Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Brainy guy, that Adam Smith [1]

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Ron Bailey over at Reason [3] has a look at what modern science can tell us about the workings of the brain. The discovery of mirror neurons (essentially an extension of monkey see, monkey do, to monkey see, monkey feels like he do) and their part in the generation of empathy, plus the connections between this and certain forms of autism, all fascinating stuff. And all dependent upon the highest of high technologies: MRI scanners (the development of which got the 2003 Nobel in Medicine) and electro-encelphalogram studies.

But as Bailey points out, while the mechanisms have only recently been uncovered, the basic idea has been around for a couple of centuries or more:

> "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," observed [4] British philosopher and economist Adam Smith in the first chapter of his magisterial *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). "Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator." Smith's argument is that our ability to empathize with others is at the root of our morality.

Given this further proof of his wisdom, might we be able to persuade a few more people to pay attention to what he had to say about political economy do you think?

NB: Gavin Kennedy gives us [5] the chapter and verse on the quotations for those who want to follow the reasoning more closely in the original.

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