

Adam Smith and Dependency

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is the works and life of Adam Smith. Adam Smith is widely recognized as the father and founder of contemporary economics. Latent content analysis is applied to his seminal text in economics, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776/ 1981). The results reveal that Smith considers *dependence* on others a problem and sees the solution to this problem in impersonalized interdependence. In addition his views on *social dependency* and *personal dependency* reflected in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1963/1982) and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (1759/2007) are analyzed. This analysis suggests a central tension between dependence and independence in Smith's writings. The *personal dependency patterns* he exhibited in his life through a reading of his biographies, which also suggest a tension between dependence and independence in his life are also identified. Benefitting from psychoanalytic literature it is proposed that developing the ideas in the *Wealth of Nations* was part of Smith's creative solution to this tension. In particular, his solution to one individual's dependence on another was through a system of impersonalized interdependence. In other words, it is argued that Smith defended against his personal dependence through his economic theorizing.

I. Introduction

Most economists view economics as a field that develops through applications of “the scientific method” described in mainstream notions of the philosophy of science. Many social scientists, including certain economists who are not in the mainstream, have criticized the limited nature of this approach to economics. For example, the great economist Shumpeter (1954) has argued that the subject matter of economics is a historical process and that its implicit intellectual history should be made explicit (pp. 3-4). Philosopher Harding (1995) has criticized mainstream economics research on the grounds that economists lack recognition of the embedded values in their assumptions, such as those that describe men as rational, self-interested individuals. In addition, there are a few studies on how the psychology of researchers enters into economic theorizing. Focusing on researchers as a group Weisskopf (1949) argues that the conflict an individual feels between his/her ideas and the group’s is defended against by making an intellectual compromise. Feiner (2003) suggests that the market functions as a “perfect substitute” for the mother to meet all needs and wants. Feiner argues economists elevate markets institutions as a “defense against anxieties provoked by the guilty feelings associated with infantile rage at mothers/markets for not being perfect.” (188)

Adding to these constructive criticisms, it is noted here that latent meanings of texts are not analyzed in mainstream economics. Thus, starting from the premise that the emotional and unconscious basis for thought and action influences the development of a field of academic inquiry latent content analysis is applied to the fundamental opening chapters of one of the most influential texts in economics, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (WN; 1776/ 1981) by Adam Smith.

One of the essential ways psychoanalysis can be applied is by seeking "...the function of the unconscious in human behavior as evidenced by life styles...creativity and sublimations...writing...human action and inhibition." (Lowenberg 2007, p. 15).¹ Following this lead, latent content analysis is applied to the study of the *WN*.

The *WN* is chosen because Adam Smith is widely recognized as the father and founder of contemporary economics and the *WN* is considered a seminal text. The chapters analyzed here are on the division of labor and are among the most widely studied pieces of work by Smith (see for example Rosenberg 2003).² On the surface, Smith's analysis of the division of labor focuses on the productivity gains that result from it. Smith's important insights about the technological superiority of division of labor and specialization have become one of the pillars in economics.

This analysis reveals that Smith views personal dependence on others to meet one's needs distasteful. Smith argues that people never reach a stage of independence from others. How, then, do men survive in a world where they do not have the capacity to be independent, yet dependency is unacceptable? Smith sees the solution to this problem in a system of socially-distanced faceless contracting. Individuals who are able, due to the division of labor and specialization, to produce more than they need of a particular good, offer their produce in exchange for that of others by appealing to others' self-interest. Thus, the market exchange that is entered voluntarily is a system that enables people to meet their needs through other people via impersonalized interdependence. In this analysis, people's dependence on each other is unmentioned; in rare instances when such dependency comes into the text, it does so only implicitly, and the topic remains unexplored.

In order provide a broader exploration of Smith's views on dependency, the views on *social dependency* and *personal relatedness* reflected in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence (LJ)*;

1963/1982) and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (*TMS*; 1759/2007) are also analyzed. Furthermore, through a reading of his biographies, the *personal dependency patterns* he exhibited in his life are identified.

From (*LJ*, 1963/1982) and (*TMS*, 1759/2007) it is deduced that while he disdained some forms of dependence, he cherished others. In particular, Smith shows a strong antagonism toward the unequal dependence of one social group on another (*LJ*).³ Domination is in human nature, he argues. He also expresses a belief that domination and dependency corrupt human character. In his writings on personal dependence (in *TMS*), Smith shows a great regard for the value of family and friendships for personal happiness. He argues that a man's affections naturally fall upon his immediate family.⁴

The picture that emerges so far is that Smith idealized independence in the *WN*, exhibited a strong disdain towards unequal social dependence in *LJ*, yet had a high regard for personal relatedness in his writings in the *TMS*. This picture suggests a central tension between relatedness and independence in Smith's writings. To shed light on the potential roots of this tension his personal life is examined. The most salient aspects of Smith's life that are learned from his biographies are that Smith's father passed before Smith's birth and that he lived with his mother throughout her life, until she passed at the age of 90, only several years prior to Smith's passing. Smith did not develop any romantic partnerships beyond having had loving or affectionate interactions with a couple of women. At the same time, he had enduring male friendships. For his financial needs, Smith initially depended on family income and later on rich businessmen, gentry, intellectuals, and aristocrats for teaching positions and his pension. Thus dependency patterns Smith exhibited in his life also suggest a tension between dependence and independence. In this paper it is proposed that his solution to one individual's dependence on

another was through a system of impersonalized interdependence among equals through market transactions, as my analysis of his chapters on the division of labor illustrates. In other words, I argue that Smith defended against his personal dependence through his economic theorizing.

Consistent with the results of this analysis it has been noted by Kuiper (2002) that dependency has been a complicated issue for economists since being dependent on others requires that power differences, relations between non-homogenous individuals. These issues do not neatly fit in the optimal outcomes analysis of market processes. Thus dependency has been placed outside the framework of economic analysis. Kuiper concludes that in economics dependency is seen as a social problem and its solution is provided through economic exchange.

One may argue that Smith was only writing about economic relations in a capitalist system. However, even in a capitalist system transfer of goods between people takes place not only through faceless transactions in the market place. They also take place between individual with close ties with one another, such as within the family, close friends, members of extended family, and close knit communities. That Smith chooses only to focus on impersonalized interdependencies in the WN is noteworthy.

There is, of course, a vast amount of scholarly work on Adam Smith. A very informative and useful review is contained in Haakonnsen (2006). Since the novelty of this work is an application of psychoanalytic reading of the aforementioned work by Smith there is not an immediately relevant literature to review.

Some important qualifications are necessary. This paper has a limited scope as described above. It is neither an analysis of the entirety of the WN, nor an analysis of Smith's entirety of works. This paper also has a limited scope in that the social, historical context of Smith's works are not analyzed, except for brief references to the Scottish Enlightenment. Finally, it should also

be noted that this study is not about whether Smith viewed humans as benevolent or self-interested but it concerns his views and attitudes on dependency as reflected in his writings and his life.

In the rest of the paper, the following organization is used. Section II, which focuses on the chapter on the division of labor in the *WN*, analyzes the idealization of impersonal interdependence that Smith exhibits in that text. Section III, on his attitude towards social dependence, and section IV, on his attitude towards personal dependence, reflect the strong sentiments with which he wrote about these forms of dependence, as well as the apparent intensity with which he experienced them. In that section, first, a synopsis of Smith's personal relations, based upon his biographies as well as some of his own writings is provided. Later in the same section, a psychoanalytic interpretation of his struggle with dependence in his personal life is discussed. Concluding remarks are contained in Section V.

II. A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Division of Labor

The *WN* shows the usefulness of the market economy. Smith's analysis of markets is based on trade between self-interested individuals. Smith further argues that the pursuit of self-interest would benefit the whole society. Self-interested competition within a free market would keep the prices low, and the market would guide the production of the right amounts of a whole variety of goods and services. An essential component of Smith's analysis of markets is his treatment of the division of labor. The chapters on the division of labor are places where his attitudes towards dependency are most apparent. Thus, next an analysis of Smith's chapter on the division of labor is presented.

II.1. *Chapter I: “Of the Division of Labour”*

In this Chapter, people’s dependence on each other is unmentioned; in the rare instances when dependence comes into the text, it does so only implicitly, and the topic remains unexplored. For example, Smith describes the operations of a manufacturing firm where division of labor takes place. With the division of labor every man is dependent on each other’s produce, but this is not acknowledged in the text. Second, in the discussion of how inventions occur, the potential for an invention that arise through cooperation of workers is not considered. Therefore, workers’ dependency on each other’s work during an invention process is not taken into account. The process of exchange of extras makes each person depend on the products of others. However, Smith characterization of this exchange erases people’s dependence on each other or reduces it to socially distanced impersonalized transactions.

This chapter opens by stating that “the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labor” (Smith, 1776/1981, I.i.1).

Smith’s interest in productivity was a shared one during the Scottish Enlightenment. Scots were poor. They believed that if the country were to prosper, the economy needed to improve, men would have to be trained, and science would have to be brought to solve problems. There were intense debates about conditions that may lead to economic growth. Both the mercantilist and free-trade solutions were being debated. Scots argued for more efficient industries, larger markets, and more investment.

Smith observes division of labor in those industries or manufactories where workmen can be collected in the same workhouse and viewed by a spectator. To explain the process of the division of labor and the resulting gains from it, Smith gives his famous pin factory example: “One man draws out the wire, another straightens it..making pins is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations” (I.i.3). Smith goes on to state that one worker could probably make only twenty pins per day, while if ten people divided up the eighteen steps required for making a pin, they could make a combined 48,000 pins in one day. The description of pin making is written with a meticulous focus on the number of pins that can be produced. Smith takes more than one page of the twelve page chapter to elaborate on this example, perhaps to preserve Smith’s status as scientific observer.

Placing value on scientific work was an important aspect of the Scottish Enlightenment. , Sir Isaac Newton had a significant influence on the Scottish Enlightenment. Both institutional factors, such as the creation of new teaching positions, and individual initiatives were instrumental in the rise of Newtonianism in Scotland (Wood, 2003, p. 102). As Wood (2003) explains,

Natural knowledge and mathematics were increasingly presented as polite forms of learning and gentlemanly accomplishments, which meant that the study of natural sciences could be seen as exemplifying the values now thought to be appropriate to academe. Newtonianism, in turn, benefitted from this shift, because it too was construed as a branch of knowledge fit for a polite gentlemen.

(p. 103)

It is also argued that Newton's success in his discovery of the natural laws of motion had a significant impact on Adam Smith's efforts to discover the general laws of economics (Hetherington, 1983).

While Smith is relentlessly arguing that the division of labor increases productivity, however, he leaves out important aspects of the reality of pin factories that do not suit his argument. For example, the work conditions are sanitized portraying workers as equals. As is well known, however, various groups of workers, adults, apprentices and children were discriminated by the tasks they were assigned, children being assigned the worst tasks.

One also wonders whether the dichotomy between specialization and the separate crafting of each individual pin is a false one. Marglin (1974) argues that indeed it is. Furthermore, implicit in Smith's description of the pin factory, is that one man depends on the other's work. However, dependency and its potential implications—which may involve, for example, conflict that could lead to a reduction in productivity, feelings such as envy or gratitude that may impact the work environment, or workers' relations to one another—are not addressed.

Smith generalizes his argument to other manufacturing industries where labor can be subdivided into different tasks. He makes comparisons across different industries and across different countries. Though the argument may largely be valid, the multitude of examples provided, the length of the text devoted to them (two pages of a twelve page chapter), and the sweeping generalizations are notable. There appears to be a strained effort to convince the reader of the “universal truth” of the argument made.

Smith then turns to a discussion of how the division of labor results in improved productivity. One of the arguments Smith makes is that the division of labor propels invention. His imagery is that of one man focusing on a single object (1776/1981, I.i.8). Though this image

fits certain instances of invention, it is the only one brought up in the text—at the cost of raising the possibility of a group of workers jointly working on an invention. Thus, some important potential dependencies are not considered but only the one that is consistent with the argument being developed in the text.

Another argument of this chapter is that the division of labor leads to “universal opulence”. The extension of the universal opulence to the “lowest” ranks of people assumes power- and conflict-free social relations of exchange. This is another place in the chapter where people are dependent on each other’s produce and the ability to exchange to benefit from the opulence of the society. Again, the exchange process is described as an idealized situation in which all men are equal except for the difference in the amount of their product arising from the division of labor. They enter into exchange with one another out of their free will in a harmonious society. More important is the fact that people are interdependent through what Smith depicts as an impersonal exchange in the markets.

III.2. *Chapter II: “Of the Principle Which Gives Occasion to Division of Labour”*

In this Chapter Smith argues that a man is able to produce surplus goods to offer to others because of his increased productivity due to division of labor. Ironically, we again end up in a world in which human beings depend on each other. The dependence, however, is impersonalized, sanitized, and reduced to market exchange among equals.

One of the key building blocks for the arguments in this chapter is stated in the first paragraph:

division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom. It is the necessary . . . consequence of a

certain propensity in human nature . . . the propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another.⁵ (Smith, 1776/1981, II.ii.1)

The assertion that the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange is unique to humans is developed with the following words:

It is common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals, which seem to know neither this nor any other species of contracts. Two greyhounds, in running down the same hare, have sometimes the appearance of acting in some sort of concert. Each turns her towards his companion . . . This however, is not the effect of any contract, but of the accidental concurrence of their passions in the same object at that particular time. Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog. (II.ii.2)

The most curious aspect of this statement is that animals are portrayed as having passions and acting on them, whereas men are characterized as relating to each other through contracts. Of course, men have passions, and animals exchange things, though we may not think of them as forming contractual arrangements. Ants and bees, for example, exchange things with others in their communal living.

According to Smith, animals and men also differ in that animals, when grown to maturity, are independent of each other, whereas men have constant need for the help of others, but they cannot expect this from their benevolence alone. The contrasts he draws between animals and men continue being important to Smith's depiction of how men and animals get what they want. Animals, he asserts, get what they want from other animals or men by gaining their favor. Men, by contrast, do not have time to do this on every occasion. A man will succeed in getting what he wants from other men "if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew

them that is for their own advantage to do him what he requires of them” (Smith, 1776/1981, I.ii.2). “Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer,” Smith insists, “and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest” (I.ii.2). A man never talks to others of his own needs, in other words, but of their advantages. “Nobody but a beggar chuses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens” (I.ii.2), Smith asserts. Men get what they want from each other “by treaty, by barter, and by purchase” (I.ii.3).

There are a couple of striking aspects to the arguments related in the paragraph above. First, men are portrayed as unlike animals in being dependent on each other. However, many animals live in groups for their survival, depending on each other. Second, what is absent from this depiction is noteworthy. The argument would suggest that neither men nor animals take what they want by force or by using power. There are no conflicts in the process of getting what either an animal or a man wants. Smith’s depiction of men as getting what they want only by an appeal to the self-love of others leaves out many possibilities: men can also get what they want through family, informal networks, gifts, reciprocity, or others’ benevolence. In other words, men have the possibility of depending on each other through personal relations, not only through impersonalized market exchange.

How do people then obtain things to offer to others in order to get what they want? To provide an answer to this question, the text turns to the division of labor:

As it is by treaty, by barter and by purchase, that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this

same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour. In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business . . . thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his consumption . . . encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation.

As it is in this chapter, it was common to compare animals and humans during the Scottish Enlightenment. Distinctions between animals and humans were made to reach conclusions regarding human sociality and socialization. It was believed that we could learn something about humans by studying the animal world. It was also noted that humans required extensive nurture, unlike animals; some animals would be able to join a herd within hours of birth, whereas the new human baby could not. Another distinction noted between animals and humans was the ability of humans to reason. However, reason could not be the basis of human sociality as, it was argued, it took time to develop.

It was argued that the parent-child bond among humans was more durable than that among animals and that it was this durability that led to familial and kinship ties that extended beyond mere instinct. Once the child established a durable bond with his parent, he could develop friendships and loyalty. The Scottish thinkers also argued that the human “frame was composed of passions that were the basis of our relations with others, our mores, our conventions and our morality: to understand the frame one must understand the mores, and vice-versa”(Garret, 2003, p. 83). Human frames were believed to have been created to harmonize with other humans. Eventually, the durability of parent-child bonding would grow into a habit,

becoming second nature. Thus, habit would be a significant source of sociality and social coherence. This, of course, is argued to be an important source of slow changes in institutions. As Berry (2003) puts it, “Since customs are creatures of time, then time, that is gradual alterations in the sentiments of people, is what changes them” (p. 249). Thus, Scots were cautious about the speed of progress in social relations. (See Berry, 2003, for a broader discussion of sociality and socialization during the Scottish Enlightenment.)

III. Smith’s Views on Dependence and Social Relations

In Smith’s other writings, there is an acknowledgment of unequal dependence. Specifically, in Smith’s view, domination is in human nature, and most humans despise treating others as free persons. He was deeply hostile towards the dependency the nobility imposed on their retainers and servile dependents. (See also Fiori and Pesciarelli (1999), Lewis (2000), and Perelman (1989).) He believed domination and dependency undermined and corrupted human character and the moral stock of the society. (Rosenberg (1990).) Smith saw self-interest inherently corrupting in societies where great wealth created hierarchy. Different social structures imposed on self-interested men, however, could have a powerful impact in mediating the corrupting nature of dominance and dependency. He saw commercial society as a powerful force that prevents unequal social dependency, giving rise to liberty and the security of individuals.

Writing on domination, Smith tells us that

the love of domination and authority over others, which I am afraid is natural to mankind, a certain desire of having others below one, and the pleasure it gives one to have some persons who he can order to do his work rather than be obliged to persuade

others to bargain with him, will forever hinder this [the employment of free labour in the Scottish mines] from taking place. (1963/1982, p. 192)

He later returns to this subject in the *WN*:

The pride of a man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors. Wherever the law allows it, and the nature of the work can afford it, therefore, he will generally prefer the service of slaves to freemen. (1776/1981, III.ii.10).

Smith speaks of “tyranic” [*sic*] disposition which may almost be said to be natural to mankind” while describing slavery (1963/1982, p. 452).

Smith thought sustained moral character could be provided by a market or commercial society. In his words,

Nothing tends so much to corrupt and enervate and debase the mind as dependency, and nothing gives such noble and generous notions of probity as freedom and independency. Commerce is one great preventive to this custom. (1963/1982, p. 333)

Smith returns to this subject in the *WN* by highlighting how commerce contributed to the rural society through introducing “the liberty and security of individuals” (1776/1981, III.iv.4) and by relieving them of servile dependence:

...commerce and manufacturers gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived in a continual state of war with their neighbors, and of a servile dependency upon their superiors. This though it has been least observed is by far the most important of all their effects.

(1776/1981, III.iv.4)

Scots also thought about freedom and its meanings. Control and power in Scotland were manifested in both the formal mechanisms of the church and state as well as in patronage. Patronage gave local elites extensive powers, though patrons were few in number because Scotland was governed by a small number of merchants and landowners. (See Emerson 2003 for a broader discussion of the context of the Scottish Enlightenment). Scots saw change in power relations as a slow process. Smith, for example, argued that the destruction of feudal power would be brought about by the “silent and insensible operation of foreign commerce and manufacturers” (1776/1981, p. 10) and by the changes in the form of “property and manners” (p. 8). “These changes were,” Garret (2003) states, “almost entirely positive, the emancipation of social inferiors, women, slaves and children from their barbarous conditions in rude times through the emergence of liberal societies and governments” (p. 80).

IV. Smith and Personal Dependence

In this section, first, a synopsis of Adam Smith’s biography is presented. The goal here is to delineate the salient aspects of Smith’s experiences with personal dependency, the personal aspects of his life are discussed below. Later in this section, some possible interpretations of Smith’s dependency patterns is presented.

IV.1 *A Synopsis of Smith’s Family History and Personal Relationships*

There are volumes of biographies on Adam Smith. Among these biographies I find Stewart (1793/1858), West (1969), Ross (1995), and Weinstein (2001) most useful in providing information on Smith’s life, thus the synopsis provided below is based on them. The content of these biographies is mostly centered on Smith’s works. Because the information on his personal

life is not nearly as rich as the information on his works, the synopsis will suffer from the constraints imposed by the available information. The scantiness of information on Smith's life is, of course, not surprising. In his circles, it was important to keep one's own personal affairs private as well as to protect the privacy of those with whom one had intimate personal relations.

Starting with pertinent historical information on Smith's parents. Smith's father, the senior Adam Smith, died about 6 months prior to Smith's birth in January 1723. Smith was born in Kirkcaldy, where the senior Adam Smith had been a customs officer. Smith senior left several of his friends as guardians of Adam Smith. These men, who included merchants and professionals, were participants in the early stages of the Scottish Enlightenment, to which Adam Smith became a major contributor.

The elder Smith died a fairly rich man, leaving a large income and some property behind. His family was able to afford good accommodations for Smith throughout his years of schooling. Smith's dependence on family income continued through his teens and adulthood. Furthermore, throughout his life, Smith was frequently dependent on rich businessmen, gentry, intellectuals, and aristocrats for teaching positions, his pension, and his appointment as a customs officer.

Smith's mother, Margaret Douglas Smith, descended from a powerful, landowning family. Not much is known about her character. What we know about her is that she was a Stoic woman with firm religious values. As a Stoic woman, she believed in controlling one's emotions through self-command, a personal discipline that she clearly passed on to Smith.⁶ Based on her portrait by C. Metz (Kirkcaldy Museum of Art) (Ross (1995, p. 310)). Ross states that she appears as an "austere and dignified figure [and that her] . . . face seems to be [that] of a woman with strong character, with dark, heavy-lidded eyes under dark eye brows" (p. 309). Following his interpretation of the portrait, Ross states that "when Smith writes in *WN* of the two systems of

morality, on the one hand the liberal and on the other the strict and austere (v.i.g.10), it is perhaps appropriate to think of his mother as upholding the values of the second” (p. 309).” An aspect of the Stoic doctrine that is important in Smith’s upbringing is the central tension between independence and dependence. On the one hand, nature has its rules that all creatures follow and on which they depend. On the other hand, rational creatures can show independence, choosing certain actions that they consider moral and rejecting others.

Margaret Douglas was left a widow with a newborn after a marriage of only about 3 years. According to his biographers, Smith was constitutionally a sickly child and his health prevented him to participate in the activities of his peers. Douglas Stewart wrote “The weakness of his bodily constitutions prevented him from partaking in their more active amusements...” (Stewart (1793/1858, 270). Ross (1995) speaks of Margaret Douglas as a remarkable mother who brought Smith through an illness-ridden childhood, with the help of the guardians appointed in his father’s will. While raising Smith, his mother had not only the support of Smith’s guardians but also of her family. Ross (1995) suggests that Smith’s mother was able to compensate for the absence of Smith’s father through her close kinship and family bonds. Stewart (1793/1858) states that as a child, Smith “required all the tender solicitude of his surviving parent. She was blamed for treating him with an unlimited indulgence” (p. 1). Besides creating a stable environment for her sickly child, Margaret Douglas is also known to have encouraged him to become a distinguished scholar. According to Ross (1995), “There is every indication that he responded to his mother’s care by loving her deeply and seeking to please her, not least in achieving distinction in his career as a professor and a man of letters” (p. 17).

Smith never married. His most influential relationship was with his mother to whom he kept returning to through his life. Smith lived with his mother until her death in 1784, only 6

years before his own passing in 1790. The depth of his feelings towards his mother is very eloquently expressed in a letter he wrote upon her death:

That the final separation from a person who certainly loved me more than any other person ever did or ever will love me; and whom I certainly loved and respected more than I ever shall either love or respect any other person, I cannot help feeling, even at this hour, as a very heavy stroke upon me. (Smith quoted in Ross, 1995, p. 358)

Another important woman figure in Smith's life was his cousin Janet Douglas. She joined his household in 1754 and was his housekeeper. There are indications that his cousin partly filled the gap in his life after his mother's death. When she was dying, Smith wrote, "She will leave me one of the most destitute and helpless men in Scotland." (Smith quoted in Ross, 1995, p. 401)

As much as Smith depended on these two women, not only did he remain a bachelor all his life, but he also did not develop any lasting romantic relationships. There were only a few women who gained his affections. We are told that Smith was in love as a young man with a beautiful and accomplished woman. However, unknown circumstances prevented their marriage. Reportedly, he beamed at her company later in life, though only with kindness rather than with any romantic interest (Ross, 1995, p. 402). One may wonder whether Smith's appearance might have been an impediment to his involvement with women: he was a physically unattractive man with a funny walk. The known facts, however, suggest otherwise. For example, although actress and novelist Mme. Riccoboni thought him as ugly as a devil, she is said to have been won over by the goodness of his heart. "She was writing," Ross records, "that she liked Smith very much, wishing the devil would carry off all the *gens de lettres* and bring back Smith" (p. 210). Ross adds, "It is feared that the biographer can do little more with the topic of Smith's sex life than contribute a footnote to the history of sublimation" (p. 214).

At the same time, it seems that Smith had wishes about being a father. Ross (1995) quotes a letter in which Smith writes

not only to shew it some of my young friends, in the mean time, but to leave it a legacy to my family and Posterity, if it should ever please God to grant me any, as an example of inflexible probity which they ought to follow on all occasions. (p. 257)

Despite his lack of any lasting romantic relationship, Smith had numerous male friendships, starting in his childhood. Above all he was beloved for his character. Through all accounts of his character and personality, Smith is described as a good, kind, and even-tempered man who was beloved by many for these characteristics.⁷ He was known for relying on signs of sympathy or the lack of it to gauge the effect of what he was saying. He was legendary for his absentmindedness.⁸ At times, this led him to exhibit embarrassed manners in the company of strangers; however, Smith was extremely communicative. Ross (1995) quotes Carlyle, who shared a membership with Smith at the Poker Club, saying that “he was the most absent man in Company that I ever saw, Moving his Lips and talking to himself, and Smiling, in the midst of large Company’s. If you awak’d him from his Reverie, and made him attend to the Subject Conversation, he immediately began a Harangue and never stop’d till he told you all he knew about it, with the utmost Philosophical Ingenuity” (p. 142).

Smith’s sickly nature continued through his adulthood. His physicians diagnosed him with hypochondriasis, as Smith continually experienced exhaustion, low spirits, bad appetite, skin disease, involuntary shaking of the head, pains in the limbs, and violent colds. “He would often be forced to stop writing because of sudden bouts of illness By all accounts, including his own, his poor-health impinged on his work time” (Weinstein, 2001, p. 9). At times, Smith’s

health appears to have interfered with his social and personal relationships. Stewart (1793/1858) quotes a letter from Hume (1772) to Smith:

I shall not take any excuse from your state of health, which I suppose only a subterfuge invented by indolence and love of solitude. Indeed, my dear Smith, if you continue to hearken to complaints of this nature, you will cut yourself out entirely from human society, to the great loss of both parties. (p. 25)

Smith, however, had numerous lifelong friends, some of whom were “the most famous minds of his time, including, but not limited to Edmund Burke, Benjamin Franklin, Adam Ferguson, Turgot, and Voltaire. His greatest friend, and perhaps his greatest influence was David Hume” (Weinstein, 2001, p. 8). He felt a great affection for Hume. They are known to have advised each other on personal, philosophic, and professional matters. In Hume’s obituary, which Smith wrote in the form of a letter, he spoke of his friend in the most glowing terms. He concluded by writing, “I have always considered him, both in this lifetime and since his death as approaching as nearly the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit” (Weinstein, 2001, p. 19).

Smith’s writings suggest that he considered friendships and family very important for happiness (Griswold (1999) and Nieli (1986)). Man’s affections naturally fall upon his immediate family, according to Smith. In his view, man has a natural great affection for his family from habit and past acquaintance. He knows their situation, and he is also in a position to have an effect upon them. In Smith’s words,

Wealth and external honours are their proper recompense, and the recompense which they can seldom fail of acquiring. What reward is most proper for promoting the practice of truth, justice and humanity? The confidence, the esteem and love of those we live with.

Humanity does not desire to be great, but to be beloved. It is not in being rich that truth and justice would rejoice, but in being trusted and believed, recompenses which those virtues almost always acquire. (1759/2007, p. 194)

Smith expresses his belief that a prudent man is always capable of friendships and steady faithful attachments (1759/2007, p. 251). The most virtuous attachment, which is the happiest form of attachment, is based, according to Smith, upon the love of virtue (1759/2007, p. 264).

His affections towards his friends were equally returned by them. Ross (1995) quotes a letter from a friend of Smith's written 1 month prior to Smith's passing in July 1790: "Poor Smith! We must soon lose him; and the moment in which he departs will give a heart-felt pang to thousands" (p. 404). Stewart (1793/1858) also writes that Smith

will be long remembered by a small circle, with whom, as long as his strength permitted, he regularly spent an evening in the week; and to whom the recollection of his worth still forms a pleasing, though melancholy bond of union. (p. 38)

IV.2 Psychoanalytic Suggestions about Smith's Personal Dependency

In this section, potentially relevant suggestions towards a psychoanalytic formulation of Smith's dependency patterns are discussed. Of course, this section is necessarily speculative because of the limited information we have about Smith's personal relationships and about the characters of his primary attachment figures.

Three pertinent experiences have resulted in shaping some very significant attitudes in Smith. These experiences are: he was a sickly child and a hypochondriac in his adult life; his father died prior to his birth; he lived with his mother for most of his life until her death in her 90s and did not have any romantic partners. These experiences not only shaped his character but

also significantly affected his perceptions. We also assume that the experiences that he did not have also influenced his understandings of himself and the world. He excluded significant aspects of human nature within himself and in his writings about marketplace. This is particularly true of his attitudes toward independence and dependence.

There is considerable evidence that Smith was a sickly child. This would undoubtedly bring with it intense feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, frustration, anger and an acute sensitivity to power differentials. It has been noted earlier that these types of feelings are notably missing from his discourse. The denial of such feelings is consistent with obsessive dynamics that deny such human passions and isolate his affects from the realm of human discourse.

There are many references to an “All-powerful Being” in Smith’s *TMS*, which is his treatise on moral code. Law and order is most often associate with power and authority. We often endow the father with power and authority as an inherited part of our psychological makeup. (see for example Etchegoyen, 2000, and Fonagy and Target, 2002.) This was first noted by Freud (1913). Smith, however, saw the Deity not only as punishing but also as benevolent. In the *TMS*, he writes, “The happiness of mankind, as well as of all other rational creatures, seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature, when he brought them into existence” (Smith, 1759/2007, p. 193). Thus, it is possible that Smith was referring to an idealized all-powerful father with a yearning for his protection and the harmony that might be created by him. His idealization of independence might be a defence against this longing. Having grown up without a father, he would have been left with many unconscious fantasies about who his father was and this world of men might be about.⁹

One of Smith's constructs that extend his denial of human emotions is in his disavowal of human differences. Viewing others as equal diminishes a need to depend on them and avoids envy and competitiveness that would come as a result of individual differences. Such differences would emphasize one person's attributes or abilities over another. Recognition of differences would also bring to light dependency needs which further bring with them longing, frustration, anger and envy. His having grown up without a father might highlight the unique dependency needs that a child would have on a father. His not having had a father would deprive him of the experience of being dependent in an unequal power oriented relationship and its attendant emotional reactions.

It appears that lacking a father, Smith may have been left with a longing resulting in a deep wish for a connection with men. It is conceivable that Smith's male friends fulfilled the role of his father in his life. We know that his friends included the most famous minds of his time. A point that raises curiosity on this subject concerns how he was described by his friends. His male friends frequently depicted him as generous and kind. One may wonder whether his generosity towards men in his life stemmed from his longing for a father. In other words, his generosity might have been a sublimatory defense against this longing. He further defended against this longing by idealizing his needs in relation to other men to defend against his natural longing for a father and for human love with a woman other than his mother.

The absence of Smith's father might also have played a crucial role in Smith's lifelong dependence on his mother. First, the absence of his father is likely to have made it possible for Smith's mother to have greater than usual influence. His inability to separate from his mother might also suggest that Smith did not experience father surrogates, despite the presence of guardians appointed by his father and of his mother's close ties to male kinsfolk (such as her

brother). Furthermore, his mother might have failed to potentiate a relationship with a father, even if in fantasy, in his father's absence. Perhaps, she could not separate from Smith to allow him space for a triadic representation.

When we speak about Smith's mother we are touching a confluence of issues ranging from her character, the circumstances of his birth to his not having a father and its implications for the oedipal struggle. We don't know much about Smith's mother other than that she had a strong character, she had strict values, and she held the view that one's emotions should be kept regulated. At the same time, she has been described as overindulgent of Smith. Her husband's passing before Smith's birth, combined with Smith's sickly nature, might have generated or heightened anxieties about mothering in her. Given what we know of her character and circumstances at Smith's birth, a question that arises is if she was able to respond in consistently containing and mirroring manners towards her infant. If indeed she failed to mirror or contain him at times and was at other times overindulgent, Smith would have found himself in an environment where the effects of his behavior were unpredictable. He would have been left with un-soothed feelings such as anxiety, fear, and a desire for comfort. It is possible that his lifelong hypochondriasis was consciously or unconsciously a way he knew to gain his mother's affections.

It is also of no small importance to note that for Smith in his father's death he wins the oedipal conflict by default. Not only does this bring with it additional unconscious guilt, it once again does not allow Smith to experience the identification with the father and its resultant learning. In this circumstance what is lost is not only the opportunity for father to son bonding but the modeling of the independent/dependent relationship between his mother and father.

Smith does not have any recorded romantic partnerships with women. There is, of course, the possibility that Smith had romantic partnerships that are not known to us. We don't know if he had an attraction to men, a possibility that might have emerged from his being without a father to provide a model of masculine identity for him. Given the importance of keeping one's personal affairs private at the time, either of these possible situations would, of course, have been kept as secrets. Smith's continual return to his mother may suggest that he idealized her. It is possible that his idealization of his mother did not allow any room for other intimate partnerships in his life. It appears that Smith met his needs for closeness through a relationship with his mother instead of meeting them through an adult romantic partnership. His relationship to his mother and its exclusive dependencies do not appear to have allowed him the experience to forge a real life relationship with autonomous woman and the experience of forging a new relationship with all its attendant struggles, joys and emotional learning experiences.

The above discussion suggests that Smith experienced an un-integrated pattern in his relationships with women vacillating between dependence and avoidance. This collision of two separate world views is expressed not only in Smith's personal relationship patterns but also in his writings. As my analysis of the *WN* demonstrates, in that text, Smith idealizes impersonalized interdependence. In contrast, in the *TMS*, he idealizes personal dependency.

How does someone deal with disturbingly intense and widely ranging experiences of human dependency? There is no doubt that Smith was a genius. It seems that he used his genius to defend against the un-integrated collision of idealized versus devalued dependency through creative solutions. It thus seems that his admiration of impersonalized interdependence, reflected in his theorizing in the *WN*, was a solution for him. Putting it in different terms, we may conceive that the glorified state of independence in the *WN* was a reaction formation to his

lifelong dependence on his mother and financial dependence on his benefactors. It is therefore, suggested that Smith turned the dependency he experienced in his personal life into its polar opposite in writing the *WN*. Denying his reality of lifelong dependence on his mother and benefactors, Smith appears to have idealized independence.

V. Concluding Remarks

Smith glorified an economy where impersonalized transactions among self-interested individuals take place. He idealized markets, arguing that market expansion would lead to economic prosperity. The argument he makes is that larger markets create greater opportunities for exchange. Increased opportunities for trade lead, in turn, to a greater division of labor and thus improve productivity and economic growth. Smith's idealization of markets as sites of impersonalized interdependence among participants was rooted in his lifelong struggle with dependency. In the denial of the reality of his personal dependence, he conceived of markets as institutions that would lead to independence and hence to prosperity.

The importance of analyzing the works and lives of leaders in their fields has to be undertaken. In doing so, we not only understand a man and his work but also how an entire field develops and ideas survive. Freud (1921) suggests that the groups that can subsist are those that can identify themselves, not only with one another, but with a leader. Thus, he asserts that man is not a herd animal but a horde animal led by a chief. Adam Smith was and continues to be such a chief. Whether we individually agree with his ideas on economics or not, they continue to influence our everyday lives.

In closing, it is suggested that a general analysis of dependency needs and their effect on one's chosen belief about economics and how that has shifted over time would be an important topic to be further explored.

Endnotes

¹ For example “Freud offered his bold cultural hypotheses as cultural inventions and in 1934 planned to subtitle his book on Moses ‘a historical novel.’ (Loewenberg 2007, p. 20).

² For overviews of the WN see Ozler and Kuiper (2007, 2008)

³ For a discussion of Smith’s views on social dependence see Perelman (1989).

⁴ Neili (1986) argues that in Smith’s system of “natural connections” there is a sphere that expand outwards from nuclear family to extended family to friends and finally to the national level.

⁵ Smith indicates that this propensity might arise from “original principles of human nature” or from “reason or speech” (Smith, 1776/1981, II.ii.2).

⁶ Smith himself placed a great value on the regulation of emotions, reflecting his upbringing with Stoic morals. Smith writes, “Self-command is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the other virtues seem to derive their principle luster” (*TMS*, 1759/2007, p. 284). Smith saw early childhood as a period of overwhelming emotions “when an indulgent... . parent must pit one violent feeling in the child against another . . . to restore their charge’s even temper” (Ross, 1995, p. 21). However, he believed there was no such indulgent partiality at school and that the school years were therefore crucial in character formation.

⁷ A couple of anecdotes evidence exceptions to his even temperament. On one occasion, “Johnson . . . attacked Smith for praising Hume and called him a liar, whereupon Smith retorted that Johnson was A? son of a bitch” (Ross, p. 192). Smith was also said to be a “most disagreeable fellow after he drank some wine” (Ross, p. 251).

⁸ A widely cited anecdote tells us that while “he was talking warmly on his favorite subject, the division of labour,” he “forgot the dangerous nature of the ground on which he stood” and fell into a pit—a noisome pool (Ross, p. 152).

⁹ Smith’s well known phrase of the “invisible hand” which reconciles individual and social interests might be a reference to his absent father.

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