context to judge both parties „objectively"? How much background information do we need to set the moral conflict right? Certain information relevant to assessing somebody's state or action could simply be „invisible" to the

spectator's eye. But I cannot follow this line of argumentation here. Suffice it to say that moral assessment in many cases should go beyond observable behaviour into the twilight zone of the human psyche. To postulate an Impartial Spectator is only to cover up the problem of „reading the other person's mind". What a man does may be determined by occasional, unpredictable occurrences or traumatic experiences like the loss of a relative, or internal spiritual conditions like solitude, social or family expectations, fear of being stigmatized, etc. Naturally, in the 18th century, moral judgment had less to do, if at all, with the internal psychology of the targeted person; it was more a question of the *situation* which was more or less observable. In order to gather morally relevant knowledge about the person, one did not need to „enter the other's body". Sympathy was the right term to express knowledge at a distance. The Impartial Spectator was an abstraction of objectively accessible knowledge. Modernity, in turn, brought a fundamental change with not only the rise of psychology but a range of disciplines like action and causal theory, the philosophy of other minds, ethnography, communication theory, etc. To judge somebody presupposes that we know intentions, desires, thoughts, etc. How else can we do it than by „entering body'? Empathy, but not sympathy, appeared to cater for that need. Let me cite a bit longer an anthropologist who highlights more than anyone else the problem of imagining being in the alien other's place. Clifford Geertz proposed the idea of „thick description" in the following way: „*What the ethnographer is in fact faced with* […] *is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity: interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households* […] *writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read* […] *a manuscript-foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious e emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.*" (Geertz, 1973, p. 10)

4. Sympathy with the alien

Geertz's analogy with the ambiguities of deciphering showcases the basic problem with sympathy, which I pinpointed in dealing with the alien. Compare Geertz's observation with the Humean idea that we are all similar, we are all of the same flock. Ethnographers by definition seek to understand foreign, unknown cultures. In other words, they try to sympathize with people about whom they have the slightest information, or what they have comes from interviews with the Aborigines themselves. Here I cannot go into details, but hint at the difficulty in „welcoming the stranger within the flock". Before Geertz, ethnographers were naive enough to believe that natives tell what they think during interviews. Thus Margaret Mead, who was researching in the Samoan Islands in the 1920s, felt genuine sympathy for the indigenous teenage girls when they told of their elopement with teenage boys.

Mead was ready to leave her Western conservatism about sex behind and embrace the girls' promiscuity. However, later on, David Freeman, who also visited Samoa, heavily criticized Mead for being credulous for „*Mead's informants must have been telling lies in order to tease her.*". To show the importance of a thick description concerning the alien, let me quote Freeman a bit longer. He mentions a „behaviour called *tau fa'ase'e,* to which Samoans are much prone. *Fa'ase'e* (literally „to cause to slip") means to dupe, „[...] *and the phrase tau fa'ase'e refers to the action of deliberately duping someone, a pastime that greatly appeals to the Samoans as a respite from the severities of their authoritarian society.*" (Freeman, 1984, p. 289-90) If it is so, there was no empathy between Mead and the Samoan girls.

Following the publication of Freeman's book, scholars seemed to agree that the truth is in the middle. Samoan societies were characterized by a kind of paradox, in the sense that there was a norm for girls to preserve their virginity until marriage, but it was also a norm for boys to seduce as many teenage girls as they could. If it was indeed the case, it highlights the irresolvable problem for any first- or second-order Impartial Spectator to blend all relevant points of view (of the native girls and the ethnographer-observer, who imagines being in their place and the Impartial Spectator, whom the latter imagines to be in place and the second-order Impartial Spectator, whom the first-order Impartial Spectator imagines to be... and so on). Consequently, there is no way to judge the girls' state, mood and action unequivocally, let alone „politically correctly". To do so would require one to take a position in the debate of the „paradoxical" norms, to side with either the males or the females. The sad news is that there is hardly any way to harmonize the two positions or find a common „middle".

The moral that we must draw from the above is that there is at least a tension in the concept of the Impartial Spectator. On the one hand, to come up with an „objective" point of view, he/she must be an „outsider" to both the observer and the observed agent; on the other hand, the Impartial Spectator is still being imagined or projected by the observer. Thus, the Impartial Spectator is an insider and an outsider at the same time. This creates a conflict for the ethnographer who is either empathetic with the natives accepting their norm or takes the position of an Impartial Spectator by adopting a „neutral" point of view, from where the native norms can be compared with, say, Western norms. To choose between the two positions, to decide between sexual promiscuity and abstinence in the example above, calls for a meta-ethical position. Consider the following colonial alternative: Should we side with the „savages" or our Christian roots? To answer such a question, we inevitably run into the infinite regress I pointed out further above. To postulate a series of embedded Impartial Spectators only deepens the problem of objectivity. Suppose that there is a historical point of view, like what Marxists would say, from which the two norms, that of preserving virginity and that of promiscuity, had changed historically with colonization. It is the position taken by Paul Shankman, who disagrees with both Mead and Freeman, but he cannot feel empathy with the natives, either. For the natives, by definition, cannot see themselves, their norms and especially the changes they have gone through from

above. Certainly, we can imagine a third-order Impartial Spectator who sees the cultural changes „objectively" from the perspective of evolutionary theory or even Christianity, in which sexual behaviour is in the long run a question of procreation on Earth. Though the argument could go on indefinitely, we can safely conclude that any meta-ethical consideration only reinforces the regress that the idea of the Impartial Spectator originally harbours. That it does so is because the idea is too wide, too generalized, to accommodate the point of view of those who originally do not belong to us, who are strangers to our flock but who, if the Impartial Spectator is right in recurring to and thus imagining other impartial Spectators, can be accommodated in it.

5. Responsibility for the alien

Is there a way out of the dilemma outlined in the previous sections? Due to the lack of space, I will come to a close by a kind of shortcut. Even if we accept the distinction between social morals and individual ethics, responsibility can be the common term. It is commonplace that the terms of responsibility are determined by the community in the first case. However, there are many examples, such as individual ambition, feminist pursuit, reasons for divorce, self-exposure and the use of violence in art, just to name a few, when moral judgment by the majority of the community may run offline by appealing to what is decent, acceptable, or right in a given context. Morals are general cases of rule-following, whereas individual criteria for action or reaction in most cases cannot be summed up in terms of moral norms. The reason can be that individual action constitutes a special case of thick description, which includes specific, idiosyncratic contextual conditions, and which cannot be subsumed under general rules, norms or laws. It explains why certain scholars like Gregg Caruso and Derek Pereboom claim that a basic desert is not sufficient for moral responsibility. The basic desert is „*the idea that the harm of blame and punishment and the benefit of praise and reward are deserved and fundamentally so, and that such backward-looking desert is thus a basic element of morality*". (Caruso & Pereboom, 2022, p. 1) The authors refer to Marion Vargas, who says that „*moral responsibility is a social practice built upon the responses we have to the ways others treat us, but where the basis for why we ought to continue to participate in practices of praise, blame, and punishment turns, in part, on the effects of these practices upon us as agents.*" (p. 11) The emphasis is on „backward-looking", referring to a specific act or fact that grounds the agent's moral assessment. However, when we happen to face the alien, the native of an unknown culture we cannot appeal to anything like a past experience. Responsibility so-to-say falls back on the subject, the „I". The ethical gesture that is demanded of us is neither desert nor empathy. By being responsible for the other and to the other, we are not eligible for approbation or disapprobation. Just as we cannot be empathetic with someone, we know nothing of. Thus, ethical gesture would not link us with the community but is a means to respond to the one facing us.

However, there is no denying that being responsible to the alien other, or which amounts to the same here, trying to be empathetic with him/her (that is welcoming him/her), who comes from without, can be utterly dangerous. „*Even in situations when people can anticipate that empathizers intend to help rather than to harm, they may fear that the first-person-like knowledge that others have obtained about them is inaccurate or that it will be leaked to third parties who could use it to harm or embarrass.*" (Hollan, 2017, p. 346) There is a wide range of examples from various cultures, which sharing intimate knowledge with anyone, including the tribe's shaman, may lead to that knowledge being abused or publicly known. Certain tribes even put a ban on empathy for „*the group's closeness and harmony is the cultural goal that underlies this practice*". (Caruso & Pereboom, 2022, p. 18) The community must protect itself against intruders who are alien to internal norms. It must then frown upon any empathetic act vis-à-vis the stranger if the foundation of its own morality is at stake. Any system that is closed under the rule of eliminating „strangers" from the flock suffers from the same failure: the lack of a consistently and coherently grounded moral system. Over and above aboriginal cases, there are historical examples of cultures like the Great Roman Empire, which were sort of forced to accommodate „barbarians", even allowing them to buy offices. But this they did when they were in a moribund state. Contemporary migration poses a similar dilemma: either let „aliens" in with the risk of overturning the political, religious and social system or lock them out with the risk of overturning the moral system which is grounded in „objectivity" guarded by the Impartial Spectator. (Remember the integrity of the community can only be preserved if we can imagine an impartial spectator who is neutral with respect even to the non-members or aliens.)

Let me add two other scenes *in passing,* where the same dilemma can be noticed. One that has been talked of lately so often because of the pandemic is the fight between the immune system of an organism and an intruder, a virus that is an alien body. Though the details are very complicated, note two kinds of risks that the battling participants cannot avoid. On the one hand, by intruding the virus risks destroying the body of the host on which it lives, and consequently, it risks kind of committing „suicide". On the other hand, by considering „alien" everything inside that is different from the host, the immune system risks destroying even the embryo that is growing in the mother's womb. The two cases constitute a kind of overreaction to eliminating empathy with the stranger. The other scene is the new digital culture that swallows up almost every aspect of human life. Consider the way how digital networks operate. Since a network is defined in terms of connections among the participating nodes, by definition, it excludes any potential intruder until it builds up a connection with any of the nodes. Since connections represent bits of information accessible by the nodes, an „alien" unrelated to the network is simply non-existent. Similarly, the network of a live community not only excludes aliens but considers them non-existent. Elsewhere I modelled the state of war on the crumbling social system, which no longer operates as a network, for each individual is an alien to any other. In such a state, all morality is done

with, but it is still open to the individual to become *ethical*. It is the individual who can become responsible for its singularity and irreplaceable self-identity and enter into an ethical relationship with the others who have become aliens to him, even if once they shared the same community. All the more so because we are indeed nothing without the other. „*The existence of an 'other' as the very fundament for self-identity, and the need to define oneself through difference, with and against the other, simultaneously denying one's own internal fragmentation.*" (Beugnet, 2008, p. 33)

Naturally, we can always ask: who is the Other? It should not surprise us that there is no straightforward answer to be given. For the answer depends on two things. First, on what we can know of the other, and second, on where the other belongs. Since we cannot know everything about everyone around us and those with whom we belong together, and we may have strong preconceptions about people who do not belong together with us, there is a garden variety of „others" whom we can face at any moment of our life. Sympathy, as Adam Smith conceived it, despite all the tension it harboured as I tried to show in the present paper, paved the way toward ethical relationship precisely because of the said tension. Remember that he allowed us to be sympathetic with any feeling whatsoever. Although he does not add that the target person can be anyone we may come across, I think it is a charitable interpretation to conclude that not only non-relatives and non-friends can be the target of moral assessment, as the formulation of the Impartial Spectator specifies, but radically different persons as well, who may not belong together with us.

To top that interpretation, I think we may extend it further by allowing that we feel sympathy with non-humans as well, like primates, pets or other domesticated animals. The list could be infinitely continued. Our human responsibility begins with our responsivity to all forms of life in our environment. *Any* form of life may address us, species which are dying out or are seriously endangered, like bees, on which our own survival crucially depends. By addressing us, they appeal to our ethical responsibility and not to some basic merit that they accomplished in the past. Whether we feel any sympathy and take any action – and this is my fundamental contention here – depends on us as singular and irreplaceable individuals and *not* as members of a social group. Not as moral beings, but as those who have come to ethical consciousness. Just as in the chaos of war, it is only the individual who can overcome violence and see further than the horrific scenes of death in order to take a step toward re-establishing human order, the preservation of the Earth presupposes the individual's ethical gesture. Naturally, Adam Smith could not see that far in the 18th century. He may have had no idea of animal rights, the rights of women or colonial people. Last, but not least, he could not foresee the fate of sympathy and the arrival of empathy, which not only displaces the Impartial Spectator and the condition of objectivity for moral judgment, but creates ample space for manipulation, indiscretion, or even spiritual violence.

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