

# Introduction

*Christel Fricke and Dagfinn Føllesdal*

Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) and Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) are not often read side by side. Smith was a central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, after 1776 increasingly known for his work in economics, who had a successful career both as an academic teacher and researcher and as a civil servant. Husserl was a Czech-German phenomenologist, a Jewish scholar who, towards the end of his academic career at the University of Freiburg, was exposed to the anti-Semitic repressions of the Nazi regime and its local representatives, one of them a former assistant of his, namely Martin Heidegger. Smith's philosophical work is focused on topics belonging to the realm of practical philosophy. Apart from a few essays on rhetorics, aesthetics, and the history of science, he mainly wrote and lectured about moral theory, economics and the philosophy of law. Husserl's focus is on topics of theoretical philosophy, he wrote about epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of mathematics with only a borderline interest in matters of normative ethics. And while he makes claims to a Humean and a Kantian heritage, he hardly ever mentions Smith in his writings.

There is no evidence for Husserl having been very familiar with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* or any other part of his work. In the lectures entitled *Introduction into Ethics* (from 1920 and 1924), Husserl mentions Adam Smith, together with Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume, as a philosopher of the moral sense theory (see Hua XXXVII, p.148); but whereas he dedicates long passages to his reading of Shaftesbury, Hume, and then of Kant, Smith does not get any particular attention.<sup>1</sup> And in the earlier *Lectures on Ethics and Theory of Value* (from 1908 – 1914), Husserl refers to Adam Smith as a philosopher who believed that, for justifying our emotionally grounded moral judgments, we have to refer to God as the source of our moral sense (see Hua

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, Edmund (1950ff.) *Husserliana – Edmund Husserl, Gesammelte Werke*, The Hague: Dordrecht, (quoted as “Hua” with reference to volume and page number).

XXVIII, p. 390). These claims can only arise from a merely superficial reading of Smith, since they are both erroneous: Smith explicitly denies that people are provided with a moral sense and he does not attribute to God any essential role in his account of human morality.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, bringing together both Smith-scholars and Husserl-scholars and editing a volume with contributions from both camps is not an evident thing to do. Indeed, this volume owes its existence to the contingent encounter of two philosophers at the University of Oslo in Norway: Dagfinn Føllesdal and Christel Fricke. It was Dagfinn Føllesdal who, back in 2004, when talking to Christel Fricke about her interest in Adam Smith's moral philosophy, claimed that similar thoughts could be found in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. In 2007 and 2008, the *Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature* provided the editors of this volume with the means for inviting both Smith-scholars and Husserl-scholars to workshops in Oslo where they presented papers on their respective fields of specialization. We found the idea confirmed that it would be fruitful to look at Smith's moral theory against the background of Husserl's phenomenology and to make comparisons under different aspects. The present volume, however, does not simply assemble the proceedings of these two workshops. Rather, the editors have invited some of the workshop participants and some other scholars to contribute essays on topics which are most fruitful for the purpose of reading Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl side by side.

There are, however, certain obstacles to be overcome for pursuing this twofold reading, mainly for the scholars of Adam Smith: So far, the publication of Husserl's collected works fills 40 large volumes, and the publication has still not been completed. Apart from the frightening quantity of Husserl's writings, there is a further obstacle to overcome. Much of Husserl's published work is not available in English; in particular, the three volumes on intersubjectivity and the lectures on ethics are

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith (1976) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press; Liberty Press imprint 1982, (quoted as "TMS" with reference to parts, chapters, paragraphs and page numbers). Here, see TMS III.4.5, p. 158. The latter part of this claim is controversial in the critical literature. For its defense see Christel Fricke (2011) "Adam Smith and "the most sacred rules of justice"" in *The Adam Smith Review* 6, pp. 46-74.

available only in German. Whereas it was possible for some of the Husserl scholars to incorporate their reading of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in their essay, thus providing a comparative interpretation of Smith and Husserl from the perspective of Husserl scholarship (see essays by McIntyre, Beyer, Drummond and Kern), insufficient access to Husserl's work for the Smith scholars has resulted in only one comparative essay on Smith and Husserl from the perspective of a Smith scholar (see essay by Fricke).

The present volume is addressing an audience not only of Smith- and Husserl scholars, but also anybody interested in understanding the nature of human knowledge and morality. The tentative hypothesis of the editors underlying the design of this volume is that Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (first published in 1759) and Edmund Husserl in his extensive writings on phenomenology were not only dealing with related questions but were looking for answers to these questions along similar lines. In a sense, this similarity is not entirely surprising. Both held Hume in high regard and were inspired by him in their commitment to empirical plausibility and accuracy. But neither of them endorsed Hume's normative skepticism and his refusal to believe that humans could ever make justified claims about how the world is in itself or about what proper morality consists in. Neither Smith nor Husserl was willing to give up the project of reaching beyond the sphere of appearances and make judgments which could make justified claims to objectivity. Both took up Humean topics of inquiry, including in particular the nature and function of human empathy and sympathy, the role of the imagination in processes of intersubjective understanding, and intersubjectivity and objectivity. Furthermore, both thought that evidence on which to rely for justifying claims of objective knowledge of the world or judgments about what was morally right or wrong could be found in human sentiments.

Both Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl inquire into the possibility of objective judgments informed by sentiments (perceptual or emotional) and the constitution of the respective conceptual tools. Underlying this is the observation that we commonsensically claim objectivity for certain judgments, including descriptive judgments about the way the world factually is and evaluative judgments about what is right and wrong for people to do under certain circumstances. The evidence on which we can

rely for these judgments seems to be limited to the perceptual and emotional responses triggered by what affects our senses. How can judgments based on something as subjective as such responses rightly claim to be objective, to be true in virtue of the way the world actually is? This question challenges us to enter the sphere of intersubjectivity – one of the central topics of the essays in this volume.

Smith and Husserl realize that, in our commonsensical way of judging, we are naïve realists. We make judgments about the objects which trigger our perceptual systems, trusting our perceptual information about them. Once we raise questions about the processing of this information and the reliability of its results, once we become aware of the possible discrepancies between appearance and reality, we have already left the sphere of naïve realism and entered the sphere of philosophical theory. We tend to spontaneously project what we perceive and feel on the things we believe to perceive and feel, ignoring – at least to some extent – the constraints of individual perspective or the possibility of our being misled by malfunctions of our perceptual systems or passions, by hallucination, or by contingent personal tastes and prejudices. As far as visual perception is concerned, we are in fact not very often misled by the distortions of perspective which make distant objects appear smaller in comparison to those nearby even if in reality they are much bigger than the latter – we have learned to adjust for that. But in the realm of evaluative judgment based on emotions, these spontaneous projections often mislead us. One question then is whether we can avoid being misled in the evaluative realm by relying on strategies similar to those on which we rely in the epistemic realm.

For a scholar of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology who reads Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* for the first time, the analogy of their philosophical projects may not be evident: Not only is Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, exclusively concerned with the challenge of the objectivity or "propriety" claimed by our evaluative ethical or moral judgments. He explicitly denies that there is a similar problem of distinguishing between appearance and reality concerning either the judgments of our common and scientific knowledge or those of our aesthetic

experiences.<sup>3</sup> Husserl is mainly concerned with the objectivity of the descriptive judgments of our common and scientific knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Evaluative judgments, both ethical and aesthetic, were not often the focus of his interest. And where he deals with evaluative judgments explicitly he claims (or at least implies) that his phenomenological method allows him to meet the challenges of objectivity raised by the claims of our descriptive, aesthetic and evaluative, moral judgments in the same way.

But let us not be misled by first appearances. The idea shared by the editors and contributors to the present volume is that it can be philosophically fruitful to read Smith's moral theory and Husserl's phenomenological epistemology side by side: Husserl provides a conceptual means for making Smith's methodology more explicit than Smith did himself. A phenomenological reconstruction of Smith's analysis of the intersubjective process by which people reach an agreement on impartial and thereby "proper" concepts of right and wrong feelings and actions will provide an opportunity to explore whether and to what extent Husserl was right with his analogy assumption: According to this assumption, his phenomenological method allows the philosopher to meet the challenges posed by the claims to objectivity of our moral judgments about right and wrong along the same lines as the challenges posed by the objectivity claims of our judgments of common and scientific knowledge.

Most of the essays collected in this volume focus either on Husserl's or on Smith's work. Some of them bring in Hume's views and compare them to those of Husserl or Smith (see the essays by Beyer, Drummond, Kern, Brown and Fleischacker). After all, both these authors were responding to Hume. These essays, read as explorations of a joint project, allow the reader to get an idea of the similarities and differences between

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<sup>3</sup> See TMS I.i.4.1-10, pp. 19-23.

<sup>4</sup> This knowledge includes both knowledge based on research in the natural sciences and knowledge acquired within the humanities. The latter typically is about human beings and their works: "What distinguishes the naturalistic from the anthropological (the humanistic) attitude? The natural scientist studies nature as it is in itself, he does not study humans, neither humans as such nor humans as subjects of natural scientific knowledge." (HUA XV, p. 482, translation Christel Fricke) ["Was unterscheidet nun die naturalistische Einstellung von der anthropologischen (geisteswissenschaftlichen)? Der Naturwissenschaftler hat die Natur, und rein sie selbst, zum Thema und nicht den Menschen, weder den Menschen überhaupt, noch den Natur erkennenden Menschen."]

Husserl's phenomenology and Smith's empirically-informed moral theory. The reader will also realize that the phenomenological accounts of empathy and sympathy as well as the role of the imagination in intersubjective communication remain controversial. But seeing the similarities and differences between Husserl's and Smith's accounts of objective judgment against a common, namely Humean background has turned out to be particularly helpful.

There are three philosophical questions which Husserl and Smith raised in their different ways and which are a constant concern in the essays collected in this volume: How do we construct a secure path from perception to objective knowledge? How can we build a secure path from feelings and emotions to proper moral judgments? Can these paths be seen as parallel, so that the pathfinders, while focusing on one of these paths, can keep in touch and learn from each other? Smith and Husserl share the conviction, high up on the philosophical agenda today, that answers to these questions should be empirically informed.

Frode Kjosavik explores Husserl's *Phenomenological Approach to Intersubjectivity in the Sciences*, focussing on a particular aspect of Husserl's account of intersubjectivity, namely the notion of a "particular world" ["Sonderwelt"] and its role in Husserl's conception of scientific theories. These particular worlds inform the intersubjectively shared view of the world. All particular worlds are part of the all encompassing life-world. But what distinguishes a particular world is that its members share a specialized practice which cannot be found throughout the whole of the life-world community. The problem arising from Husserl's distinction between the life-world and any particular scientific world is how there can be a flow of insights from a particular scientific world to the life-world. Kjosavik names this "the in-flow problem". What is specific about a particular world of science is that the scientific theory it develops and holds to be true may be incompatible with the view of the world previously held in the life-world. Husserl's account of objectivity as constituted by intersubjectively shared views of the world represents a particular challenge for the encounter of scientific theories with the commonsensical view of the world. Kjosavik proposes a solution to the in-flow problem which is based on a suggestion originally made by Dagfinn Føllesdal. According to this suggestion, any particular world-horizon belonging to a

particular world has to be brought into coherence with the general world horizon of the life-world, and the scientific world-horizons are no exception. Such a coherence can only be brought about at the price of a revision of certain beliefs.

Henning Peucker, in his essay on *Husserl's Approaches to Volitional Consciousness*, looks at Husserl's phenomenological analysis of acts of willing. He distinguishes between two models of the will that can be found in Husserl's writings. According to the first, the "foundational" account, any act of willing depends on two more fundamental, though equally conscious acts, one of presenting an intentional object and the other of evaluating it. According to the second, the "genetic" account, acts of volition are motivated by instincts and desires that originate in our consciousness. Peucker's claim is that Husserl never gave preference to the genetic account of volition exclusively. Rather, Husserl held on to both accounts. In the last part of his essay, Peucker explores how the two models for understanding acts of willing can be correlated phenomenologically.

Under the title of "*We-Subjectivity*": *Husserl on Community and Communal Constitution*, Ronald McIntyre looks at Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity. Husserl's claim is that intersubjectivity plays a crucial role in our experience of the world as objectively there for everyone. The subjects of this experience are members of social communities who conceive of themselves as such. Furthermore, McIntyre argues that, for Husserl, the subjectivity that constitutes the world is a "we-subjectivity". McIntyre's claim is that, according to a thought-experiment Husserl explores in the *Cartesian Meditations*, even the self-conception of a person as not being a merely solipsistic subject but rather a social being depends on this person's awareness of and communication with others, that is on intersubjectivity. He then explores the additional experiential resources that come into play through the intersubjective dimension even of our self-consciousness. In particular, he looks at empathic apperception and its role in the constitution of personhood. The social world includes different kinds of groups, the most encompassing being the whole of mankind. But there are also smaller communities constituted by we-subjects. Their members typically share a surrounding world and they have certain aims and interests in common; they are interrelated through empathy, trust each other, and coordinate their activities.

Christian Beyer, in his essay entitled *Husserl on Understanding Persons*, focuses on Husserl's *Ideas II* and the notion of the "life-world", its role in Husserl's account of what it means to understand a person, and the role of empathy in processes of intersubjective understanding. Against this background, he briefly looks at Adam Smith's notion of sympathy and compares it to Husserl's notion of empathy. Beyer stresses the importance of personal motivation in Husserl's account of the life-world: Whatever is the object of our attention, our interest is not only cognitive but also practical. The motivational, practical aspect of personhood also plays a key role in Husserl's account of empathy-driven intersubjective communication, aiming at understanding both ourselves and others as persons. In his comparison between Husserl's phenomenological exploration of empathy and Smith's notion of sympathy, Beyer points out analogies and differences. Furthermore, he distinguishes between two different senses in which Husserl uses the notion of empathy and gives an account of Husserl's notion of "rational values" and their role in accommodating personal habits and the freedom of action.

John Drummond, in *Imagination and Appresentation, Sympathy and Empathy in Smith and Husserl*, places Husserl's phenomenological account of objective knowledge in relation to both the empirical account of Hume and the transcendental account of Kant. His claim is that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is characterized by "a descriptive methodology that seeks to identify the essential structures – both subjective and objective – in the disclosure of objects in their significance for experiencing subjects". What, according to Drummond, Husserl takes over from Hume is the insight into the role the imagination plays in processes of intersubjective communication and of constituting objects of experience as persisting in time and looking differently from different points of view. He then compares Hume's, Smith's, and Husserl's account of the imagination in both the cognitive and the moral domains, looking at whether the role attributed to the imagination is merely reproductive or also creative and whether it is limited to the solipsistic subject or enters the sphere of intersubjectivity. As far as Husserl's phenomenology is concerned, Drummond's discussions of intersubjectivity focus on the establishment of cognitive and linguistic normality. Drummond points out various similarities and differences between the three authors: Hume and Smith understand

objectivity as some kind of imaginative projection on to the world whereas, for Husserl, objectivity is disclosed through processes of intersubjective communication. Hume and Smith differ in their respective accounts of emotional sympathy and the role the imagination plays in bringing it forth. On this topic, Husserl is closer to Smith than to Hume. Finally, Drummond mentions certain differences between Smith's account of the impartial spectator and Husserl's account of objectivity in the realm of cognition. His claim is that the deficiencies in Smith's account of intersubjectivity in comparison to Husserl's are a consequence of Smith's empiristic, mainly Humean, heritage.

In the next essay, entitled *Mengzi (Mencius), Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl on Sympathy and Conscience*, Iso Kern begins his inquiry into sympathy and conscience from the perspective of the Chinese philosopher Mengzi (4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.). In the context of the present volume this may come as a surprise. But Kern informs us that Mengzi had developed a notion of spontaneous sympathy long before Edmund Husserl and even David Hume and Adam Smith thought about the phenomenon. Kern explores whether Mengzi's notion of "sympathy", Husserl's notion of "empathy" ["Einfühlung"] and Smith's notion of "sympathy" may all be necessary ingredients for understanding the nature and origin of the "virtue of benevolence or humanheartedness" as it is manifest in our concern for others and their health and happiness. As Kern informs us, Mengzi refers to phenomena like childrens' spontaneous love for their parents and people's spontaneously being affected by the sight of the suffering of another creature (which could also be an animal). Kern finds further sources of humanheartedness in the spontaneous feelings of pity, compassion and gratitude with which we respond to the sight of others' situations and actions. These feelings "intentionally refer to situations as they are for other people or for other living beings". Furthermore, Kern attributes to these feelings a motivational function. He traces accounts of such feelings in the writings of David Hume and Adam Smith and in their use of the notion of sympathy in particular. But he argues that our concern for other people is not explicable in terms of our sharing their actual feelings. He then looks at Hume's and Smith's notions of sympathy in more detail. In particular, he inquires into the function Adam Smith attributes to sympathy in his theory of moral judgment, including moral self-judgment and

the moral judgment about other people's attitudes and actions.

In her own contribution to this volume, entitled *Overcoming Disagreement – Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl on Strategies of Justifying Descriptive and Evaluative Judgments*, Christel Fricke looks at strategies for overcoming disagreements and justifying judgments as they have been developed by Edmund Husserl (in his *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* – mainly for descriptive judgments) and Adam Smith (in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – mainly for moral judgments) respectively. She first gives an account of Husserl's reconstruction of the way we justify judgments of descriptive knowledge. The main function of this account is to provide a background for her comparison between Husserl and Smith. Her focus is on Husserl's theories of "empathy", "sympathy", and "normality". She then provides an overview of the main characteristic features of Adam Smith's reconstruction of the way we justify moral judgments, that is judgments about the propriety or impropriety of emotional and behavioral responses of people to certain circumstances. She argues that these ways or strategies of justification are analogous in important respects: Both Husserl and Smith take their starting point from subjective sentiments (from perceptual and emotional data respectively) and reconstruct the process in which people can use these sentiments, or at least some of them, as an evidential basis for making justified claims in descriptive and moral judgments. Both authors understand this process as intrinsically intersubjective, aiming at overcoming the partiality of subjective sentiments. Both attribute an important role to an imaginative change of standpoint that allows a person to try and understand how things look from another's point of view. Despite these analogies, she confirms Adam Smith's claim according to which, in order to overcome moral disagreement and to justify moral judgments, more challenges have to be met than to justify descriptive judgments. This difference is ultimately explicable in metaphysical terms: Whereas in the cognitive realm there are objects and their properties to be discovered, in the moral realm what is at stake are human emotional attitudes and the resulting actions which, while being judged morally, undergo a constant process of normative improvement.

In her *Intersubjectivity and Moral Judgment in Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Vivienne Brown raises the question whether a moral theory needs to be informed by a theory of mind. Her claim is that Adam

Smith's reliance on intersubjective understanding for moral judgment suggests that this question should be answered in the affirmative for *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The problem that she notes, however, is that it is not clear how such intersubjective understanding relates to Smith's account of moral judgment and his notion of "sympathy". Brown's starting point is what she terms Smith's "tripartite model of moral judgment", according to which a moral judgment involves a spectator in making a comparison between his own sympathetic emotions in looking upon another's case and (what the spectator takes to be) the emotions of that other. This model requires that the spectator's sympathetic emotions are distinct from what he takes to be the emotions of the other. Brown surveys how Smith scholars have struggled to understand this distinction in the TMS, either in terms of the psychological processes involved or in terms of an appropriate conceptual distinction between the two kinds of emotion. Many scholars take the view that Smith fails to explain psychologically how spectators can access what others feel or that he even denies that such is possible; and they do not see that Smith has any coherent conceptual distinction between the two different kinds of emotion. Brown's claim is that TMS is stronger on both counts than scholars have realised. She argues that in the opening chapter Smith presents a psychological account of "empathy" that is distinct from "sympathy", one that has much in common with current simulationist theories of mind and so perhaps receives some support from recent research in empirical psychology and neuroscience. She also argues that there is a robust conceptual distinction in the TMS between a spectator's *imagining what X feels in X's situation* (empathy) and a spectator's *imagining what he would feel if he were X in X's situation* (sympathy), a distinction that clarifies the different imaginative processes involved and answers to the requirements of Smith's account of moral judgment and the impartial spectator. Brown concludes that the intersubjectivity of Smith's moral theory is both conceptually viable and grounded in a theory of mind that is currently relevant for scientific research.

In the last essay of this volume, Samuel Fleischacker provides a comparison between Hume's and Smith's accounts of "sympathy". His philologically careful comparison of the two accounts, under the title *Sympathy in Hume and Smith: A Contrast, Critique, and Reconstruction*, is

informed both by the historical audience Hume and Smith were addressing and by the contemporary debates about theory of mind. According to Fleischacker, it is important to keep in mind that both Hume and Smith were less concerned by questions of mind and intersubjectivity than by their wish to respond to Hobbes' and Mandeville's exclusively egocentric accounts of human motivation. Still, Hume's and Smith's accounts of sympathy differ, and Fleischacker claims that Smith, in introducing his account in the first chapters of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was implicitly and critically responding to the account Hume had proposed. Whereas Hume has a mainly biological, a contagion account of sympathy, Smith suggests a more intellectual, a socialized account which Fleischacker suggests to describe as a "projective account". Sympathy, according to Smith, depends on our actively imagining ourselves in the position of others. Furthermore, people naturally have, according to Smith, not only a faculty of sympathy, they also have a desire for sympathy. And this desire requires them in some cases to make a special effort to sympathize with another's feelings. But Fleischacker sees a problem in both Hume's and Smith's account of sympathy: Both rely on the unquestioned assumption that all feelings are essentially private, accessible only to the people whose feelings they are. Fleischacker considers this assumption as untenable.

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