

Saggi

Trendsetters and imagination.
Adam Smith's views on change in Fashion

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Abstracts

Il presente saggio presenta una ricostruzione e una interpretazione del processo di modifica della filosofia di Adam Smith, basandosi sull'esempio del cambiamento della moda. Mi concentrerò sul ruolo dell'immaginazione, così come sul ruolo della ricchezza nel processo, per poi analizzare come la simpatia, il rispetto e gli errori cognitivi portano a guardare e imitare i "grandi". Se qualcosa introdotto da un piccolo numero di persone diventa di moda, gli altri seguono. Tuttavia, i processi di cambiamento saranno considerati come un effetto del comportamento individuale e delle decisioni che influenzano la società.

This paper presents a reconstruction and interpretation of the process of change in Adam Smith's philosophy basing on the example of changes in fashion. I shall focus on the role of imagination, as well as on the role of the wealthy in the process. I shall analyse how sympathy, respect and cognitive errors result in looking up to and mimicking the great. Something introduced by a small number of people becomes fashionable, as others follow. However, the processes of change will be regarded as an effect of individual behaviour and decisions that affect the society.

Keywords

Philosophy – History of Philosophy – Fashion – Change – Adam Smith – wealthy

The research was financed from the assets awarded by the National Science Centre, Poland, for the post-doctoral internship upon the decision no. 2016/20/S/HS1/00071.

The paper aims to propose an interpretation and reconstruction of the processes in which social change occurs in one of the areas discussed by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: fashion. I would like to apply a framework in which change is an effect of individual actions and of dynamics between individuals. I will argue that it is possible to describe a scheme of social change and look for factors that trigger it. At the same time, it is crucial to stay aware of the fact that the processes of social change happen constantly and we are able to fully control neither all the changes or their consequences.

Yet, I would also like to suggest that within the framework of Smith's philosophy change can be not only treated as an unintended consequence, but sometimes can be introduced more or less consciously. I would like to identify a few possible instances of such an influence by referring primarily to top-down examples and to identify how Smith's remarks can be helpful for planning the introduction of certain changes.

The paper also assumes that Smith's works present a coherent enough view of such processes: not only *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, but also other, minor writings, contribute to the possibility of such a reconstruction. The way Adam Smith describes individuals and society is deeply connected to the way change occurs. People tend to learn and act in a given way, have certain feelings and observations that strongly affect the

behaviour of others, thus influencing or even inducing change. The paper is also to underline the crucial role of imagination in the process of change of fashion.

1. Natural respect towards the wealthy

Analysing the way fashion changes requires an introduction that would evoke natural respect towards the wealthy. In both the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith mentioned the wealthy and the great, ascribing them an important role within society. Social harmony, according to him, is to some extent rooted in hierarchically organised society, especially that both respect for those who hold a privileged place in society as well as sympathy for the poor are important factors that enforce social harmony¹.

Smith explains why do people want to be rich and that they have natural respect for the wealthy. He states that we are more willing to sympathise with positive, joyful emotions than with negative ones. This leads individuals to showing their good condition – including wealth, and to hiding their poverty². Another point the author of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* makes is that it is pleasurable when other people give us attention and

¹ Smith presented a mixed approach in which a praise of hierarchical society coexists with his egalitarian views. See: A. SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1981, 710-714, S. FLEISCHACKER, *Adam Smith on Equality* in C. BERRY - M.P. PAGANELLI - C. SMITH (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, 485-500.

² Smith is not fully explicit here, but it seems that people in their imagination connote joy with wealth and sadness with poverty.

sympathise with us. People, in Smith's view, like to be noticed and approved by others.

To superficial minds, the vices of the great seem at all times agreeable. They connect them, not only with the splendour of fortune, but with many superior virtues, which they ascribe to their superiors; with the spirit of freedom and independency, with frankness, generosity, humanity, and politeness. The virtues of the inferior ranks of people, on the contrary, their parsimonious frugality, their painful industry, and rigid adherence to rules, seem to them mean and disagreeable. They connect them, both with the meanness of the station to which those qualities commonly belong, and with many great vices, which, they suppose, usually accompany them; such as an abject, cowardly, ill-natured, lying, pilfering disposition³.

The situation of the wealthy varies, in Smith's description, from the situation of an ordinary man. The people of rank are respected and noticed, people sympathise with the situation of wealthy even without expecting anything from them. Natural respect and will to sympathise is also connected to high social status: Smith tells us that we naturally respect older people, children respect their parents, etc., nature also inclines us to submit to kings and those who possess power⁴. Therefore, people want to show that they are rich, as they assume that would gain them approbation and sympathy of other people, «...it is chiefly from this regard to the sentiments of mankind, that we pursue the riches and avoid poverty»⁵.

³ A. SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1982, 201.

⁴ A. SMITH, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1981, 318: ID., *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 51-53.

⁵ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 50.

In Smith's opinion we even wish the situation of the wealthy and the great was always good and that they were always happy. Their tragedies affects us more than those of an ordinary man⁶. We tend to idealise the situation of the wealthy, not considering the fact that achieving their position might have taken a lot of hard work or that they lack some freedom and anonymity.

When we consider the condition of the great, in those delusive colours in which the imagination is apt to paint it, it seems to be almost the abstract idea of a perfect and happy state. It is the very state which, in all our waking dreams and idle reveries, we had sketched out to ourselves as the final object of all our desires. We feel, therefore, a peculiar sympathy with the satisfaction of those who are in it. We favour all their inclinations, and forward all their wishes. What pity, we think, that any thing should spoil and corrupt so agreeable a situation! We could even wish them immortal; and it seems hard to us, that death should at last put an end to such perfect enjoyment⁷.

Imagining how good life of the wealthy is, people frequently try to achieve the same position. As Craig Smith has stated, «It is not the rich that we admire but rather their situation»⁸. We do not have enough time, possibilities or resources to get to know deeply the people we look up to, especially basing on their material status.

⁶ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 51-53, A. SMITH, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1985, 124.

⁷ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 51-52.

⁸ C. SMITH, *Adam Smith's 'collateral' inquiry: fashion and morality in the Theory of Moral Sentiments and the Wealth of Nations*, in *History of Political Economy* 45 (2013) 3, 1-24, here 5.

Though wisdom or morality seem to be better criteria, economic status is much more visible and is easier to recognise⁹. Therefore, pragmatically, we tend to focus on visible signs of wealth as symbols suggesting that a person deserves respect; consequently, we respect those who earn a lot or were born into wealthy or noble families¹⁰. The rich and the great are much more interesting than ordinary men, so we would rather sympathise with the successful¹¹. This is why people's aspiration for wealth and material possessions is frequently, in fact, an endeavour to gain respect and admiration¹².

Ambition drives people not only to be praiseworthy, but also to achieve high social status or rather: admiration and sympathy of others and benefit from it. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we can find two ways to fulfil the needs of ambition: one is being moral, practicing virtue, being modest. Such a model of behaviour attracts attention only of the «careful observers» amongst the wise and virtuous, which is quite a small group of people. Following the other model – becoming rich – attracts much more attention of most of the people. It is a simpler and, in perspective, more profitable way of becoming approved of and getting to feel the pleasures of fellow-feeling. Moreover, for

⁹ In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations* Smith provides us with a catalogue of features that «naturally introduce subordination»: strength, beauty, agility, wisdom, virtue, prudence, age and wealth (SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, 710-716).

¹⁰ The latter case also provides one more factor that makes it even easier for them to play an important role in society in the future – from childhood such a person is being trained and accustomed for the future role (A. SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 53–54, 253).

¹¹ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 50-51.

¹² SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 181-182, 225-226.

many people gaining money and respect requires practicing prudence and justice¹³.

Smith notices that people sometimes respect the rich instead of the virtuous by mistake:

The respect which we feel for wisdom and virtue is, no doubt, different from that which we conceive for wealth and greatness; and it requires no very nice discernment to distinguish the difference. But, notwithstanding this difference, those sentiments bear a very considerable resemblance to one another. In some particular features they are, no doubt, different, but, in the general air of countenance, they seem to be very nearly the same, that inattentive observers are very apt to mistake the one for the other. In equal degrees of merit there is scarce any man who does not respect more the rich and the great, than the poor and the humble. With most men the presumption and vanity of the former are much more admired, than the real and solid merit of the latter¹⁴.

Since individuals as described by Smith are not perfect and learn in social circumstances, discerning the roots of respect requires wisdom, effort, time for observation and practice. Therefore, in my opinion, what the philosopher provides us with is an ascertainment that it would be better to base social hierarchy on virtue, but, people tend to choose a simpler model: basing it on wealth. It is easy to mistake the feeling of sympathy and respect for the wise and virtuous with similar feelings towards the rich and the great (especially that we keep observing that they are being admired), therefore it is more and more probable that wealth will dominate as a basis for respect and as a path

¹³ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 62-65.

¹⁴ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 62.

to be followed. I would like to emphasize that it does not mean that the rich are moral, it only means that in their imagination people tend to connote wealth with authority and respect (and, as I understand the author of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, sometimes, by mistake, with morality).

According to Adam Smith, this wishes to acquire financial resources and to achieve social rank has both positive and negative effects. We try harder, become innovative and work for the sake of society. We act in a moral way not only to be praiseworthy, but also to be praised and appreciated. Basing approval on wealth, however, creates the temptation to act in a malicious way.

...we rely more on wealth than on morality when we seek approbation from others. The frequency of moral gambles is even less surprising when one considers that in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations* Smith claims that people systematically overestimate their probability of success and underestimate their probability of failure [...] despite the possible disillusion at the end of one's life, the anxiety, and the infamy of a dirty conscience of an individual (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.ii.3.8), the consequences of trading off moral approbation for material gains at the social level do not appear to be devastating¹⁵.

¹⁵ M.P. PAGANELLI, *Theory of Moral Sentiments 1759 vs. Theory of Moral Sentiments 1790: a Change of Mind or a Change in Constraint?*, in W.L. ROBISON - D.B. SUITS (eds.) *New Essays on Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy*, Rit Press, New York 2012, 39.

The disposition to admire the wealthy and to despise the poor leads to, on the one hand, maintaining social harmony¹⁶ and, on the other hand, to corruption of moral sentiments. The richer the society is, the more probable the negative effects are because the means to show one's material status are more extensive¹⁷. People are willing to risk more and undertake actions that are not morally justified in order to follow the path that is more probable to gain them others' respect. Especially that, as observers, in case of morality and wisdom, just as in case of wealth, we are not always able to judge whether the merit is real. We need to consider also those who harm others and commit crimes to achieve their goal. Even within the framework of economy there are kinds of behaviour that are bad for society but bring profits to chosen individuals or groups.¹⁸

¹⁶ The wealthy do not need revolutions or wars to gain approval and high social status – for them being fashionable at parties is enough. Only those who seek to distinguish themselves look for such opportunities as a revolution. Therefore, subordination towards the wealthy helps keeping internal peace (SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 53-56).

¹⁷ An extensive analysis of this issue can be found in Maria Pia Paganelli's papers (M.P. PAGANELLI, *Approbation and the desire to better one's condition in Adam Smith*, in *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 31 (2009) 1, 78-92, here 82–86, 90; and M. P. PAGANELLI, *Theory of Moral Sentiments 1759 vs. Theory of Moral Sentiments 1790*, 37–42), in which she argues that in poor societies there are less goods that money can be spent on, so the temptation is smaller; as Paganelli writes: «When a society is poor, there is not much to show off and not much to gain with questionable behaviours. But the wealth of a rich society generates perverse incentives that may lead to the ruin of the individual or of society itself. [...] With the introduction of commercial wealth, indeed, individual ruin becomes more common... » (PAGANELLI, *Theory of Moral Sentiments 1759 vs. Theory of Moral Sentiments 1790*, 40-41). She also provides an interesting account of the relation between an individual's approbation and society's wellbeing.

¹⁸ Maria Pia Paganelli pointed out that merchants and manufacturers become greedy and «The wealth generated by commerce is unprecedented

No matter which way money was accumulated, the wealthy tend to manifest their position and material status. People would not be aware of their position if it was not underlined by certain symbols. Therefore, buying expensive items, living in an enormous house, looking for sometimes even not practical but fancy and rare objects – all of this plays an essential role. It is a sign for other people: *I can afford that, I am wealthy and important, I deserve respect*. It creates demand for luxurious goods such as palaces, gardens, and accessories, but also works of art and even food. The more expensive and scarcer they are, the better these goods can be used as status symbols.

Wealth does not prove one's moral qualities. Many people, in their imagination, connect high status with virtue and wisdom. They also connect high social status with wealth. As a result, they tend to connect wealth with virtue. Judgement based on material status is a faster and easier way than judgement based on morality and wisdom which requires getting to know the person deeply. Moreover, as Smith notices:

The profligacy of a man of fashion is looked upon with much less contempt and aversion, than that of a man of meaner condition. In the latter, a single transgression of the rules of temperance and propriety, is commonly more resented, than the constant and avowed contempt of them ever in the former¹⁹.

We judge the great men and the “ordinary” men in slightly different ways. Wastefulness of goods by a rich man is less criticized (although Smith notices its negative consequences and

and can be concentrated in their hands if the government grants them monopolies» (PAGANELLI, *Approbation and the desire to better one's condition in Adam Smith*, 88).

¹⁹ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 63.

approves prudence) than wastefulness by the poor one. However, this also leaves room for the men of fashion to introduce change. As we, to some extent, regard it acceptable for the wealthy to break some of the rules, we also allow them to introduce new styles.

In my opinion imagination plays here an important role, since, we rather tend to admire who wealthy appear to be or who people imagine them to be and not who they really are. We would like to appreciate the people of rank for their high moral standards and wisdom that led them to achieve wealth.

2. Smith on Fashion

Although Smith's most extensive analysis concerning fashion can be found in Part V Chapter I of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the subject is in fact present throughout the whole book. As Craig Smith noticed, «In both *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith takes particular care to stress the significance of fashion in human social life»²⁰. The subject also plays a role in the philosopher's considerations concerning imitative arts.

People admire the wealthy and wish to either achieve the same position or, at least, due to natural sympathy they wish to mimic the rich and act the way they do. This is why people tend to imitate the style with which the wealthy dress (although they might not be able to afford the expensive materials), the way

²⁰ C. SMITH, *All in the best possible taste: Adam Smith and the leaders of fashion*, in *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 23 (2016) 4, 597-610, here 597. A similar point was made by Dugald Stewart (D. STEWART, *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.* in A. SMITH, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1982, 305).

they speak, their manners, and even their flaws. According to Adam Smith:

It is from our disposition to admire, and consequently to imitate, the rich and the great, that they are enabled to set, or to lead what is called the fashion. Their dress is the fashionable dress; the language of their conversation, the fashionable style; their air and deportment, the fashionable behaviour. Even their vices and follies are fashionable²¹.

I would like to emphasise that these are individual decisions in given circumstances that eventually influence others and spread within society. People observe the behaviour of the wealthy – the things they purchase etc. – and mimic them or create similar yet cheaper goods. This is one of the ways in which new fashions arise and in which the prices of some goods are determined as demand is created. In short, the process of change in fashion can be described as the constant introduction of new trends that are observed and emulated. Fashion changes with different pace in different areas, depending on the utility, durability and price of the goods: the process is much faster in case of clothes we wear than in architecture.

The wealthy need to distinguish themselves from the rest of society and make sure their high social position is underlined by their possessions and can be easily spotted. They start to wear certain types of clothes or buy given objects. They stop using and buying goods that are popular among common people and start buying something else. Yet, other individuals tend to notice what becomes symbols of wealth and the styles that are characteristic of the wealthy. Wearing similar outfits and mimicking the style of the rich introduces fashionable goods for

²¹ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 64.

the whole of society through a multitude of individual decisions to obtain them. Such goods become adjusted to production for the masses and they become a binding and obvious outfit. Certain elements of the wealthy's style are chosen by individuals to be followed, copied and adjusted. However, frequently there is neither the need nor the possibility to mimic the whole range of symbols that are displayed by the rich.

At the same time, we cannot forget that the wealthy also are not a homogenous group – in reality, these are numerous individuals who make individual choices. Between them a certain diversity can also be spotted – those who introduce a given style or fashion can be identified. The role of Leaders of Fashion was described by Craig Smith in his interesting paper where he has proposed a similar reconstruction of the process of creation of fashion, stating that «Fashion proceeds through the adoption of a style by the rich and powerful followed by the eventual emulation of that style by the masses»²². According to Craig Smith, the fact that an object becomes fashionable partly has its roots in the fact that it is scarce²³. He introduces the characteristics of the Leaders of Fashion²⁴. His observations fit a picture I would like to propose: one in which particular decisions of wealthy individuals influence the whole of society. The style introduced by the Leaders of Fashion (individually, not collectively) becomes popular and fashionable, yet through, again, singular decisions of others who decide to follow them. In the paper I am to extend the category of the Leaders of Fashion by artists and influential individuals.

²² SMITH, *All in the best possible taste*, 600.

²³ SMITH, *All in the best possible taste*, 599.

²⁴ SMITH, *All in the best possible taste*, 604–609.

I would like to illustrate this process with a very simple example: a wealthy person wants to distinguish himself and starts wearing a given type of expensive fabric in, let us say, a given shade of green. Other people start to follow the lead, wanting to act similarly, as they respect and admire the person. Green clothes become more and more fashionable and popular (though other people wear less expensive fabrics). Therefore, rich people start wearing something yellow, etc. This is an oversimplification, but this is the way, I believe, it works in Smith's theory: individual decisions together with natural respect for the wealthy change fashion as other individuals follow the rich and the noble ones.

I assume that we learn what is fashionable and beautiful through social interactions. If people laugh at your clothes, you tend to wear something different; if people appreciate the style, you feel fashionably dressed. The same is valid for different kinds of goods. Fashion is a social phenomenon²⁵. If we use objects as symbols of status, we do so to show them to others. It affects people, and their reactions also influence society, including the wealthy. As Smith stated:

A man would be ridiculous who should appear in public with a suit of clothes quite different from those which are commonly worn, though the new dress should in itself be ever so graceful or convenient²⁶.

²⁵ Craig Smith shows that the origins of fashions, as the origins of morality, have the same roots: natural sociability (SMITH, *Adam Smith's 'collateral' inquiry*, 4). He also mentions that fashion plays an important role in social change, not only regarding clothes or arts, but it also played a role in the decline of Feudalism (SMITH, *Adam Smith's 'collateral' inquiry*, 14).

²⁶ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 196.

Since people strive for social approbation, the feedback they receive plays a key role in forming their sense of what is fashionable. People tend to find fashionable and stylish what they hear other people regard as such. In this way fashion, which in fact is an instance of a custom, spreads and we learn what is acceptable and what is not to be worn. Moreover, our imagination, which is accustomed to the co-existence of certain elements, makes us appreciate fixed connections²⁷. This significant role of imagination in the process of change in fashion needs to be underlined. We expect the known elements to coexist and when they do not – we notice a lack and feel uneasy. The narration, composition, needs to be complete, just as we are used to²⁸:

Though, independent of custom, there should be no real beauty in their union, yet when custom has thus connected them together, we feel an impropriety in their separation [...]

The modes of furniture or dress which seem ridiculous to strangers, give no offence to the people who are used to them²⁹.

It is not easy to break up the custom. Yet, thanks to our imagination we may associate the wealthy and the artists with the right to introduce change. I assume that it is also the imagination that connects certain objects with a high material status and the wealthy with respect. The role of circumstances and individual perception based on knowledge seems to be essential. The same behaviour, style of clothes or wish to possess certain objects will be judged in a different way – depending on

²⁷ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 194.

²⁸ The fact that we expect a coherent whole and that it is imagination that tends to fill in the gaps does not only concern the case of fashion: it is true, in terms of Smith's theory, also for scientific theories.

²⁹ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 194.

how, in our imagination, we associate certain people and symbols with certain positions. An ordinary man in an extravagant dress would be considered ludicrous and no one would follow in his footsteps.

Contrary, a wealthy person, widely known for good taste in our imagination would be associated with the right to introduce a new, interesting style. Imagination allows the deviation from custom in one case and not in the other, filling in the narrative gaps (the wealthy deserve respect, they owe better, stylish extravagant things etc.). It may happen thanks to individuals' knowledge of one's status and reputation.

The scarcity (when goods become commonly possessed, they no longer serve the purposes of the great)³⁰ and value of objects play one of the key roles in them being useful for emphasising wealth, as only the rich can afford expensive objects. Smith³¹ shows us – on the example of precious metals – that their high price is an effect of the demand, which results not only from their utility and beauty but also from their scarcity.

However, it is not always so evident that something we see is in fact expensive. According to Smith our level of knowledge influences our feelings and sense of beauty. In his essay *The Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called The Imitative Arts* the philosopher provides the reader with an example of a lady who wears jewels:

The difference between real and false jewels is what even the experienced eye of a jeweller can sometimes with difficulty distinguish. Let an unknown lady, however, come into a public assembly, with a head-dress which appears to be very richly

³⁰ SMITH, *Adam Smith's 'collateral' inquiry*, 6; ID, *All in the best possible taste*, 599.

³¹ SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, 191-192.

adorned with diamonds, and let a jeweller only whisper in our ear that they are all false stones, not only the lady will immediately sink in our imagination from the rank of a princess to that of a very ordinary woman, but the head-dress, from an object of the most splendid magnificence, will at once become an impertinent piece of tawdry and tinsel finery³².

Therefore, not only the beauty of an item is important, but also the price and the knowledge that something is expensive— even if it can be discerned only by an expert. This is why demand for gold, silver, pearls etc. is created and their price rises even more – knowing that something is rare enhances its beauty³³.

This demand leads to the use of rare and expensive materials when designing or creating clothes, jewellery, houses and even gardens for the wealthy. The poor are able to somehow copy the design but will never be able to afford the expensive materials. Smith provides us with an example of a fine tapestry that presents the subject in a less adequate way than a painting or a statue. Yet, creating such a work of art takes longer and the artist needs to be well trained and skilful. This is why tapestry products are expensive and only the rich are able to afford them³⁴.

However, the cost is not the only factor that plays a role³⁵. Smith discusses an example of ornaments made from yew

³² SMITH, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 183.

³³ SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, 191, SMITH, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 487.

³⁴ SMITH, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 182.

³⁵ Smith also takes into account certain limitations to the role of fashion: he regards beauty as something we notice when being a part of a society (SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 110-111), he combines custom with other factors that play a significant role: he finds that there are certain features we find agreeable no matter what the custom is, although it would be difficult

and holly trees³⁶. The trees cost little and this way of shaping them became popular in England, the wealthy would not allow anymore to shape their trees like this and this kind of ornaments stopped being considered to be beautiful. In France, nonetheless, as notes the Scottish philosopher, such gardens were still popular amongst the rich, as the poor rarely shaped their trees this way³⁷. It shows how the process of changes in fashion may vary in diverse circumstances, due to disparity of individuals' decisions to mimic or not to mimic a given kind of objects or a style, nonetheless the materials are equally available.

It needs to be reminded that when writing about fashion, Smith does not limit himself to ascribing its impact only to clothes and accessories, but also mentions works of art, styles of writing, ways of arranging gardens or styles in architecture. Three factors seem to play a role: utility (but not always, some objects that underline our social position are, in fact, useless, therefore their only utile function is manifesting the position of the owner), beauty (which is partly conventional) and fashion.

Of course, one cannot forget that Smith mentions also the important role of the artists as they, being creative and talented, can break the existing rules and the schemes themselves. They become appreciated and followed thanks to their genius and not only material position. The wealthy pay the artists to create for

to find one that people would like if the feature would be against what we are accustomed to (SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 199-200). When analysing reasons why people find certain things beautiful Smith mentions utility (SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 179-187) and the level of imitation (SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*).

³⁶ Smith focuses on the disparity between the original form of a tree and form of obelisks they imitate that enhances the beauty of the trees.

³⁷ SMITH, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 183-184.

them beautiful, scarce, original and innovative objects or pieces of art. Artists' ingenuity can influence the way art is created, introducing new techniques and styles.

An eminent artist will bring about a considerable change in the established modes of each of those arts, and introduce a new fashion of writing, music, or architecture. As the dress of an agreeable man of high rank recommends itself, and how peculiar and fantastical soever, comes soon to be admired and imitated; so the excellencies of an eminent master recommend his peculiarities, and his manner becomes the fashionable style in the art which he practises³⁸.

I believe that artists, philosophers, inventors – just like some of the wealthy – are thus able to introduce changes. Due to their reputation, the beauty or utility of their work, they are able to introduce innovations that, if accepted by others, may become popular. Artists with good reputation can lead the way and introduce new styles, as our imagination may expect them to start new ways of thinking about their craft.

3. The role of imagination and possibility to introduce change

I would like to show how natural respect towards the wealthy can be traced back to sympathy, imagination and imperfect human nature. Imagination plays also an important role in changes in fashion and defining what is fashionable.

First of all, by using imagination people idealise the situation of the wealthy: filling in the gaps (just as it happens in case of scientific theories) and ignoring disadvantages of the position of the rich and famous. Secondly, in the imagination we connect

³⁸ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 197.

certain elements that we are used to seeing together (as customs and habits have their roots in imagination) and when they do not coexist we feel as if the object lacked something. Also, in the imagination and thanks to sympathy, people tend to connect the wealthy with positive feelings and basing on that, they do find fashionable objects that are used by the rich as symbols of status.

The latter one – connoting the wealthy with positive feelings - is not only an effect of imagination. It also bases on certain errors, the fact that people feel pleasure when others sympathise with them and on natural respect towards the wealthy. As I have shown earlier, in Smith's opinion, people are frequently driven by ambition, moreover, they naturally want to be praised (not only praise-worthy) and desire other's attention. They tend to follow the easier path that leads them to being respected and sympathised with: gaining high social status through becoming rich. Positive feelings towards the wise are quite similar to those towards the wealthy, which is an obvious reason of mixing the two feelings up. Respecting and looking up to the wealthy is therefore an effect of the way human nature works in Smith's books, yet, it bases on singular actions: feelings towards certain people, decisions how to behave in a given instance and extent to which individuals make an effort to get to know the situation and qualities of others.

We all become agents of change as our behaviour and reactions influence others – on purpose or as an unintended consequence – and confirm or undermine social and moral norms. We learn to follow existing rules, expressions and customs (one of which is fashion) in the process of socialisation. We judge and keep being judged. Positive and negative reactions of others to the way we dress, to the possessions we owe, to the

way we speak and to our behaviour make us feel good about what we do (so we repeat the things that induce approval) or are an impulse to re-think and correct our misbehaviour (in order to avoid critique and be praiseworthy). Reconstructing the processes of change in fashion in Adam Smith's philosophy highlights two important issues: one is the important role of imagination and the other is the top-down approach suggested by the philosopher. Since people tend to follow the great, the wealthy and famous would have a stronger influence on changes – both positive and negative ones.

The analysis shows the strong impact of individuals that, in fact, change the masses. No matter whether we focus on artists or on the wealthy who introduce new styles, these are individual people who serve as examples of “trendsetters”. These are also individuals who, due to their desire for approval, and thanks to natural sympathy and through feedback received in interactions, find out what is fashionable and tend to emulate the rich.

A question arises whether, in terms of Smith's philosophy, we can use the knowledge of psychology that lies behind the described mechanisms, in order to purposely introduce changes in fashion. In my opinion, engaging the rich and the great could increase the chances of implementing such an intentional process and it would be in accordance with Smith's views. Individual choices of the wealthy, people of good reputation, the famous ones, artists, inventors etc. – all those people who could become “influencers” – could affect individual choices of numerous people. If they would be interested in acting in a given way or possessing certain objects, they could introduce new fashions, using their position of those who tend to be emulated. Yet, we need to remember that there is no guarantee that it

would work and that it is impossible to predict how this change would evolve because we are unable to predict the unintended consequences of people's actions. Therefore the outcomes could be unexpected and alterations from the original idea would happen. Yet, it is similar to what can be noticed nowadays, if we look closer into the influencer marketing and image campaigns.

I believe that within the framework of Smith's philosophy it is possible to suggest that certain changes could be introduced intentionally with a probability of success: by convincing somebody amongst those who can act as Leaders of Fashion (the wealthy or, in my opinion, also the artists) to use certain goods as symbols of status or simply incorporating such items to their daily activities. Intentional promotion of such objects (or ways of speaking etc.) is more likely to end up being emulated by other people.

In my opinion Smith's theory, to some extent, explains the existence of today's "trendsetters" and "influencers", especially that what was crucial for Smith, in my opinion, was not the wealth or good taste by itself. People in fact emulate those who are liked, respected, who they sympathise with and who they look up to. The key is admiration and the philosopher even mentions that:

Vain men often give themselves airs of a fashionable profligacy, which, in their hearts, they do not approve of, and of which, perhaps, they are really not guilty. They desire to be praised for what they themselves do not think praise-worthy, and are ashamed of unfashionable virtues which they sometimes practice in secret, and for which they have secretly some degree of real veneration³⁹.

³⁹ SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 64.

There are many factors that convince people to follow the wealthy instead of the wise in Smith's view – one of them is mistaking the positive feelings towards the two groups, but the other one is the will to be appreciated and in order to obtain that, acting just as those who we praise (even when one is aware that they are not praise-worthy). In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* the simplest path for the imagination was to associate respect and approval with wealth. In the age of social media we can see the link between “likeability” and on-line activity which does not need to require any special skills, wisdom or virtue.

4. Conclusion

The paper was to fill in some of the gaps in the discourse and reconstruct the path leading to changes in fashion, starting from the role of imagination, through natural respect towards the wealthy that is rooted in imagination and sympathy. It was to show the way individual choices of certain people are altered by others (e.g.: people emulate the wealthy) and affect others, causing visible changes in fashion, to finish with suggesting the possibility of intentionally treating the admired (in case of Smith's theory using the example of the wealthy) as “trendsetters”.

The analysis I have provided may also serve as a starting point to a wider discussion on the processes of change in various areas of Smith's philosophy. Smith's texts are coherent enough (though not fully), I believe that we shall not seek to find perfect similarities as different areas of life require a nuanced approach and trying to treat them as identical will never allow us to find proper descriptive tools. We all live in social networks, so we

are never able to foresee how our behaviour and opinions affect other people since the consequences are very far-reaching. We are faced with a picture in which individuals act and are observed and judged, at the same time observing and judging others. People tend to follow the ones they respect – their family members, friends, authorities, wise men, wealthy – depending on the situation. I believe that the reconstruction I present in the paper is valid not only in terms of fashion, but also could be (after certain alterations, e.g.: concerning whose opinions and behaviour are followed) applied to the analysis of processes of change in areas of morality, economics, language, etc., as understood by Smith.

I believe that in all of these areas these are individual actions that modify the social outcome, when people are being influenced, followed or corrected by others who, at the same time, are affected by the previous actions they had observed or participated in. This issue that I am signalling here is quite a complicated one, much too extensive to be discussed in the paper devoted to fashion. The subject of how, according to Adam Smith, we learn to be moral beings has been extensively discussed in the literature of the subject⁴⁰. In case of economy, people also observe others and sometimes follow the lead, however, I do not agree with James Otteson's interpretation in which the «market model» as an interpretative key⁴¹ (Otteson

⁴⁰ e.g.: T. CAMPBELL, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, Routledge, New York 2012, F. FORMAN-BARZILAI, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy. Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, K. HAAKONSEN (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006 and others.

⁴¹ J. OTTESON, *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, J. OTTESON, *Adam Smith*, Bloomsbury, New York, London

2002 and 2013), I would rather agree with his previous paper where he states that already in *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages* we can find the beginnings of the model that later is used in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*⁴². In my opinion it is also true for the *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*. The way market works, in this interpretation, is just one instance of similar (though not fully identical) types of processes of learning, changing, and negotiating that we observe in various areas of life. In case of language we can observe its changes through social interactions⁴³.

Looking at the role of the Leaders of Fashion or regarding changes in fashion from only aesthetical or economic perspective is, in my opinion, not enough, in terms of analysing Smith's theory. Staying aware of an imperfection of people who make mistakes, prefer easier ways of achieving what brings them

2013.

⁴² SMITH, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 66.

⁴³ What Smith describes are rather bottom-up constant changes in which language evolves in a similar way that fashion does (people observe ways of speaking that are used and mimic them to communicate, optimizing the language), yet I would argue that a similar phenomenon could be inferred: people would rather mimic the ways of speaking of the great, the liked and the writers. Introducing a language is an effect of the need to communicate with other people. We learn a language gradually, but we also construct it gradually: from simple, individual names, to complex grammar constructions. The simplification of a language, according to Smith, is primarily a social phenomenon; one of the reasons for this is the fact that people of different nations (and spoken languages) intermingle. This reconstruction of the process assumes that if we make mistakes or speak in a way that is socially unacceptable or not understood, we receive feedback – we are either corrected or not. This affects the way we speak in the future – trying to use words and grammar that is commonly understood and accepted. The innovations and ways of speaking we introduce might be incorporated into a language and used by others, thus becoming a new standard way of speaking.

pleasure (in this case being admired, praised and sympathised with) is crucial for proper understanding not only how but also why fashion changes. Another important conclusion is that the process of change is an effect of individual opinions and choices that are influenced by one's social environment and observations. The individual desire to distinguish from the society may create the trend that the others follow, somehow forcing the person to keep seeking for other ways to underline originality. In any case, the process of change is based on the mutual interaction between the individual and the society.