

People would be willing to give up their finger to stop the earthquake

- *To prevent, therefore, this paltry misfortune to himself, would a man of humanity be willing to sacrifice the lives of a hundred million of his brethren, provided he had never seen them? Human nature startles with horror at the thought, and the world, in its greatest depravity and corruption, never produced such a villain as could be capable of entertaining it.*

People will give up their finger because of the public reaction if they didn't.

Smith says that we would give up our finger even if there was no one around due to the 'Impartial Spectator'

- *When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves than by whatever concerns other men ; what is it that prompts the generous upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct.” Theory of Moral Sentiments, part 3, chapter 3*

Adam Smith Problem - in the Theory of Moral Sentiments benevolence is the primary force in the Wealth of Nations self-interest is the primary force

However, benevolence is largely self-interest and they operate in different spheres

Benevolence works a close range (more benevolent to family and friends than strangers)

A society of pure benevolence wouldn't work, but neither would a society of pure self-interest (there would not be enough education etc.)

Modern focus on civil society

Argued that the state was expanding and failing

The market doesn't look after the weak

Need for local initiatives, voluntary organizations etc. (such as the 'Big Society' in 2010)

John Gary argued that civil society was weakened by the political left (compulsory taxation has pushed out benevolence as people feel that by paying their taxes that they have done enough to help others) and by the right (market forces have destroyed communities)