This chapter is divided into four sections in order to present a sociological theory of human rights. In the first section, the relationship between economic self-interest and emotionally felt social values is further explored through a discussion of the manner in which self-interest has been seen as a dominant, but not all encompassing, ‘first principle’ of social action. This is seen in its emergence from the historically related concept of self-love, its use in classical sociology and its meaning in modern socio-economic theory.

The discussion in the second section establishes Turner (1993, 2006) and Barbalet (2001) as providing some useful ideas for the further development of a theory of emotion in the sociology of human rights. Their ideas, which draw attention to the importance of ‘positive’ emotions, such as sympathy, and ‘negative’ emotions, such as resentment, are adapted according to Adam Smith’s ideas of sympathy and Norman K. Denzin’s (2007) modernisation of Smith’s work in a theory of the ‘social imagination’.

The third section turns to ground a theoretical approach to the nature of human rights expansion into new cultures. Here, the previously defined understanding of self-interest and the social imagination can be seen to combine in the construction of a related political economy approach to globalisation. Here, some central concepts of Immanuel Wallerstein’s (1974) world-systems approach are adapted in the light of this Smithian basis for theory.

The fourth and final sections discuss the moral relevance of the book’s approach and an argument for sociology as ‘joining the
human rights debate’. This defines a sociological view of ‘cosmopolitan responsibility’ and relates it to issues of progress in the resolution of specific human rights issues and the preservation of the societal conditions necessary to human rights institutionalisation. It enables the sociological account of the book to be seen as congruous to the typically normative debate of the wider, often interdisciplinary, discourse in which sociology contemporarily finds itself part, and has been challenged to find a voice within (Turner 1993: 490; Waters 1996: 593).

**Self-interest, vanity, emotion and morality**

The term ‘self-interest’ is often defined in relation to the history of economics, the Enlightenment thought of Adam Smith, and the inspiration he found in the work of his contemporaries such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sir James Steuart and Montesquieu (Force 2007; Hirschman 1997). Having related the emergence of human rights in the previous chapter to the development of capitalism, let us turn now to look in greater detail at the role self-interest will play in completing this book’s theory of human rights. The issue divides into two separate points in order to define the term ‘self-interest’ and further analyse why an element of moral, or emotional, understanding is relevant in relation to this term. First, the definition of self-interest and how conceptions of it have changed since the 17th and 18th century, especially in relation to the term ‘self-love’, is discussed. Second, the manner in which ‘self-interest’ has been seen in sociological theory as having a dominant, but not all-encompassing, role in the determination of social action is analysed.

While employed by some theorists as an explanation of the totality of human behaviour, self-interest has a history of implied and explicit limitation. Pierre Force draws attention to the fact that, in the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith uses the term ‘self-interest’ only once. Smith’s predominant concern is with the issue of self-love (Force 2007: 1). Indeed, both terms were used by writers in the period before Smith; for example, La Rochefoucauld’s *Maxims* tells us that ‘self-love is love of oneself and of all things in terms of oneself’ ([1665] 1959: 112) and that ‘self-interest is the soul of self-love’ ([1665] 1959: 104). Smith’s portrayal of the Catholic priests who, in the *Wealth Of Nations*, are seen to work from the motive of self-interest do so