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MORAL PHILOSOPHY

SEE *Philosophy, Moral*.

MORAL SENTIMENTS

The field of economics developed out of political economy, which in the early twenty-first century would be thought of as an interdisciplinary combination of economics, political science, sociology, history, and moral philosophy. Prior to that evolution, political economy was part of the curriculum of “expediency,” a subfield of moral philosophy. Adam Smith, for example, was a professor of moral philosophy, and not until Thomas Malthus is political economy itself deemed worthy of a sole professorship. Smith, often considered the “father of economics,” was the author not only of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) but also of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1769). While there was long a debate over whether the two works were consistent with one another, the consensus in the early twenty-first century is that the two works are generally (if not entirely) compatible.

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Smith addressed the question of whether a society of perfect liberty, in other words, a society freed from the fetters of feudal and ecclesiastic authority, could attain moral order. In the *Wealth of Nations* (WN), Smith asked the same question but about economic order. The link was to be a third work on the institutional and legal framework ensuring this perfect society, which Smith never was able to complete but which is outlined in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ). TMS is about the socialization of the individual, and WN is about the economic outcomes of the behavior of

socialized individuals in the legal and institutional context of LJ (Macfie 1967; Heilbroner 1982).

In TMS, Smith introduces “sympathy” (what in the early twenty-first century would be called *empathy*) as the social cement of society. Sympathy is not pity but is rather fellow feeling of any kind. Our approval or disapproval of the behavior of others is determined by our imagining how we would feel and how we would respond if we were in a like situation—thus the importance in Smith of the role of the imagination. We ask whether the person’s response is appropriate to the situation and then about the effects of the response. If we sympathize, we approve; if not, we disapprove. We judge our own behavior in a similar way. Here Smith introduces his idea of the “impartial spectator”—we imagine ourselves in someone else’s shoes observing our own behavior and evaluating it in a like manner. The judgment of the impartial spectator requires more than sympathy—it also requires reason. Sympathy, when joined with reason, becomes “sympathetic reason” or “rational sympathy,” the “best head joined to the best heart.” Over time the many judgments we are all making result in social codes of conduct, some of which may become law, others unwritten but no less strict codes of morality. Self-deceit or excessive self-regard can intrude, however, and if untamed may result in us justifying or rationalizing behavior we know to be wrong. Here Smith looks to “self-command” (self-control) and a “sense of duty” (commitment to society) to ensure individuals will generally obey the social rules of society.

Interestingly in TMS Smith identifies two levels of prudence. The lower level includes what we think of as economic activities, whereas the higher level concerns valor, benevolence, justice, and the like. The former is only worthy of “a certain cold esteem,” and it is only the latter, higher level that is truly and properly called *prudence*. Thus it can be said that, in Smith, *proper* self-regard—self-interested behavior moderated by self-command and a sense of duty as well as the socially responsible adherence to social rules and obligations—can be socially beneficial under certain conditions. It is not the higher level of prudence, but it is a kind of prudence. In no way can it be said that Smith subscribed to the notion that “greed is good.” Economic order requires not only the proper institutions but also the moral sentiments, without which Smith’s society of perfect liberty would be impossible (Rothschild 2001, pp. 236–246 and *passim*).

SEE ALSO *Liberty; Philosophy, Moral; Smith, Adam*

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MORAL SUASION

Moral suasion is a discursive strategy that references a set of principles to pressure individuals, groups, or nation-states to change their policies. Moral suasion strategies have been used by various actors and organizations for diverse purposes throughout history. It tacitly assumes that most (but not all) humans are reasonable, flexible, and have capacities for conceiving an agreed-upon sense of justice. It therefore takes a rather progressive view of human history, in that barriers to human freedom can be “broken down” through persuasive dialogue that uses universal principles as the basis for its truth claims. Moral suasion is a nonviolent form of influence, and therefore the groups and organizations that use it have themselves prohibited the use of violence to further their political goals. For instance, the King Center, a nonprofit organization founded by Coretta Scott King, lists *moral suasion* in its “Glossary of Nonviolence.” Moral suasion strategies historically have been and continue to be used by a myriad of organizations.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries certain U.S. abolitionist organizations used moral suasion to seek an end to slavery. Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879) used this strategy in their published writings and public speeches. These groups based their discourse in a faith in (what they viewed as) universal values of human equality and freedom. The scholar Tunde Adeleke wrote that “moral suasion ... reflected the enduring character and impact of ... the Enlightenment. Late eighteenth-century Enlightenment culture prioritized rationalism, secularism and a utilitarian conception of government” (Adeleke 1998, p. 128).

Certain U.S. civil rights organizations, beginning especially in the 1950s and 1960s, used moral suasion for purposes similar to those of the abolitionists: Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., along with both secular and religious organizations, sought to bring about desegregation in the U.S. South. These movements combined moral suasion with other tactics, such as nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience, to secure the rights of African Americans during this time.

Economists have recently used the term *moral suasion* to reference the tactic used by financial authorities (such as the Federal Reserve and the International Monetary Fund) to pressure financial institutions to adhere to mon-

etary or fiscal guidelines. It is driven morally by the assumption that these guidelines will improve the economic well-being of a regional, national, or international society, including their individual members.

Most recently, humanitarian nongovernmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have used moral suasion to criticize global human rights abuses and to pressure the international community to systematically act to stop these abuses. These groups legitimate their moral language by referring to conventions that have been ratified by a majority of the international community (e.g., the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the Geneva Convention), but they also seek to effect action from influential nation-states by referencing those nation-states’ traditions of human rights: “The moral arguing here is mainly about identity politics, that is, Western governments and their societies are reminded of their own values as liberal democracies and of the need to act upon them in their foreign policies” (Risse and Ropp 1999, p. 251).

SEE ALSO *Civil Disobedience; Desegregation; Enlightenment; Gandhi, Mohandas K.; Human Rights; King, Martin Luther, Jr.; Passive Resistance; Persuasion; Slavery*

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MORALITY

Morality (Latin neuter plural: *moralia*) is a multifaceted term. It is commonly used to describe the behavioral teaching and practical lessons of literary and artistic works. As a descriptive term about the cultural and social realms, *morality* signifies the habits and norms of behavior that establish right and wrong conduct for individuals in particular societies. Normatively, morality is the systematic and principled reflection concerned with determining what ought to be the standards of conduct and duties for