

Critical Reflection of The Theory of Moral Sentiments:
The Fortune of Others

Robert Ernst

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443776re@student.eur.nl

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Supervisor: prof. dr. van Bunge

Advisor: dr. Bauer

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1 Introduction

In economics, scholars learn to assume that people are rational. Being rational meaning to act with reason so that an individual can identify different alternatives and choose the "best" alternative. On the aggregate, people tend to pick the alternative that is best for themselves. In economics, if scenario A yields a higher monetary payoff than scenario B, people will go for scenario A. However, this is definitely not always the case. When walking past a homeless person one could either give or not give him money. Not giving money has the higher payoff, yet many people give money to homeless people.

It was this discrepancy that played a major role in Adam Smith's two greatest works. In his magnum opus, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith discusses why people act out of their own interest:

"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. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages" (A. Smith, 2010).

This line of thought is still deeply embedded in economic theories concerning the free markets and the mechanisms that govern it. For example, in current economic theories about supply and demand, free trade and rational choice theory. However, according to Smith, there was more to human decision-making than just rational self-interestedness.

In 1759, nearly twenty years before *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In his first masterwork he discusses how and why people do not act merely out of self interest. He stated:

"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" (A. Smith, 2009a).

So, in economics scholars learn to assume that humans are rational self-interested beings. This assumption seems to hold up on the aggregate and many economic models work just fine by applying it. However, the works of the man this assumption is based on already concluded that this assumption can not always hold. This begs me to ask the following question:

Why are people interested in the fortune of others?

I will first set out to show why the rationality assumption does not always and needs to be supplemented by a theory of human morality. As a starting point for a theory of human morality I will critically reflect the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This reflection will go over his explanation of the existence of sympathy, the capacity to judge oneself and the absence of utilitarian thought in human decision-making. Through this reflection I wish to bring about an answer to the following sub-question:

What is Adam Smith's explanation for the human inclination of caring about the fortune others?

This human inclination to care about the fortune of others did not come to existence in one day. People have most likely developed this inclination since they have been around. This inclination to care about the other is widely captured in the school of altruistic thought. The interesting thing about altruism is that in early evolutionary and psychological theories, it could not exist. However, there were observations that allowed no other conclusion than that something like altruism should exist. Evolutionary biologists and social psychologists have since then developed many theories that facilitate altruistic behaviour and explain how man can sometimes act in the interest of the other. In looking at the evolutionary and psychological explanations I would like to answer the following sub-question:

Why did humans develop this inclination for caring about others?

After concluding on the nature and origin of human morality, the effects of its presence in the world ought to be examined. This inclination of caring about the other is most notably vested in the practices of charity and philanthropy. This notion of giving has played a major role in all mainstream religions over the last millennia. In the first part of the final section these historical-religious foundations of giving will be examined and compared to one another. Lastly, the acts of giving will be contrasted to three narrowly defined reasons for giving. Through this story of giving, an answer to the following sub-question will be formulated:

How is this inclination for caring about others expressed in people's giving behaviour?

2 Rationality

In this section I will show the history of rational self-interested thought and why it is flawed. One could argue that the starting point of serious thought about this idea is in 1776. Because in 1776, Adam Smith published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, in short, *The Wealth of Nations*.

Before this publication, mercantilism was the dominant economic theory. In mercantilism, the wealth of a nation is determined by the nation's stock of monetary reserves like gold and silver. In his magnum opus, Smith offers a new approach on how nations accumulate wealth, a theory that is now considered to be a cornerstone of classical economics.

Smith shifted away from the notion of there being a zero sum game, where the seller wins and the buyer loses, to the notion that everyone can profit from trade. Smith argued that at the core, people buy products through the income that is generated by their labour. As people have a natural tendency to want more, they might want to perform the type of labour that will buy them the most. This realisation led to the conception of the invisible hand, so that everyone produces that in which he is most efficient. The realisation that people choose for the action that leads to the highest pay-off is deeply embedded in the way that economic theories exist today.

2.1 Rational Choice Theory

From the way that Smith described the allocation of production and labour later followed the Rational Choice Theory. This theory states that the social behaviour we observe on the aggregate is formed by individual decision-making. In this individual decision-making process people have a specific set of preferences that are both complete and transitive. For example, if a person prefers option A over option B and option B over C, then he must prefer option A over C. An assumption of this theory is the existence of homo economicus. This assumption dictates that people make rational and self-interested decisions. In making these choices consciously or subconsciously individuals calculate the expected outcomes. These outcomes can be noted as expected payoffs, but in a more broader sense expected utilities.

2.2 Assumptions

The main assumptions of RCT, rationality and selfishness, do not always hold. There are many reasons why the rationality argument does not hold. Sometimes people are not aware of all the alternatives, do not know how to value these alternatives properly and have changing preferences. People do not always choose the option that delivers themselves the highest payoff. An example of an economic experiment that portrays this is the ultimatum game. In the ultimatum game, a proposer suggest a certain split of endowment to the respondent. The respondent then chooses whether he accepts or rejects the split. When he rejects the split both parties get a pay-off of zero. It is often found that besides pay-off, people also care about fairness and that many people offer some sort of a fair deal to the respondent (Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000). So, there appears to be a role for morality in human decision-making.

In the next section this role of morality is approximated through a critical reflection of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

3 Theory of Moral Sentiments

In 1759, Adam Smith wrote *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in which he described the foundations and origins of human morality. The implications of this work still count in modern society and a proper understanding can give crucial guidance in understanding the way humans act in relation to others. In this section the following question will be answered: what is Adam Smith's explanation for the human inclination of caring about the fortune others? This explanation will be threefold. Firstly, the sympathetic nature of man is discussed and why this leads to caring for the other. Secondly, Smith argues that people have the capacity to judge themselves and that this contributes to morally right actions. Finally, one of the main thoughts in economics, which is utility thinking, does not fully apply to human morality.

3.1 Sympathy

"As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation"

(A. Smith, 2009a). According to Smith, people have an imaginative ability. People can place themselves in the position of the other, allowing them to feel the way that they would feel in the situation of the other. This phenomenon is referred to by Smith as sympathy, a fellow feeling that we have when we change places with someone who has an emotional experience. Only when one sees or senses that their "brother is upon the rack", one can imagine the extreme pain and "become in some measure the same person with him" (A. Smith, 2009a).

Man can be affected by the mere "looks and gestures" of another person (A. Smith, 2009a). Seeing someone smile, usually makes one feel cheerful. Whereas a sad face, usually makes one feel sorry for the other. These principles are not universal, as in that their must be some preceding experience that justifies these emotions. Seeing an angry man furiously rage about without any apparent reason, might provoke one against him. Whereas we do feel the fear for the party that the rage is inflicted upon. The degree to which we feel for either party is determined by the extent to which one has met with "good or bad fortune" (A. Smith, 2009a). Before being informed on the causes of grief or joy our sympathy "is always extremely imperfect" (A. Smith, 2009a). It is not the view of the passion, but the situation that caused this passion that invokes the sympathy.

We might see a person laughing and singing, "insensible of his own misery", the feeling of the spectator can not reflect the sentiment of the one that suffers (A. Smith, 2009a). To extrapolate this point, humans sympathize with people who have already passed away, where these deceased will not have any of such emotions. Moreover, sympathising with those who met their death will not offer them any consolation. It is a "tribute of our fellow-feeling" to ensure the deceased is not forgotten and "to keep alive our melancholy remembrance of their misfortune" (A. Smith, 2009a). It is exactly this feeling of melancholy of the death of the other, that equates to the feeling that we have about our future self. We will not experience any pain once we are dead, but imagining being dead usually makes us feel dreary.

3.2 Judging ourselves

"We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them, unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us" (A. Smith, 2009b). According to Smith, people do not only act on behalf of others because they sympathize with them. People have a moral compass and most want to do the right thing. However, how can one know what the right thing is? According to Smith, people are able to judge themselves and decide whether our actions lead to moral probation or disapprobation. He stated the following on this decision: "when I endeavour to examine my own conduct, I divide myself, I the examiner and judge and I the person who is examined" (A. Smith, 2009b). Whereas with sympathy one places himself into the situation of the other, with judging, one places their situation into the other.

Through interacting with society, a person is provided with a mirror, a mirror that can be used to reflect on one's actions in relation to what is morally right. For Smith this means, is an action worthy of praise, or is an action worthy of blame. He makes a clear distinction between whether an action is praised or blamed and whether this action is really worthy of praise or blame. He states: "the most sincere praise can give little pleasure when it cannot be considered as some sort of proof of praise-worthiness" (A. Smith, 2009b). For example, when someone praises you of cleaning up a giant mess, but you were actually the one who created it, that can hardly be considered praise-worthy. On the contrary, when cleaning the mess of someone else and you do not get any praise, you will still have the sense that your action was worthy of praise and you thus did good. People do good, in the anticipation of being applauded and admired. According to Smith: "men have voluntarily thrown away life to acquire after death a renown which they could no longer enjoy" (A. Smith, 2009b). Some people will do what they think is morally right even if that will cause their death or a life full of pain.

To look at it from the other side, committing a crime that no one will find out about, will still hurt the mind. Bribing all judges in a case against you could ensure that you will not be blamed. However, one will still feel that they are worthy of blame even if no one will blame them. On the contrary, when being pursued for a crime you did not commit, you will not feel that you are to blame and target those that falsely accuse you with fury. For Smith: "the only effectual consolation of humbled and afflicted man lies in an appeal to a still higher tribunal, to that of the all seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived, and whose judgments can never be perverted" (A. Smith, 2009b). So, of course people like to be praised, but the primary motivation of doing good is to be worthy of it, to be virtuous. However, people do not only act in a way that they think is most virtuous, most definitely not. People do also have an idea of the cost of virtuous action, the utility reduction and the risks of preserving the self.

3.3 Utility

In economics, utility has always played a big role in explaining why people make choices in the way that they do. However, according to Smith, morality does not follow from the utility that certain actions have. People sympathise with people that own objects that appear to be utility improving and incorrectly assume that having those objects and thus more wealth will make them happier.

Smith argues that people think about utility in moral decision-making, but usually only after the choice has been made. Suppose that we would make decisions primarily out of utilitarian perspective, we would act only in a self-interested way. However, as stated earlier, we care about how society sees us and thus we act in a way that is aligned with our conscience and what duties it imposes on us.

To prove this point, say a family member is in grave danger and you must act quickly to save them, with a risk that you will die yourself. Are you able to determine the utility you will obtain from this action? Smith argues that we are the most sensitive of our own situation and then of the people who are nearest to us in many possible ways. So that we are closest to our offspring, parents and then other relatives or friends. The degree of sensitivity decreases when we move to people who are further away from us.

To conclude, humans have a capacity to sympathize with each other and share feelings of joy and grief. People want to act in a way that would make them worthy of blame and utility does not play as a big role as presumed in decision-making. In the next section the origins of the capacities will be discussed and elaborated on through several examples.

4 Altruism

One of the main goals of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is to examine what interests people in the fortunes of others. This phenomenon is to a large extent synonymous to what we now refer to as altruism. The definition of altruism as given by the Cambridge Dictionary is as follows: *willingness to do things that bring advantages to others, even if it results in disadvantage for yourself* (Cambridge, 2020). Altruism, in its purest form is considered to be an act of selflessness, as opposed to selfishness. In economic theory it is often argued that people act out of their own interest, but in reality people do not always do so. In order to understand the existence of altruism, it is important to take a look at the history of the theory.

Through the following sections an answer to the second sub-question will be formed, namely: why did humans develop this inclination for caring about others? This answer will be formulated through two different, but still quite similar perspectives. First, a consideration of the evolution of man and why acting altruistically could improve fitness. Second, how the psychological nature of man causes him to help the other.

4.1 Biological Altruism

The origin of biological altruism can be traced back to 1871, when Darwin published his book *The Descent of Man*. In Darwin's theories of natural selection he argues that animals act in such a way that their probability of survival increases (Okasha, 2013). However, in nature, there are many examples of animals that act in such a way that the odds of survival for the other increases. Elephants raise each other's offspring, lions hunt together and all sorts of animals warn each other when a predator is closing in. The evolutionary explained consists of three parts. The first being the way in which certain acts benefit the survival rate of one's genes, kin selection. The second explanation being reciprocal altruism, where one expects a kind favour to be returned. Finally, an inquiry into why some perform good deeds that do not directly promote their gene's fitness or can be expected to be returned.

4.1.1 Kin Selection

Apparently, increasing the fitness of the group as a whole increases the chances of the individual to survive. Darwin observed this altruistic behaviour within groups and argued that there could be such a thing as group selection. However, within his framework of natural selection, those that exhibit the highest level of altruism have the lowest chances of passing on their genes. This disparity between what Darwin truly believed and what he observed remained a puzzle for the rest of his life.

This theory of group selection remained reasonably untouched until the 1960s when, among others, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and Maynard Smith argued against group selection. That even if acting altruistically might be beneficial for the survival of the group, there will always

be selfish individuals in this group. These individuals will exploit the group and will be more likely to pass on their genes.

So, the theory of group selection did not appear to hold up, but the observed altruistic behaviour still required some explanation. In 1963, William Hamilton published *The Evolution of Altruistic Behaviour*. In this article, Hamilton gave his explanation for altruistic behaviour which later became known as Hamilton's rule. Hamilton stated this rule as: "If the gain to a relative of degree r is k -times the loss to the altruist, the criterion for positive selection of the causative gene is:

$$k > \frac{1}{r}$$

"(Hamilton, 1963).

The implication of this rule as stated by Hamilton: "thus a gene causing altruistic behavior towards brothers and sisters will be selected only if the behavior and the circumstances are generally such that the gain is more than twice the loss; for half-brothers it must be more than four times the loss; and so on" (Hamilton, 1963). This notion was already more or less implied in Smith's work, one could for instance argue that it is easier to sympathize with someone who is closer to you. For example, if one's brother was sad it would be way easier to sympathize with him, than if he were a complete stranger. This idea was taken a step further by Hamilton as he linked it to a more formal relationship between sympathizing and genetical distance.

Altruism based on kin selection can manifest itself in one of two ways. One could actually recognize the other as kin, if the other for instance exhibits similar physical or mental properties. For example, a Goth person would feel related to another person that is fully dressed in black. Second, in populations that are to a great degree homogeneous, there is more of a civil identity, a clearer set of norms and values that one can adhere to. People will feel as if they were more closely related than they actually are and act in a more altruistic way.

4.1.2 Reciprocal Altruism

In line of Hamilton's work, evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers wrote *The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism*. Through his work, Trivers attempted to explain how altruistic behaviour can occur "even when the recipient is so distantly related to the organism performing the altruistic act that kin selection can be ruled out" (Trivers, 1971).

Trivers introduced the term reciprocal altruism, by which he meant that one would help the other through reducing one's own fitness with the expectation of the favour being returned. This concept is like a prisoner's dilemma that is repeated as long as both parties act as expected. For example, a merchant might give a bit of his goods for free to his customers with the expectation that these customers come back to buy some of his goods. The customer might then walk off and later think that they like to be treated in this way and that they will come back to buy products from this man. As long as customers keep coming back, the merchant will most likely give away some of his products to keep this relationship in tact.

This type of reciprocal altruism could also be justified in two complementing notions in Smith's framework. In general, people do not only want to be praised, they particularly of praise. Obviously they want the people to praise them in terms of extra sale, but they also want themselves to be the generous merchant, a likeable guy.

For reciprocal altruism to hold, several conditions need to be met (Stephens, 1996). Firstly, this act of altruism must logically reduce the fitness of the one who acts. Giving away goods in case of the merchant. Secondly, the one who is acted on must obtain a rise in fitness. Receiving the goods from the merchant. Thirdly, there cannot be a direct payoff for the one who acts. After this act of kindness an immediate purchase cannot be expected. If one of these conditions is not met, it can not be named reciprocal altruism.

4.1.3 Costly Signaling

Outside reciprocal and kin-geared altruistic behaviour, there is altruistic behaviour geared to non-kin that will most likely not be returned. One of the first to think about this missing piece of the puzzle was the evolutionary biologist Amotz Zahavi. He stated that one animal might alert the rest of the group of the presence of a predator, just to show that it is not afraid of it (Zahavi, 1977). This observation implied the existence of the costly-signaling theory.

Evolutionary psychologist Francis T. McAndrew later concluded that individuals will perform acts that could be very well endangering their lives just to signal their strength (McAndrew, 2002). He stated: "such behaviors can benefit the signaler by increasing the likelihood that he or she will

be chosen as a mate or an ally or that he or she will later be deferred to as dominant by would-be rivals.” In short, animals, or humans for that matter, will increase someone’s fitness at their own expense in order to improve their reputation and increase their mating chances.

One could argue that these forms of evolutionary altruism are not so purely altruistic as they at first sight might appear. Kin selection has a pay off in that it will boost the odds of one’s genes living on, reciprocal altruism expects something back from an altruistic act and costly signaling boosts one’s reputation. In the next section more selfless motives will be discussed by means of a social-psychological explanation of altruism.

4.2 Psychological Altruism

While the biological explanation focuses on the ultimate functions of altruistic behaviour, the psychological explanation is more of a short-term explanation. One of the main theories in social psychology is called the social exchange theory. This theory studies how two parties interact under a cost-benefit analysis. Under this theory, something like altruism could only occur if, and only if, the benefits outweigh the cost of a given altruistic act. However, there are many thinkable examples of altruism for which this cost-benefit analysis does not appear to yield a net beneficial result for the giver. For example, giving money to a homeless person, this action has a cost to the giver without any specific benefit. The following section will further lay out how and why this deviation from social exchange theory exists.

4.2.1 Empathy induced altruism

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith already discussed the existence of sympathy, in a way that people can sympathise with the other and share a certain feeling. The way that Smith defined sympathy back then is what is now known as empathy. The modern definition of empathy is: “the ability to share someone else’s feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person’s situation” (Cambridge, 2020). The social psychological theory that applies empathy is, surprisingly enough, known as the empathy based altruism hypothesis.

The empathy based altruism hypothesis originates from a 1991 study from two psychologists from the University of Kansas (Batson & Shaw, 1991). They set out to investigate whether there is more to human motivation than universal egoism. Many of the earlier stated evolutionary causes of altruistic behaviour could be seen, or at least partly, as beneficiary to the one that is behaving in an apparently selfless way. They split explanation of why we help into two categories. First, the altruistic account where the benefit of the other is “an ultimate goal and any self-benefits unintended consequences” (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Second the non-altruistic account where the benefit to the other is “an instrumental means to reach the ultimate goal of benefiting oneself” (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

On the one hand, they argued that many acts which appear purely altruistic, might have an instrumental goal. An example of which they mention in the paper: “consider the soldier who saves his comrades by diving on a grenade or the man who dies after relinquishing his place in a rescue craft” (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Giving your life so that someone else lives seems to be one of the most selfless acts. However, they then add: “these persons may have acted to escape anticipated guilt and shame for letting others die” (Batson & Shaw, 1991). So, it could be argued that someone giving their lives in these cases, have to choose between dying or living with shame. In that case some might argue that the latter is least preferred. So, is such an act than truly altruistic?

In a paper by Smith, Keating & Stotland (1989) the effect of the presence of feedback is measured in low empathy and high empathy people. Their conclusion being that for people that are low in empathy, their level of helping is not such much affected by whether they will receive feedback from their helping. People that are considered to be of a more empathetic kind, will also provide low levels of help in a no expected feedback situation, whereas they exhibit high levels of helping behaviour in a situation where feedback can be expected. They argue that in the empathic people arises an empathic joy with the prospect of signs of relief and happiness of the other (K. D. Smith et al., 1989). Even though this empathic joy is a promoter of helping the other, there does exist a baseline of helping, even if one is not empathic or feedback can be expected.

Another promoter of helping behaviour is known as the bystander effect. This effect can best be explained by an example. For instance, when someone falls to the ground in a busy city, for no apparently intentional reason, most people just look at the person that fell. People back up, say something to their friend or even make a photo or video. If one would observe the same thing at night, or in a quiet village, one would most likely immediately approach that person and offer to help. This phenomenon is called the bystander effect. It has been thoroughly investigated and

results point towards the notion that more bystanders lead to a smaller response rate and longer response time (Darley & Latané, 1968). From which can be concluded that people are more inclined to help others if there are less others that can offer help.

When considering these previous effects and theories, one could easily argue that there are many factors that influence helping behaviour. No theory has yet ruled out the existence of a purely altruistic act, but little evidence for the contrary has been provided either. In the next section a closer look will be taken at the history of giving and underlying motives for charity and philanthropy. By exploring these different modes of giving, a more fine-grained formulation of the human inclination for helping behaviour is given.

5 Giving

Giving is an integral part of human existence and is done in a variety of ways. One might give money to a homeless person, to a charitable organisation or even set up one's own foundation. The two main categories of giving are known as charity and philanthropy. Charity is the practice of giving to those in need and is mostly targeted at pain relief. Philanthropy however, is focused on fixing the problems that cause the pain.

In this section the final sub-question will be answered: how is this inclination for caring about others expressed in people's giving behaviour? The following sub sections will show the history of giving with respect to religion and inspect the internal motivations behind it.

5.1 Religion

One of the manifestations of altruism is charity. Charity, meaning: "generosity and helpfulness especially toward the needy or suffering" (Merriam-Webster, 2020), especially through monetary donations. The concept is deeply embedded in most mainstream religions, but the actual word has its roots in Christianity. Even so, giving also plays a major, but slightly different, role than in the Islam. This sub section will discuss the role that giving plays in both religions and how they differ.

5.1.1 Christianity

Charity in late Old English meant "Christian love in its highest manifestation" and stems from the latin "caritas" (Dictionary, 2020). Charity is one of the seven Christian virtues as defined by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas divided the virtues between the cardinal and the theological virtues and put charity in the latter category (Davies, 2016). According to Aquinas it can not be acquired by effort and "we have charity not just because we are actively concerned with the welfare of other people, but because we love what God loves and as God loves it" (Davies, 2016). Aquinas was definitely not the only one to write about giving in Christianity. Many others have discussed the roots of Christian giving and how it became such an integral part of Christianity.

In *The Ransom of the Soul*, historian Peter Brown describes the origins of charity by showing how society and religion were intertwined during Late Antiquity and how giving became the norm in Christian society. In his book, Brown describes the transformation of the modes of giving. Up until 400 after Christ, the upper-class gave back to society in a practice known as civic euergetism. According to Brown, in civic euergetism: "the wealthy were expected to spend their money on their city and on the comfort and entertainment of their fellow citizens—and on those only" (Brown, 2015). Moreover, Brown stated: "those who received benefits from the wealthy received them not because they were poor but because they were citizens" (Brown, 2015). This mode of giving was about to change through, among others, the preaching of Augustine of Hippo.

According to Brown, this upcoming change could primarily be boiled down to one root cause, namely: "an entire society found itself wrestling with its self-image" (Brown, 2015). In contrast to earlier times: "the division between rich and poor, and the insistence on the duties of the rich to the poor, took on an imaginative charge" (Brown, 2015). In order to bring about change, Augustine argued that salvation can be brought about through "giving of alms to the poor" (Brown, 2015).

In order to promote "the use of wealth to expiate sin", preachers were urging the elite to give to "the faceless and unglamorous poor" (Brown, 2015). To push this movement into fast-flowing waters, Augustine ordered an attack on the "ideology of civic euergetism" and demanded the rich to match their "crazed displays of generosity" with "equal enthusiasm in giving to the poor" (Brown, 2015). If one wanted to be a good Christian, one would have to give, preferably a lot.

Sin transformed from something that could be lifted through ritualistic sacrifice, to something that could be lifted by almsgiving, "sin was a debt" (Brown, 2015). Augustine argued "that prayer

for forgiveness should be accompanied by almsgiving” and thus “that perpetual giving was the counterpart of perpetual sin” (Brown, 2015).

From the 3rd century after Christ onward, Christian churches were increasingly founded across Europe (Bird, 1982). Along with this rapid expansion came a big Christian organization. An organization that aimed to assemble many voluntary associations of the churches (Bird, 1982). An organization that functioned on ideas like the ones preached by Augustine. During the Middle Ages, the church even started selling indulgences, which were permits signed by the church that stated that one had already paid for their sins. Meaning that they would be safe when knocking on God’s door.

Through this organization income streams were bundled and the church, as an organization, could take on big projects of pain and poverty relief themselves. This sense of central donation and redistribution is still present today. After a church service, there usually is some sort of a collection where attendees can donate money to the charitable organization. One could give as much as he or she likes, but usually does so when at least several others are watching. Acting within the norms and values of the church community would in most cases imply that one donates at least something.

It is estimated that in the United States alone, over \$50 billion dollars a year is donated directly to charitable organizations of the church (Graham, 2014). The average American thus gives over \$150 a year to the church, which implies that some form of cultural identity must exist where people feel that they ought to give.

5.1.2 Islam

Giving also plays a major role in the Islam, but is defined rather differently than in Christianity. The Islam is built upon five pillars, the acknowledgment of these five pillars is crucial if one strives to be a good Muslim. The four pillars that are known by most are: “the declaration of faith, the daily prayers, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the fasting during Ramadan” (Kochuyt, 2009). The fifth is slightly less known to outsiders and is referred to as the zakat. The zakat has to do with the obligation that every Muslim has to give back, as: “a good Muslim is obliged to give because he has received from God” (Kochuyt, 2009). The zakat is defined as a reciprocal relationship with God, where the faithful Muslims: “give to the needy as God gave to them” (Kochuyt, 2009).

To enforce the zakat, there are three basic rules. The first one comes down to giving if you can and others expecting you to do so. The donor places himself as superior to the taker. The second rule is that what is offered must be accepted, not doing so would be a grand insult to the donor. The final rule is the intent to reverse the favour in the future. This system enforces social relationships and in a way enforces social cohesion.

As a Muslim, giving is thus something more private and personal than in Christianity. When generalizing the giving behaviour in these two relations one could talk in terms of Smith with respect to blame and praise. In Christianity, people most likely give because they do not want to be blamed by their community and partly of course because they want to be worthy of praise. In mosques donations are made, but in the Islam it is more about the private and personal. One could argue that there is a stronger sense of being worthy of praise than in Christianity.

5.2 Internal Motivations

Religion has made giving a widespread social practice and created a culture of giving. However, besides being expected to give in name of their religion, people give because they intrinsically want to give themselves. It might be in someone’s direct own interest, like in rational choice theory. People might also give in a way that serves their own interest in a more indirect way, which is commonly referred to as enlightened self-interest. Another explanation is pure altruism, the definition of which is slightly more debatable, but the main premise is that it only benefits someone else. In the following sections these motivations will be further elaborated on.

5.2.1 Self-Interest

The theory of self-interested giving is in ways in accordance with rational choice theory, but can often times be less obvious from the outside. For instance, some wealthy individual might make a donation to the local hospital. At a first glance this act appears to be quite selfless. However, what this act does is most likely promoting the quality of the care in that hospital. Eventually most people will end up in the hospital and one might thus expect to profit from the increased quality of the hospital. In which case the donation can be seen as some sort of an investment that might pay off later in life.

5.2.2 Enlightened Self-Interest

In the example of the hospital donation, the own benefit can be quite directly associated to the donation. A more indirect association of donation to own benefit can be found in giving that is considered to be with the promotion of enlightened self-interest (Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011). For example, someone that is employed and is at no risk of his job, might donate to a national poverty relief foundation. In the line of the enlightened self-interest argument, one might imagine that faith takes a few unexpected twists and turns that leaves one unemployed. By supporting the poverty relief foundation, one increases the chances of this foundation to be intact in the unlikely event of unemployment and even poverty of oneself.

5.2.3 Pure Altruism?

However, there are cases in which the donation can in no way be traced back to any tangible benefits to oneself. For example, when a Dutch citizen decides to anonymously donate food to an African village that he will never visit. It is possible that no one, but the one who donated, will know about the generosity of this person. This person will never visit this village and will never be benefited from this action. Is this purely altruistic?

Besides the explanation in the form of true altruism, an American economics professor, James Andreoni, came up with the term warm glow. By which he meant a good, warm feeling that arises when "creating positive externalities" (Andreoni, 2006). It is this warm feeling that skeptics of pure altruism name as some form of utility for the one who gives. So that the giving is an instrumental way of getting this warm glow.

Andreoni put the influence of the warm glow more delicately in a metaphor: "just like hunger tells a person it is time to eat but taste buds tells the person what they want to eat, it is altruism that should tell you what to give to, but warm-glow tells you how much to give" (Andreoni, 2006). This is quite analogous to the way in which Augustine described how sins accumulate into a personal debt of varying heights. So, the sense of true altruism tells one to act in an unselfish fashion, but it is the sense of a warm glow that determines the size of the donation.

To conclude, most actions can be brought back to not so selfless motives, but when boiling down the most selfless acts, one must come to the conclusion that there must exist some degree of real selflessness in man.

6 Conclusion

To come back to what I set out to do, which is answering the following question:

Why are people interested in the fortune of others?

People are interested in the fortune of others for many reasons, considerably more than mentioned in this thesis. In order to give a more a concrete and precise answer, I would like to answer this question through the three sub-questions, the first question being:

What is Adam Smith's explanation for the human inclination of caring about the fortune others?

In short, Smith states that humans are moral creatures and that is why we are interested in the fortunes of others. His motivation is based on many trains of thought of which I have discussed three. Firstly, people have a capacity to sympathize with each other. As we have this imaginative capability, we feel more compelled towards helping those in pain or celebrating with those in a state of joy. Secondly, humans want to be intrinsically good. They want to be praised, but even more so, they want to be worthy of praise and not worthy of blame. Thirdly, humans are not as rational and utility driven as we might sometimes think. When we are driven by emotion or a response needs to be presented quickly, we can not perfectly oversee the consequences in terms of utility. In my opinion, these trains of thought are still valid today and are part of the reason why people are interested in the fortunes of others.

Human beings and human thought have changed since we split from the other primates. One might assume that human thought and thus morality must have developed itself in several ways to come where we are today. This gave rise to the following question:

Why did humans develop this inclination for caring about others?

There are possibly a great variety of ways in which humans have developed this inclination. Two of the greatest drivers of this inclination are evolutionary and social-psychological. From an evolutionary standpoint there are at least three main reasons why we have developed this inclination.

Firstly, humans act in such ways that their genes live on. Since no one has the eternal life, we want to increase the fitness of those sharing similar genes. This is achieved through kin selection in which the closest relatives can count on the greatest degrees of help. Secondly, we have evolved to recognize that reciprocal relationships can be beneficial, in which case giving will ensure receiving, if you scratch my back, I will scratch yours. Thirdly, having a good reputation will increase one's fitness. Doing good will make one worthy of praise, which can benefit a person in many ways, such as group leadership and female attention.

Where these evolutionary reasons can be considered as quite rational and selfish in a way, the social-psychological explanation is perhaps a bit less rational. This explanation revolves around the question: is a caring gesture an ultimate or an instrumental goal in itself? In many cases this border is hard to draw. There are many factors influencing caring behavior outside of pure altruism, that this explanation often times appears to be crowded out. The human decision-making process is very complex and attributing an action to a single concept is probably not that wise. To however, come to a perhaps more precise definition, I went on to consider the history of giving and the intrinsic motivations behind given. By doing so I attempted to answer the following question:

How is this inclination for caring about others expressed in people's giving behaviour?

In religious points of view giving plays a big role in daily life. In Christianity, people mostly give to the organizations run by the church, a type of giving which is mostly upheld through Christian culture and has flourished for many centuries. In the Islam, giving plays a more personal role and people give primarily because they want to do good and be a good person.

When looking at giving from a more philanthropic point of view, donations can be followed back to three causes. People give to others with regard of their own interest, people give to others out of enlightened self-interest and people give out of purely selfless reasons. The latter being the most hard to grasp, but the greatest piece of evidence of a truly altruistic nature that resides in man. That people give, because they truly care about someone else.

To sum up, when critically reviewing many ways in which people seem to care about the fortune of others, their motivations do not appear to be completely selfless. However, as hard as people try to prove that most actions can be boiled down to selfish motives, one can not come to the conclusion that humans only think about their own fortunes. Following from this, I have to conclude that Smith's conclusion still holds today:

"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"(A. Smith, 2009a).

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