

## ADAM SMITH, THE POLITE PHILOSOPHER

*Carolina González Rodríguez\**

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### Resumen

Adam Smith's interest in customs, fashion, and good manners could be translated into rules of social conduct; but to what extent manners mirror morality? A polite treatment of others may encompass the efficiency of cooperation and the acknowledgment of the dignity of man as a moral entity. Turned into institutions, some customs represent the non-aggression principle, favoring further exchanges in the market. Violent behavior on social media sparks the interest on the link between manners and morals.

**Palabras clave:** Adam Smith - Política - Filosofía Política - Principio de No Agresión - Redes Sociales.

### Abstract

El interés de Adam Smith en las costumbres, las modas y los buenos modales puede traducirse a las reglas de buena conducta. Pero ¿hasta qué punto los buenos modales reflejan la moral? El buen trato a otros encuadra la eficiencia de la cooperación y el reconocimiento de la dignidad del hombre como entidad moral. Convertidas en instituciones, algunas costumbres representan el principio de no-agresión, favoreciendo mayores intercambios en el mercado. Las conductas violentas en las redes sociales despierta el interés en el vínculo entre los buenos modales y la moral.

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\*Professor of Political Economy and Law and Economics, University of Buenos Aires, School of Law. Professor of Political Constitutional Economy, UCEMA. Professor of Economics for Decision Making, ESEADE. [cgonzalezr@derecho.uba.ar](mailto:cgonzalezr@derecho.uba.ar)

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## Introduction

*Manners constitute a special department of morals.  
No man is altogether good.  
He may be good with reference to one department  
of morality and bad with reference to another.*  
G.A. Johnston  
*Morals and Manners*

In Part V of the *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Adam Smith stretches out his philosophical interests to the importance of customs, fashion (in clothes and furniture), arts, beauty, good taste and civility. For him, all these traits involve and encompass a certain moral character that translates into the “beauty of conduct” (Smith, 1759). Adam Smith acknowledges the fact that beauty is a subjective value, and so admits it by reflecting on the many customs and cultural traits allocated to *barbarians* or *savages*. Nevertheless, such acknowledgement must not be confused with their admittance or acceptance when they collide with a moral conduct.

Smith's concern about fashion and beauty is by no means superfluous or irrelevant. After a thorough consideration of fashion in clothes, furniture and the arts, in Chapter II of Part V of TMS, he deepens the consideration of such topics when it comes to be applied to customary behavior, and the relationship between individuals in any given society. His statements, hence, should neither be read nor understood outside the context of his whole project, which is the foundation and the original source of individual methodology.

The division of labor, as the cause for increased productivity and later exchange of production surplus, implies a *contractual society* in which scarce resources are allocated by deals entered into by willing members of the society, causing the general welfare by the *invisible hand*, as Smith's represented the spontaneous order (Smith, 1776). Such outcome, particularly in large and sophisticated societies, is possible by no other means than by cooperation; by a particular disposition of men towards men, for which it is imperative to resort to *civilized* manners: “(...) In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons.” (Smith, 1776).

Adam Smith's concerns about good taste, custom and fashion perfectly fits into his whole research program, since they are the expressions of a comprehensive system of morality, in which the Social Contract can hardly be admitted without colliding with the methodology and the outcome of his investigation. Instead, manners involve a trial-error scheme, from which the West obtained the ethical principles embedded in the social, economic and political system of organization.

Cooperation, hence is not only possible but is the foundation of our civilization (Axelrod, 1984, p. 15), provided that cooperation evolves timelessly and from numberless interactions among individuals dealing with each other on a daily basis. But some conditions must occur in order for cooperation to arise. Conditions such as mutual knowledge among the parties of the exchange; previous interactions, and an accurate memory of those interactions and of their results; an expectation of future exchanges between same parties; and *reciprocity* are deemed unavoidable, in order to allow the evolvement of cooperation (Axelrod, 1984, The editors' argument that sympathy should not be confused with benevolence relies upon the intuition already developed by Eckstein pp. 165-166).

For such cooperation to occur, a previous agreement on the ontological silhouettes of men must have been achieved, since only *equals* are capable of entering into valid contracts. *Valid* is meant as a recognizable and executable agreement for all parties involved, as well as for those external to the contract itself. As such, the Kantian imperative categorical of admitting men as an end in themselves (Kant, 2008, p. 114) is inalienable, for which any other understanding of the counterparty would immediately turn the contract disputable and eventually void.

But all profound research on the philosophical and political importance of cooperation, not only as the most efficient but also the most ethical mechanism for a peaceful and successful society, lies on the fact that men must coexist with each other, on a daily basis and in a limited time-space frame. Within that pragmatic scope, cultural traits, manners and customs play a significant role at the time to provide, or not, the most suitable incentives for cooperation. For this reason, Adam Smith's equation of good conduct and morality is not only logically right, but includes an invitation to consider the more or less fruitful characteristics of manners, and the way individuals engage with each other in any given society.

But fashion, beauty and manners are as dynamic as the market, for which the link between manners and morality may be exposed to permanent challenges, posing the need for the continuous consideration of their coupling. With the development of technology and the emergence of social media, manners and politeness takes on a new dimension. Public discourse is currently conducted without intermediaries, and not only for market exchanges purposes. Social media has turned into an unlimited spring of information, with a substantive impact in the political arena. Politicians can reach out to their voters and constituents directly, and voters not only reveal their political preferences but also their intensities (Arrow, 2012, p. 114). Social media allows them to express their unbounded support and criticism addressed not only to politicians but to other participants as well, and they can do it anonymously. In that environment, incentives in favor of keeping good manners are diluted, and *cyber-violence* emerges, leading to diminishing and abusive treatment of others.

This paper aims at exploring the link between good manners and moral contents found in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and questions whether such link remains valid when observing the behavior of social media users under anonymity, particularly when related to exchanges regarding political issues.

## 1. Adam Smith's consistency

*A sacred and religious regard not to hurt or disturb in any respect the happiness of our neighbour, even in those cases where no law can properly protect him, constitutes the character of the perfectly innocent and just man; a character which, when carried to a certain delicacy of attention, is always highly respectable and even venerable for its own sake, and can scarce ever fail to be accompanied with many other virtues, with great feeling for other people, with great humanity and great benevolence.*

Adam Smith  
*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

For the vast majority of people, Adam Smith is known of as *the father of Economics* (Crowley, & Sobel, 2010; Norman, 2018), and the author of the famous line *the invisible hand*, which funds the idea of the spontaneous order as the source of social outcome and organization, opposed to a centrally engineered and planned society (Hayek, 2007, p. 84).

But Adam Smith was, first and foremost, a moral philosopher, concerned with the ethics of conducts and the interactions of men in society; interested in the “Science of Man”,

It would be even more correct to assert that by dividing Moral Philosophy into ethics, political economy, and jurisprudence, Smith’s main aim was to cover what in modern times we would call “social science”. Though Smith could not fulfill his dream of a complete social science system, he was a forerunner in the intellectual tradition that pursued this dream. He not only became the undisputed father of economics, but also envisaged a particular, original, and modern view of human nature and human beings as part of society. (Montes, n.d.)

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Adam Smith (1759) provide a thorough and proper entanglement of topics, in which is clearly distinguished a basting of ideas that emphatically discredit those who see in in him the father of *selfishness*, and the promoter of an isolated and greedy *Homo Economicus*, pursuing solely his own interests and indifferent to the means necessary to achieve his benefits.

For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, capitalism, funded in Adam Smith’s lessons, has promoted a bourgeois class which “(...) has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment” drowning “(...) in the icy water of egotistical calculation” (Marx, 1888).

But even before Marx and Engels, an alleged contradiction between Smith’s scholarship in TMS and that of *The Wealth of Nations* (TWN) has been addressed as *Das Adam Smith Problem*, as this theory was named to characterize the apparent inconsistencies between Smith’s works. The title was crafted by the socialist economists of the German Historical School<sup>1</sup> (Nieli, 1986, p. 611), who challenged by the *laissez-faire* system of TWN, found a systemic contradiction between the nature of a benevolent and sympathetic man in TMS, for later basing, in TWN, the theory of general wellbeing and social prosperity in the acting of individuals pursuing their self-interest alone.

However, there is a general consensus about the overcoming of *Das Adam Smith Problem*. Montes (2003) presents an exhaustive investigation on the topic, stating that replies and rejection to the Germans’ *problem* can be found as early as of 1861, with Sir Henry Buckle’s historical account of Scottish intellectuals, and Edwin Cannan’s publishing of some Adam Smith’s lectures, delivered at the University of Glasgow between 1762-1763

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<sup>1</sup> Oncken (1897, p. 444) expressly appoints the German economist “(...) Bruno Hildebrand, a forerunner of the German ‘ethical’ school, or ‘Socialists of the Chair’”, as the first one to raise the topic of the alleged contradiction between TTMS’s and TWN’s contents.

(Montes, 2003, pp. 75-76), among others. The latter was paramount for the task of discrediting the so-called *problem*, since it probed Adam Smith's originality, which has been previously challenged on the basis of Smith's acquaintance with Helvetius and other French materialist thinkers during his stay in France, before working and publishing TWN (Oncken, 1897, 444; Nieli, 1986, p. 614).

But Montes' (2003) most significant praise of all the theories rejecting *Das Adam Smith Problem*, is allocated to Raphael and Macfie<sup>2</sup>, editors of TTMS in 1976, who

[d]ismissed it as a 'pseudo-problem based on ignorance and misunderstanding' (TMS, intr.20). The editors' argument that sympathy should not be confused with benevolence relies upon the intuition already developed by Eckstein<sup>3</sup> (1926, pp. 33–39), summarized in his assertion that 'it must above all be said that Smith never equates 'sympathy' with 'benevolence'' (1926, p. 36). (Montes, 2003, p. 78)

Of the many critics of the alleged problem, Wight suggests that the confusion may have arisen from the misunderstanding of greed and selfishness, with "prudent (and virtuous) self-interest on the other" (Wight, 2005, p. 47). This plausible explanation involves two issues: (i) the concept of *greed* brings along a negative content; a value or principle which is largely rejected by a vast majority of people since it implies, "the desire to have more of something, such as food or money, than is necessary or fair" (Collins Dictionary, 2023). In spite of the fact that *necessary* and *fair* are not possibly defined by any objective measure (Menger, 1871), the definition helps to grasp the difference between *greed* and *self-interest*; and (ii), self-interest, as in TWN, does not collide with the comprehensive system of ethics stated by Adam Smith in TMS, since self-interest is consistent with the need to meet and cooperate with counterparties in the exchange of surplus production of goods and services.

Wight's remarks on the confusion of German economists may lay in the classical figure of *Homo Economicus*, as the individual maximizing his utilities, in a setting where utilities are understood as a monetary gain only, achieved by the rational pursuer of: "By contrast, Smith found man to be a fundamentally social animal with at times weak powers of rationality and a great capacity for heroic action" (Wight, 2005, p. 47).

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2 Smith, Adam. *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith: I: The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by David D. Raphael and Alec A. Macfie. Oxford University Press.

3 As cited by Montes (2003): Eckstein, Walther. 1926. *Introduction to The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In Hiroshi Mizuta, ed., *Adam Smith: Critical Responses*, vol. 1. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 12–49

## 2. A system of civic ethics. Against the Social Contract

*Small government is only possible when through civic discourse and institution building mature ethical standard have been established, and when through education and example these civic ethics becomes second nature for all citizens.*

Jerry Evensky  
*The Lost Legacy of Adam Smith*

Another explanation for the non-existent *Das Adam Smith Problem* lies in the fact that it would be inaccurate and improper to revisit Adam Smith's works independently from each other. On the contrary, TMS, TWN and Lectures on Jurisprudence (LJ) (Smith, 1762-1763) offer a coherent argument in response to the most important questions for the renowned thinker: how can societies become peaceful and prosper.

In TMS, Smith sets a thorough understanding of what he believes reflects the best civic ethics, bearing in mind that a society is the outcome of the relationship between interdependent individuals, for which he resorts to Kantian deontological consideration of individuals (that is, individuals as ends in themselves and never means to whatsoever other ends).

In TWN, he focuses on the particular performance of said individuals in an economic system, continuing the individual methodology previously explored in TMS, and purposefully linking the relevance of self-interest with the sympathy for each other, as imperative in order to execute multiple exchanges in a cooperative setting. In LJ, Adam Smith reflects on the key issue of justice which is the cohesive sealant that encompasses and allows a mature society, in which moral, ethical and philosophical features are to be actually performed in material behavior and conduct.

But this seemingly simple scheme actually dives into the depths of the enquiries about the origins of such an advanced system of cooperation. Against the theory of the Social Contract, Smith can be found among the earliest evolutionary philosophers and thinkers. Evensky (2001, p. 498) states that “(...) Smith's vision on how institutions and individuals evolve, and how their evolution makes possible the development of the civic ethics necessary for the emergence of constructive liberal society”, lies and depends on trial and



error of individuals conducting their affairs in society (Evensky, 2001, p. 502). And, at the same time, only the fittest of such conducts will survive, delivering the most efficient outcome. Unlike the Social Contract theory, the evolutionary theory upheld by Adam Smith departs from and acknowledges the limitations of human reason, and the value of ethics, benevolence and sympathy among men.

Limited reason and unethical behaviors in liberal societies present what Evensky (2001, p. 498) calls the “cohesion question”: were a social system formed by free will individuals and pursuing their self-interest, how such best institutions arise, survive and expand to be accepted and executed by the vast majority of members? How such a society avoids the Hobbesian “state of nature”, where there are, indeed, some men who are wolves eating other men? In Adam Smith’s answer can be found another reason for the discredit of *Das Adam Smith Problem*: his belief in man’s capability of fostering the most sensitive interests and motives, including the well-being of their fellow citizens. And so TMS begins with Chapter 1, titled “*Of sympathy*”

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. (Smith, 1769, Chapter 1)

Against Hobbes, Adam Smith’s *sympathy* element is the cement that affix what can be formed as a contractual society; the *natural* byproduct of a system of exchange, imperative not only for the well-being of its members, but also the *sine qua non* condition for the prosperity arose from the division of labor. While contracts imply a win-win situation for all parties involved, it is not by any other means than cooperation that such a state of affairs can be achieved. Since contracts involve transaction costs, they could be either enlarged or diminished, depending on the rules and regulations applied to the contracts, being the “moral, ethical and behavioral norms which define the contours that constrain the way in which rules and regulations are specified and enforcement carried out” (North, 1984, p. 8).

Consequently, a sense of justice is imperative to emerge, in order to achieve cohesion, without depending on the police power of the Leviathan. Justice is, in itself, one of the outcomes of evolution, which serves as the most suitable (ethical) guide for the conduct of men in society. Where justice is in power, the rules that embody its execution blossom,

serving not only as the solution for the cohesion problem, but as one of the key tools for advancing evolution as well (Evensky, 2005, p. 111)

Evolution, then, supports the emergence and continuation of a liberal society, based on the ethical system of rules of conduct that promotes contractual exchange, fulfillment of duties, private property and cooperation, for all of which sympathy and correctness are deemed not only imperative, but *selfishly* convenient for all the individual members of society.

### 3. Of Beauty, Rules of Conduct and Morality

*The expression of anger towards any body present, if it exceeds  
a bare intimation that we are sensible of his ill usage,  
is regarded not only as an insult to that particular person,  
but as a rudeness to the whole company*  
Adam Smith  
*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

In Part V, Chapter I of TMS, Adam Smith devotes the whole section to his reflection on customs, fashion, beauty and deformity (Smith, 1769). The incorporation of such topics is properly linked to their importance as part of the consideration of manners as one of the many representations of morals, which is included in the Part VI of the same Chapter I.

For instance, Adam Smith joins manners and clothing style, being the latter a representation of “The graceful, the easy, and commanding manners of the great (...)” (Smith, 1769). The relevance of considering customs and fashion in dressing, furniture, architecture and the arts lies in the fact that “They influence our judgments, in the same manner, with regard to the beauty of natural objects”(Smith, 1769). While clothing style can *influence* one’s consideration of others, manners goes beyond that since they directly impact the well-being of the parties relating to each other.

However, such influence is dependent on cultural traits of different peoples in the world, something acknowledged and praised by Adam Smith, who, by citing “a learned Jesuit, Father Buffier (...)” (Smith, 1769), agrees with the understanding of *beauty* as that feature

that is found in the middle, the center of the various elements of the observed human, animal, item or behavior. By this, Adam Smith dismisses the criticism and judgemental opinions about cultures and customs foreign to the observer.

His consideration of these topics has an introductory value for what he later, in Part V, Chapter II of TMS, reflects in depth, and relates to *Moral Sentiments*. For Smith, as custom impacts fashion, furniture and other daily, mundane and physical elements, is of not less significance when rules of conduct are observed and analyzed. However, his conclusion is that no cultural trait, transcribed into any given custom, can be strong enough to avoid their moral accordance or rejection.

The principles of the imagination, upon which our sense of beauty depends, are of a very nice and delicate nature, and may easily be altered by habit and education: but the sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation, are founded on the strongest and most vigorous passions of human nature; and though they may be warped, cannot be entirely perverted. (Smith, 1769)

Same conclusion applies to the propriety of conduct, according to time and circumstances, which shall be rendered as more *beautiful* as long as they meet the ubiquitous middle, or centered in a reasonable mix of passion and self-control. It is the ability to find that middle which allows the *civilized* peoples to enter into more animated debates, since “the rules of decorum” (Smith, 1769) serve as the barrier for excessive passion and the limit for a properly constrained behavior.

In Part V, Chapter II, Adam Smith portrays the features of *civilized* and *barbarian* nations and cultures. While the former admits softer characteristics, and allows sensitive expressions of feelings, the latter, in his view, are less inclined to such expressions, since *barbarians*, finding themselves in the most extreme need and lack of resources, are most oriented toward hardship of behavior, and less consideration of their fellow men (Smith, 1769). Same can be said about age and professions, which deem different expectations of behaviors and manners. “Principles of right and wrong (...)” (Smith, 1769) are formed by education, and upbringing experiences, for which those unfortunate to have been raised in less loving environments “lose (...) though not all sense of the impropriety of such conduct, yet all sense of its dreadful enormity, or of the vengeance and punishment due to it” (Smith, 1769).

In civilized nations the passions of men are not commonly so furious or so desperate. They are often clamorous and noisy, but are seldom very hurtful; and seem frequently to aim at

no other satisfaction, but that of convincing the spectator, that they are in the right to be so much moved, and of procuring his sympathy and approbation. (Smith, 1769)

But whatever customs, age and profession, the philosopher acclaim that custom (or general acceptance) of improper behavior cannot be an excuse for lack of justice and reasonableness, and “(...) custom should never pervert our sentiments with regard to the general style and character of conduct and behaviour, in the same degree as with regard to the propriety or unlawfulness of particular usages” (Smith, 1769).

#### 4. Manners, Morals and Institutions

*As long as it is allow'd, that reason has no influence on  
our passions and actions, 'tis in vain to pretend,  
that morality is discover'd only by a deduction of reason*  
David Hume  
*A Treatise of Human Nature*

Manners are a significant expression of rules of conduct. They encompass a certain vision of the world, and are a good example of institutions, as they are the outcome of cultural customs and traditions which are an informal code of conduct that accurately serve as a social coordination tool. But, to what extent can they be considered *moral* or *ethical*? Is there a substantive link between morality and the rules of conduct found in the manifestation of language, gestures and daily behavioral acts?

As seen in Adam Smith, manners can be understood as one aspect of morality. But while manners vary in a more dynamic way than morality (and may differ sharply from cultures, ages and professions), morality has a universal content<sup>4</sup>. This different pace of change may lead some to disregard their closeness (Sumner, 2007, p. 8). However, Johnston (1916) explains that manners and morals can be seen as the two sides of a coin: “it is impossible to exclude manners from the realm of morality, though within that realm there

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<sup>4</sup> The characteristic of morality's universality has been challenged by multiculturalism (Murphy, 2012; Laden & Owen, 2007; Barry, 2001)

are many departments of morality and many degrees of moral good” (Johnston, 1916, p. 205).

This argument may be challenged (Brink, 1997, p. 281) by the fact that individuals have multiple spheres of action, for which some people may be extremely moral, but rude, harsh and have rough manners, while others may be found very polite and proper, but known as having a poor morality. If this is the case, the deliberation posed might be that of the election between the two alternatives: in social settings: is it more important to be moral or ethical, or rather good mannered? Smith (1759) replies that there is no such difference between politeness and morality.

The source of that identity is found in human *dignity*. Buss (1999) suggests that manners are not only an utilitarian means to achieve our own goals, by constraining our conducts to the interests of others, but manners reflect our direct acknowledgment of their entity and worthiness, which can be revealed by a polite treatment: “When we treat one another politely, we are directly expressing respect for one another in the only way possible. We are, in effect, saying: ‘I respect you’, ‘I acknowledge your dignity.’” (Buss, 1999:802). However, Buss’s theory of politeness as a means to avoid “hurting other people’s feelings” (Buss, 1999, 804) may give room for an endless discussion on what constitutes “hurt”, and how to discover “people’s feelings” *a priori*, since “hurt” and “pleasure” are subjective values unknown unless revealed by the holder<sup>5</sup>.

While *civilization* implies the recognition of social groups and owned cultural traits (*Civilization Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary*, n.d.), it is in the noun *civility* where the sense of politeness and courtesy are embedded (*Civility Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary*, n.d.), as referring to a particular way of treating each other. Civility, of course, will vary depending on each particular culture, but whatever manner may be found as *civil*, the universal moral content of human actions impede calling *civil* a custom that violates human dignity.

Manners, politeness and correctness in the form of treating each other encompass not only a moral content, but also an efficiency angle. As Elias (2000) suggests:

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<sup>5</sup> This poses the challenging topic of, for example, the current political correctness of using “proper” pronouns when addressing to people who, in order not to have their “feelings hurt” advise *a priori* about the pronouns applicable to them. A trend strictly linked to collectivist movements like feminism (Laugesen, 2019; Martyna, 1980)

(...)[T]he civilizing process is a change of human conduct and sentiment in a quite specific direction. But, obviously, individual people did not at some past time intend this change, this 'civilization', and gradually realize it by conscious, 'rational', purposive measures. Clearly, 'civilization' is not, any more than rationalization, a product of human 'ratio' or the result of calculated long-term planning. (Elias, 2000, p. 365)

As societies became more complex, division of labor implied the need for individuals to expand their interactions so as to find a counterparty for the exchanging of their surplus of production. Mutual dependence was enhanced, driving to a deeper interweaving of social relationships.

The web of actions grows so complex and extensive, the effort required to behave 'correctly' within it becomes so great, that beside the individual's conscious self-control an automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control is firmly established. (Elias, 2000, pp. 367-8)

Hence, manners evolve as a product of spontaneous order which although not rationally and purposefully (Elias, 2000, p. 365), serve as a social coordination tool, and may be counted among the many elements emerged<sup>6</sup> in the same way. As a result of spontaneous order, manners are institutions that may efficiently achieve two simultaneous goals: (i) to lower the transaction costs in a contractual society, and (ii) to put into practice the significance of human dignity. However, dynamics and fast paced changes in manners may not always be followed by the ethical understanding of the latter.

As "Institutions are the humanly devised *constraints* that structure political, economic and social interaction"(North, 1991, p. 97) (emphasis added), manners imply a self-imposed limitation of conducts and behaviors, which are flexible enough to encompass those which better suit peculiar cultural traditions, and reflects the moral status achieved by any given society.

Western civilization's manners developed as a set of behaviors that include certain basic principles, such as the respect for the lives, liberties and private property of others. The emerging (or discovered) tacit behavioral agreements lower material and moral costs of exchanges, inevitable in extended societies. And by commanding a respectful treatment of all, those classical liberal principles diluted class differences and other circumstantial features such as race, gender, age or physical or mental disabilities. All of them are

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<sup>6</sup> Among those elements, language, law, money and the price system, for instance, may be counted.

involuntary traits of individuals, which bans any diminishing treatment, and instead, may release in some the good will and compassion for those less advantaged.

## 5. Manners in the 21st. Century

*To superficial minds, the vices of the great seem at all times agreeable.*  
Adam Smith  
*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Adam Smith's antique concern about beauty and customs rekindles, and perhaps with a stronger force now than then, when technical features of social media allows it to be the platform for what could resemble a *deliberative* democracy (Christiano, 1997, p. 243), as users take part in the causation of public discourse without intermediaries. But at the same time, such participation can be anonymous, producing a set of incentives completely different from those that may play a role in a physical exchange.

In-person relationships implies cost and benefits for participants who may, eventually, find themselves in the situation of either repeating the exchange, or eventually meet again, for which cooperation may emerge more fluidly (Axelrod, 1984). But in social media settings, under anonymity, the costs of confrontation (at any level) may be zero or close to zero, while benefits may largely surpass the cost, and improve the anonymous party's psychological welfare (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 364-365).

What has been called *cyberbullying* can be defined as a deliberate and repeated act of aggression mediated through digital devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015) and it can take different forms. On a broader level, it can either be direct cyberbullying (sending insulting messages directly) or indirect cyberbullying (spreading rumors and fake news) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Although most of the literature found on the topic of cyberbullying is related to the problem affecting children and adolescents (Dennehy et al, 2020; Ranney et al., 2019; Nocentini et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2020), political cyberbullying has taken a significant toll on the use of social media.

The Barlett and Gentile Cyberbullying Model (BGCM) (Barlett and Gentile, 2012) theoretically elucidates the psychological mechanisms that predict cyberbullying

perpetration while simultaneously highlighting the differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying “(...) [T]his theory suggests the aggressor will increasingly learn that two key factors in traditional bullying, identifiability and physical muscularity, are irrelevant when bullying on social media” (Barlett et al., 2018, p. 149).

Having been Barack Obama the first presidential candidate to use social media (Facebook) for his political campaign in 2008 (Javeed et al., 2022, p. 12), on time all politicians resorted to this powerful communicational resource as well. As of then, social media has become a new scenario for the life-long discussion on the scope and the extent of free speech. It forms the battlefield for a 21st century clash of ideas and ideology (Hayek, 1949, p. 418), departing from a civilized exchange and activism, to falling down a whirlpool of aggression and initially, at least, verbal harm and violence.

While followers or adherents of different political offerings can express their opinions under anonymity, politicians lack of that benefit for which their involvement in social media discussions are usually constrained to rules of manners and correctness<sup>7</sup>. Social media platforms may challenge the Public Choice’s hypothesis that suggests that politicians are bound to produce a discourse according to what they *may* think meets the voters’ demands (Caplan, 2007, p. 4). And even though votes do not allow to know the intensity of voters’ preferences (Campbell, 1973), “[s]ocial media (...), promises to equip researchers with data sets involving tens of millions of informants, raising enormous scientific—as well as ethical—challenges” (Jost et al., 2018, p. 87).

According to (Fershtman & Segal, 2018, p. 131) “individuals have a social influence function that determines his behavioral preferences”. Recent research (Jost et al., 2018) shows that political protests have been many times fueled by the use of social media, emerging as grass-root movements that promoted later leadership. Weeks et al., (2017) found that “online social influence is powerful and can impact a range of political behaviors, such as the media outlets people select (Messing & Westwood, 2014), what they learn on social media (Bode, 2015), and even whether they vote (Bond et al., 2012)” (p. 217).

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<sup>7</sup> Although some research has been conducted finding “598 People, Places and Things Donald Trump has insulted on Twitter” (Lee & Quealy, 2019)



Influence of political leaders may lead their followers to adopt the same (or similar) behaviors and manners as those witnessed and praised. To what extent such influence is determinant for online followers, or political leadership actually mirrors voters' cultural traits remains pendant of further research. For the time being, online violent behaviors, rude and ill-mannered expressions of social media users against political opponents are both quantitative and qualitative self-evident, which may cause alarm in reference to nowadays social moral settings.

## Summary

In TMS, Adam Smith establishes a system of moral behavior, desirable for the advancement and progress of societies. Some critics found discrepancies between TMS and his findings in TWN, which was summarized in what was known as “Das Adam Smith Problem”. The allegedly divergence between an *ethical* individual (as portrayed in TMS) and a selfish, utility maximizer one, interested in nothing but his sole benefit (as some found in TWN) was redundantly challenged and probed to be mistaken, given that division of labor can only benefit the members of society as long as they are able to exchange the surplus of their production.

As part of the behaviors that would lead to a prosperous exchange, in Chapter V of TMS, Adam Smith devotes his consideration to beauty and fashion, admitting that features of what may seem irrelevant elements for the philosophical consideration (such as fashion in clothing and furniture), are -in fact- worth of consideration when applied to manners and behaviors. By observing good manners, individuals will increase their chances of entering into beneficial exchanges, and the outcome would be a contractual society.

Hence, manners imply a set of moral values, which are reflected in the actual behavior of individuals. And while Adam Smith admits that customs and cultural traits differ from one society to another, he still supports an universal morality that legitimize banning certain customs which may imply the violation of basic human dignity and rights. By

attaching to good manners, members of society would be attaching to a *good morality*, and enhancing their chances to enter into beneficial agreements with each other.

Smith's disbelief in the Social Contract theory leads to the understanding of manners as *institutions*, since they become an informal set of rulings, constraining the behavior of individuals. The manners in place, reflects the general acceptance of rules of conduct which, supposedly, brought about the best outcomes possible, for which they become institutions. Manners then, may not only be a set of moral preferences, but also efficient tools for enhancing cooperation rather than confrontation.

However, changes in manners are significantly more dynamic than changes in moral schemes. Or, at least, more noticeable in the short term. Social media and technological developments serve as platforms for the observation of manners in a direct way, by allowing a first-hand expression of users, particularly when such statements referred to politics and directed to political opponents. Social media, hence, allows political leaders not only to have a more accurate knowledge of voters' preferences, but also of their intensity. The higher levels of verbal violence, and unconstrained behavior -most of the times under anonymity- found in current public discourse on social media, may lead to conclude that the 21st century manners reflect a diminished value of morality, and a devaluation of ethical treatment of each other.

Manners are one of the many aspects of morality. By adopting good manners, individuals show the set of ethical principles to which they abide. Mistreating, cursing, or expressing opinions in rude or improper ways, not only discredit so expressed opinions, since they may incur into *ad-hominem* fallacies, but also informs of the poor consideration of man's dignity, and the lack of respect for what could be properly considered the basic principles of classical liberalism: this is, the non-aggression principle. Something that the polite thinker taught about to generations to come.

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