

## **Part II**

# **Impartial Spectators**

# Introduction

In Part II I discuss selected ideas from Smith's philosophy in plain language. Philosophical ideas can seem unconnected with the real world but my treatment is selective, not comprehensive, and I miss out a great deal from the contents of his *Moral Sentiments*.

*Moral Sentiments* covers the first of the three pillars of Smith's legacy. It discusses the moral sentiments that constrain individuals living as strangers in close proximity in society. The net effect of his imaginative construct, the impartial spectator, means they live in relative harmony (nothing human is perfect). Moral sentiments alone are not enough.

By itself, *Moral Sentiments* is ignored as a lasting contribution to a science of morals and this probably accounts for its relative obscurity. Certainly, without Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and the fame that it engendered for its author, *Moral Sentiments*, much like George Berkeley's book on Tar Water,<sup>1</sup> would be a scholarly curiosity on the fringes of the attention of specialists in 18<sup>th</sup>-century minutia.