

1. Why did Adam Smith think that the pursuit of power and wealth was not necessarily in one's "true" self-interest? In your answer make sure to discuss why "self seeking" behavior cannot be defined in an unambiguous way. / Sanghoon Lee

Smith's concept of 'self' – feeling and reason

Smith treats the self as the matrix of reason and passion. When speaking of 'self-command', Smith equates the self with the passions. Yet, sentiments are not purely personal, but involve a connection to others, even if that connection is mediated by an intellectual effort, of placing ourselves where they are. This means that sympathy combines feeling and reason, suggesting the important part reason plays in the moral sentiments.

Smith's concept of 'self-interest' – sympathy, an interest in others

Self-interest narrowly conceived is an interest in feeling states and satisfactions unconnected to the well-being of others. Self-interest broadly conceived refers to the entire set of possible satisfactions available to and pursued by the self, including those that derive from sympathy for others. While acknowledging that our investment in the attainment of ends associated with (narrow) self-interest is much stronger than our interest in others, Smith also insists that we also adopt a perspective, that of the impartial spectator. (Being impartial means relating to the interests of others on the same plane as your own.) For Smith our interest includes a more universal end, the approbation of the impartial spectator. This does not mean that we give up our partial ends, but that our ends must combine two dimensions: one partial, one general.

While Smith interprets sympathy as a constraint on, or redirection of, self-interest, he also treats sympathy as implying that the self has an interest in others. It is not just reason that commands the passion in the name of the self, it is the feeling for others Smith calls sympathy that commands and constraints those feelings that lead us to disregard others. Therefore self-interest can be an interest in others.

Smith's concept of happiness – tranquility and enjoyment

According to Smith, happiness cannot be attained by the restless striving to attain a higher station in life, but consists instead 'in tranquility and enjoyment' within a 'permanent situation'. This image hardly fits the life of the capitalist, with its never-ending pursuit of more.

Why the pursuit of power and wealth? - the regard of others

Why does the self pursue ends whose attainment assures it will be unhappy and unsatisfied? Why would the owner of wealth use it to acquire more wealth, and can this use of wealth be said to express genuine self-determination?

If we wonder, as Smith does, why individuals have such an interest in wealth and power, the answer, according to Smith, is the regard of others, that is, the self's dependence on recognition by others. In a free society based on individual property, station depends on amount of wealth. Smith insists that the desire for the admiration of others plays a primary part in shaping and directing self-interest. Therefore the self pursue wealth.

Why the pursuit of wealth not happiness? - never-ending process

Freedom means the right if the property owner to dispose of his property as he sees fit. Freedom means that the object is made subordinate to the will of the subject. But Freedom, which means self-determination, also means attaining station and thus the esteem of others, which means the never-ending accumulation of wealth, which assures we will never attain the state of tranquility where happiness and satisfaction are possible. Freedom means unfreedom. In Smith's language, the

individual's self-interest drives him to achieve ends not his own, and of which he may be unaware.

Self to the large order? - unintended outcome of the pursuit of one's own ends

To gain satisfaction by living within a permanent situation requires an adjustment of self through identification with its situation. If this situation confirms the value and ideals of the larger order, then the happiness gained by adjusting self to the situation is also a confirmation of the meaning and significance of that order. Smith's permanent ends retain at least a measure of connectedness to a larger community including a regard and concern for others. It seems doubtful that (narrow) self-interest could confirm to them.

The demands of the social order are not directly imposed on the member, but emerge as the unintended outcome of the exercise of the individual's freedom to determine and pursue his own ends. The end is wealth, but not wealth primarily as a means to the ends of the self (narrow self-interest); rather, wealth is a means to provide subsistence to the population and security for the nation. Wealth is important not because it liberates the self, but because it better assures subsistence.

cf. "The self and its interests in classical political economy" (David P. Levine)