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Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith

A generation or so ago, commentators used to discuss what they called the “Adam Smith Problem”: how to fit together Smith’s sentimental virtue ethics, in the tradition of Hutcheson and Hume, with his seemingly egoistic or libertarian economics and politics? Smith himself gave little help. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*) and *The Wealth of Nations* (*WN*) make almost no reference to each other, and it is not immediately obvious how to combine them other than with a conjunction such as ‘and’ or ‘but.’¹

Over the last twenty-five years, we have benefited from a significant renewal of scholarly interest in Smith that has begun to illuminate the interrelations between different aspects of his voluminous corpus.²

A review of Athol Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith’s System of Liberty, Wealth, and Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; paperback, 1998), 222 pp.; Charles L. Griswold, Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 414 pp.; and Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1993; paperback rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 283 pp. I am indebted to Kate Abramson, Samuel Fleischacker, and Charles Griswold for helpful comments on an earlier draft and to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Michigan for support during the period I worked on this review article.

1. As Charles Griswold points out, the only exception is a reference to the *Wealth of Nations* in the advertisement prefixed to the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

2. See, e.g., A. S. Skinner and T. Wilson, eds., *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), and some of the essays in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The definitive Glasgow editions of Smith’s works are available in inexpensive paper versions from *LibertyClassics*:

An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (originally published, 1776), 2 vols., R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, eds. (Indianapolis: *LibertyClassics*, 1976. (Hereinafter: *WN*))

Moreover, with the help of the books to be discussed here, we can now find, not only a reconciliation between Smith's ethical and economic writings, but a fascinating line of thought that leads Smith from his distinctive form of sentimentalism, probably the most interesting version ever developed, to a kind of liberalism—"sympathetic liberalism," as we might call it.

I will sketch this line in a preliminary way presently. First, though, it is worth saying something about why we should take more than a scholarly interest in Smith. Contemporary writers on ethics who are attracted to ethics of virtue or impressed by the role of sympathy, emotion, and feeling in the moral life have generally looked to Hume for inspiration.³ The remarkable resources of Hume's ethics notwithstanding, however, there are at least three reasons for taking a serious interest in Smith. First, Smith's theory of sympathy and its role in our emotional lives is richer, more sophisticated, and, arguably, more suggestive for a wider range of issues in experimental psychology, philosophy of mind, and moral psychology than is Hume's.⁴ Contemporary work on imaginative simulation in mental-state attribution, for example, derives directly from Smith.⁵ Second, Smith's theory of the moral sentiment deploys this

Correspondence of Adam Smith, E. C. Mosner and I. S. Ross, eds. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987).

Essays on Philosophical Subjects, W.P.D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce, eds. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982).

Lectures on Jurisprudence, R. L. Meek and D. D. Raphael, eds. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982). (Two sets, designated A or B.)

Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, J. C. Bryce, ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985).

The Theory of Moral Sentiments (originally published, 1759), A. L. Macfie and D. D. Raphael, eds. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982). (Hereinafter: *TMS*.)

3. Most prominent here has been Annette Baier. See various of the papers collected in her *Moral Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), especially "Hume, the Women's Moral Theorist" and "Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant," pp. 51–75, 268–93. A rare exception to the dearth of contemporary ethical thought deriving from Smith is Gilbert Harman, *Moral Agent and Impartial Spectator*, the Lindley Lecture (Lawrence: Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas, 1986).

4. I briefly compare Hume and Smith on sympathy in "Empathy, Sympathy, Care," *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998): 261–82.

5. Robert M. Gordon, "Folk Psychology as Simulation," *Mind and Language* 1 (1986): 158–71; Robert M. Gordon, "The Simulation Theory: Objections and Misconceptions," *Mind and Language* 7 (1992): 11–34; Robert M. Gordon, "Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator," *Ethics* 105 (1995): 727–42; Alvin I. Goldman, "Interpretation Psychologized," *Mind and Language* 4 (1989): 161–85 (also in Goldman, *Liaisons: Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences* [Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1992]); Alvin I. Goldman, "In Defense of the Simulation Theory," *Mind and Language* 7 (1992): 104–19

more sophisticated theory of sympathy in a way that is interesting in itself and provides an important sentimentalist alternative to Hume.⁶ Finally, as I will argue here, Smith's ethics are a model of how a sentimentalist virtue ethics can nonetheless ground a substantially liberal theory of justice.

Sentimentalist approaches, such as Hutcheson's and Hume's, generally hold that moral judgments are made from the sort of impersonal standpoint more usually associated with aesthetic distance and agent-neutrality. Motive and character are contemplated in a detached way, as part of the passing scene, and approved or disapproved from that point of view. So considered, morality has nothing essentially to do with judgments we render from *within* the moral life as agents and patients interacting with each other. It is not concerned, in any fundamental way, with reciprocity between equals or with any mutual accountability that expresses equal respect. It is akin, rather, to aesthetics, and moral value is like a kind of beauty, as Hume explicitly says.⁷

It is ironic, and not a little misleading, therefore, that the term "impartial spectator" originates with Smith (and not with either Hutcheson or Hume), since the perspective of moral judgment, according to Smith, is not strictly a *spectator's* standpoint at all. For him, the primary moral judgment concerns no form of beauty, but what he calls "propriety," whether of an agent's motive or a patient's feeling.⁸ And Smith holds that to judge whether a motive or feeling is warranted or proper, we must take up, not some external perspective, but that of the person who has the motive or feeling—the agent's standpoint, in the case of motivation; the patient's standpoint, in the case of feeling (*TMS*.16–23). Of course, Smith does believe that impartiality regulates moral judgment.

6. Important on this point is Gilbert Harman, *Moral Agent and Impartial Spectator*.

7. Hume frequently uses 'moral beauty' to refer to virtue. See, e.g., *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 465, 479, 484. Although Hutcheson distinguishes beauty from virtue, he sees both as corresponding to an observer's sense. See *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London, 1725). On the differences between Hutcheson and Hume see my "Hume and the Invention of Utilitarianism," in M. A. Stewart and J. P. Wright, eds., *Hume and Hume's Connexions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 58–82. See also the chapters on Hutcheson and Hume in my *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

8. Smith distinguishes between propriety and beauty, specifically citing Hume's account of beauty at *TMS*.187–88.

But it does so by disciplining the *way* in which we enter into the agent's or patient's point of view, not by providing its own perspective. Moral judgment involves an impartial projection into the agent's or patient's standpoint. We imaginatively project, not *as ourselves*, but impartially, *as any one of us* (TMS.82,137–38). The judgment that the agent's motive or the patient's feeling is proper involves what Smith calls "sympathy": an imaginative sharing of the agent's motive or the patient's feeling from his point of view (TMS.10).⁹

Smith's view thus makes all moral judgment deeply *individual-relative*—either *agent*-relative or *patient*-relative or both (as in the case of justice, as we shall see presently). When we judge an agent's motive, we do so from the agent's own perspective (appropriately regulated), viewing the practical situation as we imagine it to confront her in deliberation. And when we judge someone's feeling or reaction, we do so from a patient-relative point of view, viewing the situation as we imagine it to confront the patient who responds to it. This already pushes Smith's thought away from the virtue ethics of Hutcheson and Hume. What leads him even closer to liberalism is his metaethics of justice and its relation to a doctrine of the dignity of individuals.

Justice, for Smith, is a kind of demerit, where merit and demerit are distinguished among moral qualities by their respective relations to patients' warranted reactive feelings, specifically, to gratitude and resentment, and, consequently, to reward and punishment (TMS.67–108). In addition, conduct cannot have merit unless it is proper, and contrariwise for demerit. But that is not sufficient, since, for example, not all impropriety warrants resentment. Injustice consists in improper conduct (motivated by improper motives) to which the proper response is a reactive, retaliatory feeling like resentment and motives to challenge, resist, or punish the conduct forcefully.¹⁰

This sheds light already on one important way in which Smith's treatment of justice differs from the tradition of Hutcheson and Hume. For

9. Of course, these are not the only differences between Hume's sentimentalism and Smith's. Unlike Hume, Smith does not hold that moral distinctions derive from, or are evident to, sentiment *as opposed to* reason. Like Butler, Smith sometimes identifies "the great judge and arbiter of our conduct" with "reason" (TMS.137).

10. Smith also holds, of course, that these feelings can also be held *improperly* and, moreover, that "we ought always to punish with reluctance, and more from a sense of the propriety of punishing, than from any savage disposition to revenge" (TMS.172, see also 160–61).

Hutcheson, the primary moral fact from which all others derive is that universal benevolence is the morally best motive, this being established by moral esteem from an observer's point of view. Since universal benevolence aims at everyone's happiness equally, Hutcheson draws the conclusion that "that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers."¹¹ A similar line of reasoning leads to Hutcheson's theory of rights. Someone has a right "to do, possess, or demand" something just in case "a faculty of doing, demanding, or possessing [it], universally allow'd in certain circumstances, would in the whole tend to the general good."¹² Hume's theory of justice differs from Hutcheson's in (at least) the respect that he holds that rules of justice cannot be established unless they are, and are seen to be, in *everyone's* interest, and not just for the general good. Nonetheless, Hume's account of the "moral obligation" to justice is roughly the same as Hutcheson's, since it depends on justice's tendency to advance overall, general or "public interest."¹³

On Smith's view, however, we judge injustice, not from an observer's perspective, but by projecting ourselves impartially into the agent's *and*, crucially, into the *patient's* point of view. In particular, something is unjust only if it is proper to feel like retaliating against or resisting it forcefully. And this is something we can judge, Smith believes, only by imagining what it would be like to be in the shoes of the parties who are affected and considering what to feel—what any one of us would or should feel—in their situation. Since injustice is a vice, it is also essential that its motives be improper. But this it shares with every other vice. What is distinctive about injustice is that it is properly resented and resisted, and this is something we can assess only from the perspective of individual patients.

Smith's differences with Hume about the perspective of moral judgment relate to differences in their respective understandings of *sympa-*

11. *Inquiry*, III.viii. Scholars generally agree that this is the first statement of the greatest happiness principle in English. Joachim Hruschka argues that Leibniz first formulated it ("The Greatest Happiness Principle and Other Early German Anticipations of Utilitarian Theory," *Utilitas* 3 [1991]: 165–77.)

12. *Inquiry*, VII.i.

13. "Sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue [justice]." *Treatise*, pp. 499–500. See also, *Treatise*, p. 498. I discuss how Hume's account of justice relates to his theory of moral obligation in *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, pp. 284–318.

thy. For Smith, sympathy is a specific form of “fellow-feeling,” a sharing of another’s feeling or motive as a result of projecting into his perspective and seeing his situation in the same emotionally or motivationally laden way we imagine he does. What the sympathetic person has in view is not the other’s feeling *per se*, but its object, viewed as he takes the other to view it. For Hume, however, sympathy is a psychological mechanism that transforms ideas of another’s feeling or passion into “the very passion itself” (*Treatise*, p. 317). So although Hume says that we define an appropriately common or general point of view for moral judgment “by sympathy with those, who have any commerce with the person we consider” (*Treatise*, p. 583), his theory of sympathy requires him to mean by this, not projecting into the patient’s standpoint and viewing things in his (patient-relative) way, but having our observer’s view of the situation influenced by feelings that mimic the patient’s feelings we have in view.

By contrast, Smith holds that judgments of justice involve an evaluation of *patients’* warranted reactions by impartially entering into a patient’s-relative point of view. So, although injustice, like all vicious action, proceeds from “motives which are naturally disapproved of,” injustice is distinguished by causing “injury,” “positive hurt to some particular persons” that is “the proper object of resentment, and of punishment, which is the natural consequence of resentment” (*TMS*.79). It is no surprise, therefore, to find Smith concluding that it is wrong for someone to injure another in order to benefit himself “though the benefit to the one should be much greater than the hurt or injury to the other” (*TMS*.138). From an agent-neutral observer’s standpoint, in which benefits and harms can be accounted as offsetting gains or losses, such an action might seem justified. Nonetheless, Smith believes, we cannot justify it when we view things from the perspective of the injured parties themselves, however impartially we enter into their standpoint.

Smith then links this individual-relative metaethics of moral judgment (and patient-relative metaethics of justice) to a doctrine of the dignity of individuals. Because we judge that anyone would properly resent various kinds of injury and violation, we see these as forms of injustice that are appropriately resisted and reacted to with force. This gives us a way of grounding rules of justice that impose “strict,” enforceable obligations and define rights of individuals. However there is also, in addition, an important Rousseauian theme in Smith. We resent

injuries, not just to our possessions or bodies, but also to our dignity as *persons*. What most “enrages us against the man who injures or insults us, is the little account which he seems to make of *us*”—“that absurd self-love, by which he seems to imagine, that other people *may* be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency” (*TMS*.96, emphases added). In other words, we resent disrespect of our dignity, our status as someone who *may not* (not to say, cannot) be treated in certain ways. What our resentment is “chiefly intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel pain in his turn, as . . . to make him sensible that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner” (*TMS*.95–96).¹⁴ Punishment aims to make the other “sensible” of our dignity, to feel respect for us.

Smith’s view of the equal dignity of individuals provides much of the moral underpinning for his praise of free markets in *The Wealth of Nations*. Market exchanges occur between independent equals who pursue their respective interests, not by “servile and fawning attention to obtain” each others’ good will, but through mutually advantageous, respectful free exchange (*WN*.26). Of course, Smith’s main topic is the relation between markets and the creation of wealth, but even here the theme of equal dignity is in the background: “Masters of all sorts make better bargains with their servants” during tough times when their servants are “more humble and dependent” (*WN*.101, see also *WN*.412).

Fitzgibbons, Muller, and Griswold discuss many aspects of Smith’s thought other than the relation between his distinctive sentimentalism and his normative moral and political theory. And none puts the pieces together quite like this. But reading these books, especially Griswold’s, can help us to see Smith’s thought in ways that both make more sense of it as a coherent whole and bring it into closer contact with contemporary moral and political theory, in part, by suggesting something like the picture I have just sketched.

The authors write from different disciplinary matrices and for different audiences. Athol Fitzgibbons is an historian of economics who writes primarily in a tradition of historically minded economists such as Jacob Viner and Robert Heilbroner, but with an eye also on the history

14. In the introduction to their edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Raphael and Macfie point out that Smith could, in his “Letter to the Editors of the *Edinburgh Review*” of July 1775, “describe, from his own reading, . . . Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*” (*TMS*.10).

of ideas. Jerry Z. Muller approaches Smith primarily from the perspective of history of ideas and intellectual history. And Charles Griswold is a philosopher who treats Smith's thought both in its eighteenth-century philosophical context and in relation to contemporary philosophical debate. A central theme of all three books is that Smith's economics must be read in the light of his ethics and that the popular notion that Smith was a champion of unmitigated *laissez faire* and unbridled self-interest is an egregious caricature. As Muller puts it in his subtitle, Smith is interested in free markets for, and to the extent of, their role in "designing a decent society."

I turn now to discussing these books more directly. Athol Fitzgibbons contends that Smith's "main intention" was to give liberalism "a workable moral foundation" and that his main opponent in doing so was David Hume (v). As my sketch indicates, I think there is much that is right about this. Fitzgibbons claims, correctly to my mind, that Smith bases his endorsement of markets on a liberal (or proto-liberal) jurisprudence, inherited from Grotius and Pufendorf, that distinguishes sharply between narrower justice, enforceable rights and obligations that each can demand as equal individuals, and broader moral and religious conceptions, which are not properly enforceable (109). On broad questions of virtue (the area Smith calls "ethics"), Smith inclines more toward ancient doctrines that treat "rules" as "loose and inaccurate" counsels of "style" rather than anything precisely formulable that can be followed without a sense or knack (*TMS*.174–76, 328). What the ancients lacked, according to Smith, was "jurisprudence," that is, the modern view that there exists a set of universal, strictly mandatory and enforceable rights and obligations that provide an infrastructure or "grammar" for the moral life (*TMS*.340,174–76).

Fitzgibbons also rightly stresses that Smith bases his jurisprudence on his sentimentalism (109). Thus, Smith writes, "those who write upon the principles of jurisprudence, consider only what the person to whom the obligation is due, ought to think himself entitled to exact by force; what every impartial spectator would approve of him for exacting" (*TMS*.330). We should therefore agree with Fitzgibbons that "Smith's theory of morals and method led to his theory of jurisprudence, and then the principles of jurisprudence led to Smith's theory of economics" (22).

Nevertheless, there are problems with Fitzgibbons's case. To begin, Fitzgibbons actually gives very little analytical articulation to this reading of Smith, and, most notably, he says next to nothing about the basis of Smith's sentimentalism in his distinctive theory of sympathy. Since it is possible to be a metaethical sentimentalist without holding a distinctively liberal political theory, as the case of Hume shows, this is a real lack. We cannot fully appreciate the way Smith's moral and political theories are, as it were, liberal in their foundations without bringing out the patient-relative character of his analysis of judgments of justice. (See the passage from *TMS*.330 quoted in the last paragraph.)

What is most worrying, however, is Fitzgibbons's treatment of Hume, which can only be regarded as a caricature of roughly the same order that he and the other authors complain about in popular mischaracterizations of Smith. The reason why Fitzgibbons contrasts Smith with Hume is not that, unlike Hume, Smith takes moral judgment to involve an impartial entering into the agent's or patient's perspective rather than viewing things from a detached, observer's point of view.¹⁵ As Fitzgibbons sees it, the issue between Smith and Hume is much more fundamental.

Fitzgibbons depicts Hume similarly to a familiar picture of Mandeville: an egoistic moral skeptic who holds that a theoretical concern with virtue is incompatible with a properly positivist economics and, as well, that a practical concern with virtue is incompatible with a flourishing economy. According to Fitzgibbons, Hume denied the very terms of Smith's project. He "opposed virtue because it was a cultural hindrance to economic growth" and maintained moreover that virtue was "not meaningful in his scientific world view" (14, 19). Hume was a "nihilist" who thought there could be no "moral insights" and a "radical individualist" who believed that moral sentiments derive from self-love (15, 21,

15. There are, of course, important matters of detail here also. For many kinds of moral judgment, at least, Hume does hold that we can fix on an appropriately general point of view for evaluating a trait or motive "by sympathy with those, who have any commerce with the person we consider" (*Treatise*, p. 583). But what Hume means by sympathy is quite different from the imaginative projection into the other's standpoint that Smith is talking about. Humean sympathy is a psychological mechanism that takes an idea of another person's feeling or passion and transforms it into "the very passion itself" (*Treatise*, p. 317). As Smith frequently emphasizes, however, what is in view from the other's standpoint is not his own feeling, but the situation to which it responds. Humean sympathy operates from an observer's standpoint, not by any imaginative identification with the other.

28, 38). Smith, Fitzgibbons summarily proclaims, “differed from Hume in both morals and method as chalk does from cheese” (28)!

This is all deeply confused. When he writes that Hume “thought that it was possible to account for ‘every moral sentiment . . . by the principle of self-love’” (38), Fitzgibbons quotes a passage from the second *Enquiry* without noticing that context reverses the sense Fitzgibbons takes from it.¹⁶ Far from endorsing the reduction of moral sentiment to self-love, Hume explicitly rejects it. And as for nihilism, Hume could hardly be more explicit than at the beginning of the second *Enquiry* where he says that those who deny “the reality of moral distinctions” must be supposed to do so disingenuously, “from a spirit of opposition” or the “desire of showing wit” and superiority to others.¹⁷

There are nice questions of detail, to be sure, about whether Hume should be read as a projectivist, noncognitivist, naturalist, or, more plausibly, as fitting neatly into none of these anachronistic categories. But however these questions are decided, there can be no doubt that Hume meant to distinguish himself from writers like Mandeville who attempted to problematize virtue and the terms of ethical and political thought. When it came to ethics, whatever skepticism Hume held was decidedly “second-order,” even if no doubt intended to undermine the “monkish virtues.”¹⁸

Moreover, as Charles Griswold points out, in this respect Hume was exactly like Smith.¹⁹ What Hume means by skepticism in ethics—that nothing is, “in itself, valuable or despicable” independently of the “particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection”—simply follows from his sentimentalism.²⁰ By this definition, Adam Smith is a skeptic also. Smith’s skepticism, as Griswold usefully puts it, is “of the Humean rather than Pyrrhonist variety” since both hold that “skeptical theorizing ought not to budge our everyday beliefs” (165).

16. The full passage from the *Enquiry*, however, is: “Compelled by these instances, we must renounce the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self-love.” David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, reprinted from the 1777 edition with an introduction and analytical index by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 219.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

19. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, pp. 155–78.

20. Hume, “The Sceptic,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, rev. ed., ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), p. 162, quoted by Griswold, *Adam Smith*, p. 161n.

Fitzgibbons rightly stresses the role of stoicism in Smith's ethics. Here Smith really does differ from Hume. Although Smith criticizes the Stoics on some matters, there are two quite important ways in which stoic ideas are central to his thought that set his virtue ethics apart from those of Hutcheson and Hume. The first is the place of "self-command" in his theory of virtue. Following Shaftesbury and Butler and looking forward to Kant, Smith holds that only moral deliberation that is guided by the agent's self-reflective moral judgments of propriety has a distinctive moral worth or virtue.²¹ Indeed, Kant's famous remark that a beneficent act motivated by fellow-feeling can have no moral worth, however "amiable it may be," because it is not done from a self-consciously moral motive, recalls almost exactly, Smith's distinction between "amiable" virtues like benevolence and the "respectable" virtue of self-command (*TMS.23*).²² For Smith, only from that "great" and "awful" virtue do "all the other virtues seem to derive their principal lustre" (*TMS.23, 241*).²³

In *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours*, Jerry Muller focuses less on foundational issues than on moral and social ideals and institutional design. Muller sees Smith as undertaking an approach he calls "the institutional direction of the passions," that is, the attempt to design social institutions to "draw the passions toward socially and morally beneficial be-

21. Kant's views are well known. I discuss Shaftesbury, including this aspect of his thought, in *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, pp. 176–206.

22. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 11, Ak. p. 398). We should note, by the way, that Hume also distinguishes between "amiable" and "awful" virtues (at *Treatise*, pp. 607–8), although he does not tie the latter especially to self-command.

23. Another stoic resonance in Smith's thought is that Smith seems to accept a stoic view of the normativity of nature and appears, moreover, at certain points to rest the authority of morality on it. To be sure, Smith has lots of resources elsewhere in his system to establish reasons to be moral. Much of what is most attractive in Smith concerns his deeply perceptive, sophisticated, and complex moral psychology. We humans want not just praise, but also to be *worthy* of it (*TMS.114–18, 127*). And we strongly desire to be in sympathy with others as well, so much, indeed, that wrongdoers may be sufficiently haunted by "the avenging furies" of an "affrighted conscience" to confess to those ignorant of their crimes so that they can ultimately be brought back into sympathy with them (*TMS.118–19*). As important as these motives are, however, they sometimes seem to Smith either too external (like the pains of alienation or self-accusation) or insufficiently directive (like the sense that one is not worthy of esteem) to ground morality's authority. (Compare here Mill's distinction between "internal" and "external" sanctions of morality and the principle of utility in Chapter III of *Utilitarianism*.) Neither "love of our neighbour" nor "love of mankind" can direct conduct in the way morality requires (*TMS.137*). For that

havior" (6). Smith's ideal is a substantially liberal one, according to Muller. Equal political liberty and free exchange promote mutually advantageous "social interdependence" along with greater "personal independence from the will of an individual master" (72).

Because of the prominence of self-command in Smith's picture, Muller dubs Smith's approach "the institutionalization of neo-stoicism" (96). By showing how society can be structured to enable the great mass of individuals to govern themselves and treat each other with mutual respect for their capacity to do so, Smith transformed an ethic of self-command from "a moral injunction addressed to an intellectual and political elite into a policy objective for the entire society" (96).

Muller's treatment of these aspects of Smith's views is illuminating and suggestive, and he places them insightfully in their historical intellectual context. Muller sees Smith as reacting against Christian and civic republican traditions which held that societies must be bound together by a common purpose or shared good. Whether this was an ideal of collective liberty, as with the civic republicans, or a shared devotional life, as in some premodern Christian traditions, the crucial thought was that the basis for social union was something *essentially* common. The point was not just that enjoyment of this good is interdependent in the

we need "conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct" (*TMS*.137).

But why should we follow conscience? What gives judgments of propriety *their* authority? Here Smith follows closely Butler's idea that conscience's authority is tied up with the ancient (stoic) doctrine that virtue "consists in following nature" (Joseph Butler, *Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, Preface, §13, in *Five Sermons*, Stephen L. Darwall, ed. [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983], p. 13). It "cannot be doubted," Smith writes, that our "moral faculties . . . were given us for the direction of our conduct in this life" and "were set up within us to be the supreme arbiters of all our actions" (*TMS*.165). By fashioning us in this way, nature (or God) promulgates the rules these faculties recognize, including prominently the rules of justice, as "laws." Conscience is God's "viceregen[t] . . . within us," so its "torments" inherit God and nature's authority (*TMS*.166).

I have argued that there are actually two conflicting elements in Butler's argument for the authority of conscience, a "teleological-functionalist" picture like that just suggested, and an "autonomist internalist" account, on which according authority to conscience is required for the very possibility of free moral agency. (See *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, pp. 244–83.) Although Smith does say things such as that there is no way of judging propriety except through conscience, he doesn't locate conscience as firmly as a presupposition of autonomous moral agency as Butler does. It is this latter element that makes Butler, as I read him, an important figure in an autonomist internalist tradition that also includes Cudworth and Shaftesbury and that looks forward to Kant.

(public good) sense that no individual can benefit unless others do also. Rather the benefit was thought itself to be essentially shared—not yours and mine, but *ours*. Not coincidentally, central elements of commercial society such as individual wealth and interest were held by such views to undermine social order.

With the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars of religion came an increasing sense of the costs of basing a conception of social order on such a “unified vision of the common good” (39). At the same time, the long-standing tradition of (Roman) civil law, which had existed alongside (and sometimes intermixed with) the Christian and civic republican traditions, now seemed to offer an attractive alternative. With its focus on property and rights, Roman law had a “latent individualism” that made it congenial to the seventeenth-century natural lawyers, like Grotius and Pufendorf, who were concerned to rethink the basis of political order in more individualistic terms (45).²⁴ As Muller puts it, the modern natural lawyers maintained that “society *could not be* and *should not be* governed by some shared faith or purpose” (59). In its place, they put a conception of political infrastructure—a framework of justice—that could be recommended to individuals on different terms. Here were the beginnings of a liberal vision of political order.

Roman law and natural jurisprudence, which dominated Scottish universities in the eighteenth century, were “Smith’s intellectual starting point” (58).²⁵ Smith’s admiration for Grotian natural law remained a fixed point of his thought, so much so, indeed, that it is worth elaborating this aspect further than Muller takes us. According to Smith, the moderns had been largely unable to improve on ancient treatments of virtue. In “ethics”—one of “moral philosophy”’s two main branches—it remained to the moderns primarily to give a better account of that “power or faculty in the mind” by which virtue “is recommended to us” (TMS.340, 264). This was where Smith thought sentimentalism could make a distinctively modern contribution to ethics, by linking a theory of virtue to an improved moral psychology. As to what traits are virtues,

24. For a careful and illuminating treatment, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

25. See James Moore and Michael Silverthorne, “Gershom Carmichael and the Natural Jurisprudence Tradition in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” in Hont and Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue*, pp. 73–87.

however, what “tone of temper, and tenour of conduct . . . constitutes the excellent and praise-worthy character,” Smith believed that the ancients had already pretty much covered what needed to be said, with one crucial exception to be discussed presently.

Nevertheless, ethics was only one part of moral philosophy for Smith. In setting out a theory of jurisprudence, Smith believed, Grotius and his followers had effectively invented moral philosophy’s other major part. Grotius was “the first who attempted to give the world any thing like a system of those principles which ought to run through, and be the foundation of the laws of all nations” (*TMS*.341–42).

As Muller emphasizes, Smith regarded it as a symptom of the failure of all earlier social ideals that they depended on subservience and slavery. The classical republicans’ focus on collective liberty and the virtues of civic participation was fine as far as it went, but it was necessarily confined to a narrow elite (64). And ancient ideals were decisively marred by their reliance on slavery (120). (See, e.g., *WN*.377–78.) Smith’s criticism of the chattel slavery of his own time is especially moving.

There is not a negro from the coast of Africa who does not, in this respect, possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of conceiving. Fortune never exerted more cruelty over her empire over mankind, than when she subjected those [African] nations of heroes to the refuse of the jails of Europe. (*TMS*.206)

Magnanimity, for Smith, is a form of self-command, the ability to bear up with dignity in the face of violent emotions, to regulate grief, for example, by what an “impartial spectator” in the situation could sympathize with. As an aspect of self-command, magnanimity is, consequently, a “respectable” rather than an “amiable” virtue (*TMS*.47–49). This is significant, since it is the link to self-command that evidently underlies slavery’s special horror for Smith. It is the subjection of these dignified, self-commanding “heroes” to men so unable or unwilling to control their own arrogance and self-conceit that they appear unable even to conceive the virtue of self-command, that is so especially appalling.

Here we see, again, the Rousseauian theme in Smith that leads toward Kant, although Muller doesn’t develop it. From our own egocentric standpoints, there is a tendency to rank value and importance in

terms of importance *to us*, from our own points of view. To insist on this self-preference, however, is to manifest the “arrogance of self-love” (TMS.83). If we take our own preferences as conclusive reasons for acting and ignore the needs of others, we fail to see our ordering for what it is, namely, the way things look to us from where we are. When, however, we view ourselves and our situation from a perspective anyone could take on us, we see that we are “but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it” (TMS.137). Only from this impartial standpoint can a person assess the propriety of his own motives and achieve self-command, thereby “humbl[ing] the arrogance of his self-love” (TMS.83). From this perspective, blind self-preference seems “shamefu[l]” (TMS.137).

Compare this with what Kant says about respect in *The Critique of Practical Reason*.²⁶ Awareness of the moral law issues in a feeling of respect by “humiliat[ing]” the arrogance (“arrogantia”) of “self-conceit” (that is, self-preference made “law giving and the unconditional practical principle”).²⁷ Respect for the moral law thus “strikes down” self-conceit. In the same vein, Smith says that submitting oneself to the authority of self-command through impartial regulation “humble[s]” the “arrogance of self-love.”

Smith and Kant both stress that we are humbled also when we recognize this authority through the eyes of others, as when we appreciate their self-command. That is why self-command is an “awful” or “respectable,” rather than amiable, virtue for Smith. In Kant’s terms, the other’s “example holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit.”²⁸

As in Kant, there is a deep connection in Smith between “recognition respect” for the authority of that by which the self-commanding person regulates herself (in Smith, “propriety” as reckoned by impartial sympathy) and “appraisal respect” (moral esteem) for the trait of self-com-

26. In a very fine article that discusses various ways in which Smith anticipated and perhaps influenced Kant, Samuel Fleischacker notes several related parallels, but not, I believe, the similarity of language discussed in this paragraph. See his “Philosophy in Moral Practice: Kant and Adam Smith,” *Kantstudien* 82, no. 3 (1991): 249–69, esp. p. 262.

27. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, general introduction by Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 199–200; 5:73–74.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 202; 5:77.

mand itself.²⁹ Moreover, and more importantly for sympathetic liberalism, there is a deep connection in Smith and Kant between both of these and recognition respect for the dignity of persons as beings capable of self-command. This is quite explicit in Kant's doctrine of rational nature as an end-in-itself, the idea that every individual person has a "dignity" "above all price."³⁰ But a form of it is implicit in Smith also, as my sketch suggested above. What we resent when we are injured by someone who gives us little thought crucially includes the contempt with which he treats us. We are "enrage[d]" by "the little account which he seems to make of us" and by the "arrogance" of his self-promotion (*TMS*.96, 83).

Moreover, the justice-grounding reactions we think an impartial person would have in our place include feelings of retaliation and resistance that *challenge* such "absurd self-love" cognitively *and* practically. Resentment of someone who treats others as though they "may be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency and humour" (*TMS*.96) challenges blind self-preference cognitively by representing it as an error: arrogance, the illegitimate usurpation of authority. And it challenges this arrogance practically by prompting resistance and retaliation against it. In judging that these reactions are warranted we judge it proper to have feelings that can be satisfied only if the other can be made "sensible" of our dignity, forced to recognize our status as beings who may not be so treated (*TMS*.96).

It is illuminating to consider in this connection what Smith says about "the man of system," a bureaucrat, we might imagine, who devises an "ideal plan of government" based on systematic virtues such as beauty, utility, and coherence, imagining "that he can arrange the different members of a great society with ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board" (*TMS*.234). Such a man treats the individuals to whom he applies his plan as having no "principles of motion" besides those his "hand impresses upon them." He fails adequately to recognize that in the "great chess-board of society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own," that is, the capacity for self-command (*TMS*.234).

29. The terms "recognition respect" and "appraisal respect" are my own. For a discussion of this distinction, see my "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36–49. Reprinted in *Ethics and Personality*, ed. John Deigh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 65–78.

30. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 37–43, Ak. 4:429–35.

We can fill Smith's picture in further by connecting these ideas to Smith's theory of justice, taking advantage of and extending some points made by Charles Griswold. Here it is useful to begin by comparing Smith to Hume. Despite their different sentimentalist metaethics, there are important similarities in the ways Smith and Hume position justice within their respective ethical systems. Both hold that justice is importantly different from the rest of the virtues. Hume dubs justice an "artificial virtue," opposing it to "natural virtues" such as benevolence because of the way he believes justice depends upon conventions and rules.³¹ More precisely, Hume holds that justice is embodied in specific rules that structure mutually advantageous practices of property, contract, and promise, and that these rules are established by a convention, that is, an implicit agreement in intention, to respect the rules (to treat them as "sacred and inviolable") provided others do so as well.³²

Smith also stresses that justice is unique among the virtues in being embodied in rules. Although we can speak in a sense of rules with the other virtues, these are only "loose, vague, and indeterminate," like the "counsels of style" that critics propose for attaining elegance in composition. The "one virtue" where "general rules determine with the greatest exactness every external action which it requires" is justice (*TMS*.175). Moreover, Smith says also that the rules of justice are "sacred" and inviolable (*TMS*.175; *WN*.138). They place us under a "stricter obligation" than the other virtues (*TMS*.80).

Differently from Hume, Smith emphasizes justice's connection to warranted resentment, resistance, compensation, and coercion. Injustice always involves injury to some individual or individuals that is properly resented and, perhaps, punished (*TMS*.79). Putting this together with justice's relation to rules, we get that injustice, according to Smith, always involves the violation of some rule that protects an important interest of individuals, to which violation the injured individuals (and others on their behalf) would properly respond with a feeling of retaliation or resistance.

Now, for Hume, rules of justice structure specific practices of property, promise, and contract within which words and things acquire, as it were, a normative status they would not otherwise have. Because, for

31. *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. III., Pt. II, esp. pp. 477–501.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 499, 533. I discuss Hume's theory of justice in connection with his account of obligation in *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, pp. 284–318.

example, we all accept that rules which define promises, the words, "I promise to do the laundry from here on out," acquire a normative standing without which I could neither keep my word nor violate it. The practice makes my word "sacred." That I can violate or "profane" my word it is just another way of making the same point. The violation is itself possible because of the norm.

Similarly, in holding that the rules of justice are "sacred" and "invulnerable" *and* that they protect individuals against "injury," Smith holds that individuals' protected interests are "sacred" also. As Charles Griswold points out, this gives Smith what amounts to a doctrine of the sanctity or dignity of the individual (which is notably absent in Hume) (237–38). Just as "heathen religions" make "holy" the ground associated with some god, Smith writes, so the rules of justice and the natural feelings that enforce them make the "happiness of every innocent man . . . holy, consecrated, and hedged round against the approach of every other man; not to be wantonly trod upon, not even to be, in any respect, ignorantly and involuntarily violated, without requiring some expiation, some atonement. . ." (238; *TMS*.107). The rules of justice define the dignity of the individual person in the sense that they render specific our status as beings who *may not* be treated in certain ways. (Again, see *TMS*.96 and *TMS*.138.)

What is more, in enforcing those rules, we do not simply protect individuals from treatment of these prohibited sorts. We also *express respect* for this norm-defined dignity. We give expression to emotions whose object is to make potential violators "sensible" of the dignity by showing how individuals are not to be treated, that is, what specific dignity-defining rules fence the "holy" ground on which they stand (*TMS*.96). We seek thereby to create respect for their dignity by humbling the arrogance of self-love.

Smith is quite clear that proper concern for individuals does not spring from concern for society, whether as a whole or as an aggregate. "We are no more concerned for the destruction or loss of a single man, because this man is a member or part of society," than we would be for the loss of a "single guinea, because this guinea is a part of a thousand guineas" (*TMS*.89). In neither case does concern for the one derive from concern for the many. "[I]n both cases our regard for the multitude is compounded and made up of the particular regards which we feel for the different individuals of which it is composed" (*TMS*.89–90). When an

individual has been injured, therefore, “we demand the punishment of the wrong that has been done to him . . . from a concern for that very individual who has been wronged” (*TMS*.90).

We can now appreciate and further develop Muller’s thesis that Smith’s political theory amounts to institutionalizing a neo-stoic ethic of self-command. To some substantial extent, Smith must believe, an adequate natural jurisprudence *defines* the dignity of the individual person, establishes individuals’ freedom to govern themselves in certain spheres, and gives them standing as self-governing persons to participate equally in collective practices and institutions that express respect for that very status.

Smith also believes that just institutions and free economic exchange support public virtue and self-command *instrumentally*. Here Muller points to Smith’s claim that increasing wealth in Roman society led to women having the power of divorce and greater control over resources, thereby increasing opportunities for them to lead more independent lives (129).³³ As I noted above, increasing wealth leads to greater independence generally, according to Smith, even of servants who, in hard times, must be “more humble and dependent” to keep their jobs (*WN*.101, see also *WN*.412). And Smith believes that free economic activity advances a “decent society” in other ways also, by rewarding merit, encouraging prudence and probity, and more generally creating conditions that enable the great majority to live virtuous lives (*TMS*.63).³⁴ The Smithian invisible hand improves, not only wealth, but also the moral quality of ordinary individuals’ lives.

Charles Griswold carries forward many of these same points in *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*. The book’s punning title suggests Griswold’s dual purpose: to understand Adam Smith in relation both to his eighteenth-century context and to our current predicament, in which the enlightenment’s ideas are heavily criticized even as almost everyone is pleased to accept its benefits. The result is a book that is wonderfully interesting and informative, philosophically stimulating and acute, and beautifully written. This may be the first truly comprehensive and philosophically probing account of Smith’s moral and po-

33. Smith makes this claim in *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, pp. 143–46.

34. “Whenever commerce is introduced into any country, probity and punctuality always accompany it.” (*Lectures on Jurisprudence*, p. 538.)

litical thought ever written. To read it is to understand why Smith deserves such a treatment.

Griswold's theme is that Smith is distinctively apt for our current moment since, although Smith defends central enlightenment ideals, he is also sensitive to concerns that drive enlightenment critique. On the one hand, Smith is a champion of equal political and economic liberties, religious toleration, and the dignity of the individual. On the other, Smith is a critic of the pretensions of reason who appreciates the importance of unintended consequences, sees human beings as profoundly social, and advances an ethic with deep affinities to ancient traditions of virtue and community. Because of his "keen awareness of the ironies and shadows of the Enlightenment," Griswold contends, Smith can offer us valuable insights into the possibilities of combining liberal political principles no one would wish to reject with an understanding of human emotionality, sociality, and community that some have thought were at odds with liberal theories (20).

We have already canvassed several respects in which Smith is a supporter of liberal political institutions, all of which Griswold discusses in insightful detail. Griswold points out further that Smith's moral and political egalitarianism is based on a remarkably egalitarian view of human nature. The "difference between a philosopher and a common street porter," Smith declares, results primarily from "habit, custom, and education" (200; *WN*.28).³⁵ Their intrinsic difference is not half so great as that between a greyhound and a spaniel (*WN*.30). Significantly, Smith's most striking examples of the master virtue of self-command come, not from the high culture of Europe, but from enslaved Africans and the "savages" of America (*TMS*.205–6).³⁶

Griswold's discussion of Smith on religious liberty and toleration is especially interesting. While Smith holds that appropriate religious belief supports public virtue, he also sees religion as a source of dangerous faction and "fanaticism" if it is not combined with religious liberty (274; *WN*.792–93). Griswold offers an intriguing account of sympathy's role in

35. See also, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, pp. 47–48.

36. Smith is not, however, so egalitarian in the case of women. He cites the education of women as evidence that private education avoids "useless, absurd" and "fantastical" elements that frequently characterize public education. "[P]arents or guardians" teach their daughters only what is "necessary or useful for them to learn": i.e., "to improve the natural attractions of their persons, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty to chastity," and so on!

Smith's analysis of the causes of sectarian faction, its political and social dangers, and the ways in which these can be moderated by free institutions. Religions gain followers by engaging their sympathies, and religious fanatics are able to do so partly because potential followers are impressed by their self-disciplining self-command and partly because followers sympathize with the fanatic's sense of superiority, confirming their own view of themselves (285). When sects promise punishment for nonadherents, this appeals further to those who harbor grudges and resentments (286). Sympathy helps to explain as well the threat to social order posed by (religious) groups that distinguish sharply between insiders and outsiders. Since moral discourse is generally an exercise in sympathy, it follows that factions that impede identification and sympathy will threaten the very possibility of moral discussion across the lines they draw.

In a regime of religious liberty, however, these effects can be moderated. If the state is impartial between competing religions, an important source of mutual resentment between religions is removed, thereby removing a strong motive of sympathy for fanatical or persecuting sects. In addition, religious liberty creates a competition between religions with its own invisible hand. With no natural monopoly, the religious "market" will tend to diversify among many sects. And the same forces that lead in an unplanned way to honesty and integrity in the economic marketplace, Smith argues, will lead to honesty and moderation in the market for souls. Over time, the faithful will be attracted to those sects that offer no more than they can reasonably be hoped to deliver.

According to Griswold, Smith's view is not that a politically free society will tend to undermine religion itself. Far from it, Smith believes that religious zeal will actually increase as religion is "privatized," sects compete, and the diversity of religions increases. But the more fanatical, persecutorial forms of religion and religious hatred will be minimized, and the sectarian threat to common moral and political life will be reduced. Whatever their identification with their sects, individuals will retain a sense of identity that they share with others across religious lines. This picture is no doubt overly optimistic in various respects, but it must also seem remarkably prescient when we consider it from a contemporary American perspective.

Among the most valuable aspects of Griswold's book is his extensive discussion of Smith's fascinating and original account of sympathy and

its place in Smith's theory of moral sentiment and moral judgment. As Smith sees it, moral judgment is always addressed to and regulated by a community of interlocutors. This makes rhetoric an important aspect of ethics for Smith. The relative frequency with which *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* mentions playwrights, poets, and historians, and the infrequency with which it mentions Smith's philosophical contemporaries, is, as Griswold points out, remarkable (47).

Smith's own moral judgments are no exception. In putting forward his normative theory of the virtues, Smith is bound to view himself as engaging his readers as members of the same community. Griswold remarks on the "conversational character of nearly every chapter" (52). Throughout, using the "protreptic 'we,'" Smith engages his readers' sympathies with examples, narratives, and literary allusions.

When I make a moral assessment of someone's motive or feeling, according to Smith, I express a sympathy with it that I expect any one (of us) to share. I impartially project myself into that person's standpoint, not as myself but as any of us, and (attempt to) judge what any of us would be moved to do or feel if in that person's shoes. So at least two imaginative projections are involved: first, into the first-person-plural perspective I share with all others to whom my judgment is implicitly addressed; and second, into the standpoint of the person being judged.³⁷ Since, however, sympathy involves a form of *identification*, problems arise, as Griswold points out, concerning these imaginative acts. Who, exactly, is to be included in Smith's "protreptic 'we'"? If, as Smith himself emphasizes, faction is an enemy of sympathy, won't it be an enemy also of the kind of moral community his theory of moral sentiment seems to require?

In a digressive section he titles "Sympathy, Authenticity, and Social Fragmentation," Griswold raises these issues in a pointed way (96–99). When we project imaginatively, Smith says, we "become in some measure the same person with" the person with whom we sympathize (*TMS*.9). But if that is so, won't the limits of our willingness to identify mark the limits of our sympathy? Won't the notion of sympathy be "unstable in a way that makes intelligible the decline of sympathy . . . into

37. I say "at least" because if the judgment concerns merit or demerit, including injustice, then it will require both a judgment of the propriety both of the agent's motive and the affected parties' reactions. In this case, we need three projections: first-person-plural standpoint, agent's standpoint, and the patients' standpoints.

group or individual narcissism” (99)? On this contrarian picture, social fragmentation or balkanization itself makes use of sympathy in ways that put a more inclusive, more liberal moral discourse at risk.

These are genuine issues for any sympathy-based ethic, but it is important to see (as Griswold himself argues somewhat differently) that the metaethics that underlies Smith’s sympathetic liberalism provides a way of trying to answer them. In this final section, I will argue that Smith’s version of sentimentalism gives a distinctive form of support to his liberal conception of justice by providing a metaethics that enshrines mutual accountability and respect for individuals in its very foundations.

We should remind ourselves, first, that according to Smith any moral judgment can be made only by projecting ourselves into the standpoint of the person we are judging. However class, race, gender, or faction narrows the scope of “us,” it will nonetheless be the case that a moral judgment rendered of someone (whether from another group or not) will be of the form—“any of us would (should) be moved or feel in such-and-such a way *were we in that person’s shoes.*” For Smith, disgust or some other distanced “aesthetic” response differs from a moral evaluation precisely in the fact that the latter can only be rendered *as from the other’s point of view.*³⁸ To this extent, then, moral judgment is an engine that drives identification. To the extent that we evaluate others morally we identify with them *per force*. Of course, we might seek to escape from moral judgment and *substitute* aesthetic assessment across factional lines, but that may not be so easy to do.

Second, within the general class of moral judgments, judgments of *justice* are distinguished, for Smith, by the fact that they involve, not just the agent’s standpoint, but also the *patient’s* point of view. It follows that even if we can avoid identifying with excluded others by evaluating them only aesthetically rather than morally, we can’t avoid identifying with them if we seek to evaluate the justice of our own conduct toward them. And as we do so, their points of view will discipline our own, since judgments of justice aim for an impartiality with respect to us *and* them. In judging that our conduct with respect to them is just, we purport to judge that anyone (we *or* they) would properly feel no resentment *from*

38. On this point, see especially *TMS*.188.

their own point of view at any conduct of ours toward them. We implicitly enter a moral community, including us and them, which accords them equal authority with us. So as moral judgment is an engine driving identification with the agents we evaluate, so likewise are judgments of justice an engine that drives identification with those who are patients to the judged agents, including when we are the agents.

It is the essentially individual-patient-regarding character of judgments of justice, again, that leads Smith to oppose utilitarian tradeoffs and to hold that resistance to injustice is warranted, not by considerations of overall utility, but by concern for the “very individual” who would be injured (*TMS*.138,90). As central as these ideas are to a doctrine of liberal equality, there is yet another way in which Smith’s metaethics of justice enshrines mutual respect. Sympathy with victims’ sense of injury involves, according to Smith, not simply a sharing of their sense of having been wronged. It also involves a recognition of their *authority* to *challenge* the wrong by resisting it, or, failing that, to demand some form of compensation or punishment. It *empowers*, that is, victims, and others on their behalf, to hold those who treat them unjustly *accountable* for their unjust injuries.³⁹ There is likely to be disagreement, of course, about when conduct *is* unjust, and therefore about when it is appropriately forcefully resisted. But Smith’s metaethics entail that discussion on this question must aim to speak with a voice that impartially expresses the sense of a community that *includes* all parties (agents and patients) *and* that is itself projected into the point of view of the purported victims. Successfully to rebut a charge of injustice, an agent must argue that, were he impartially to take up the perspective of those affected by his actions, he would feel no (warranted) resentment or sense of injury. And to count as impartially taking up that point of view he must enter it as *any* member of a community that includes both him and his patients.

We might say, therefore, that, as Smith conceives of it, discourse about justice is essentially in aid of, but also partly realizes, a system of mutual accountability in which all express a respect for others as equals. Earlier editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* made this theme of

39. Consider in this connection what Smith says about those who feel guilt for having unjustly injured others. Even when their victims are ignorant of the crime, the guilty may be moved to confess their guilt and submit “themselves to the resentment of their offended fellow-citizens,” in the hopes of some form of reconciliation (*TMS*.118–19).

mutual accountability even more explicit than it was in the book's final edition.

A moral being is an accountable being. . . . An accountable being, as the word expresses, is a being that must give an account of its actions to some other, and that consequently must regulate them according to the good-liking of this other. Man is accountable to God and his fellow-creatures. But though he is, no doubt, principally accountable to God; in the order of time, he must necessarily conceive himself as accountable to his fellow-creatures, before he can form any idea of the Deity. (*TMS*.111)

It is justice that brings accountability to our fellow-creatures into play. We don't deserve praise, our own or others', of course, unless our motives and character are proper. But we are not accountable before others for general impropriety. Imprudently wasting my fortune may rightly make me subject to disesteem, but not to any emotion, like resentment or anger, that makes a claim on how I should act.

Here again we see a fundamental difference between Smith's form of sentimentalism and Hume's. For Hume, all negative ethical judgment expresses a kind of disengaged, aesthetic reaction ("disdain," as Annette Baier terms it), an attitude or sentiment whose natural expression is some form of disengagement or distancing—revulsion, turning away from, looking down on, and so on.⁴⁰ As Smith understands them, however, judgments of justice express reactions that demand a distinctive form of engagement, namely, a mutually respectful accountability that recognizes the dignity to be treated as an equal.

Ethics of virtue such as Hume's were sometimes criticized by eighteenth-century contemporaries as the ethos of a polite upper class that cared but little for ordinary people. Berkeley, for example, took Shaftesbury to task in *Alciphron* for putting "morals on the same foot with manners," as what is "agreeable and polite."⁴¹ Inevitably, he and others argued, it is the poor and the "middling sort" who pay the price when such a view reigns, since virtue ethics lacks sufficient conceptual re-

40. Annette Baier, "Moralism and Cruelty," p. 281.

41. George Berkeley, *Alciphron: Or, the Minute Philosopher. In Seven Dialogues. Containing an Apology for the Christian Religion against those who are called Free-thinkers*, 1st ed. (London: 1732), 3rd ed. (London: 1752), in A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, *The Works of George Berkeley* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1949), v. iii. These passages are from *Alciphron* III.13.

sources to hold “people of fashion” accountable for their ill usage of working people and the poor.⁴² The only antidote, the critics thought, was a conception of morality that built accountability into its foundations, in their view, accountability to God and liability, therefore, to eternal sanctions.

The interesting thing about Smith’s position is that he can accept this criticism of “aestheticized” ethics of virtue, like Hume’s, without abandoning the general framework of virtue ethics. As he understands them, judgments of justice, by their very nature, express sentiments that operate within a system of mutual accountability and respect. It follows that liberal equality is not, according to Smith, simply a matter of law and politics. It also concerns the respect that individual citizens have and express for each other in their common moral life. For Smith, justice is not just a virtue of societies, but also, crucially, of individuals.⁴³

This gives Smith a very different way of thinking his way into a broadly egalitarian and liberal moral and political theory than the lines of thought with which we are most familiar. The rules that define justice and equal dignity are neither taken as self-evident nor given contractarian or contractualist foundations.⁴⁴ Like any moral judgment, for Smith, a judgment of justice must be anchored in moral sentiment (*TMS*.330). What leads Smith to the distinctive position I have called “sympathetic liberalism” is the remarkable way in which, according to him, the individual’s point of view and mutual accountability enter into the moral sentiments that judgments of justice express and the judgments that express them.

42. *Ibid.*, II.3; William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785), facsimile edition (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978), I.ii, p. 2. Compare Smith’s related distinction in *The Wealth of Nations* between “loose system[s]” of morals that are “more esteemed and adopted by what are called people of fashion,” and the “strict or austere” system, more “generally admired and revered by the common people” (*WN*.794).

43. One of Smith’s four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, benevolence, and self-command (*TMS*.237). This is Smith’s crucial addition to the ancient theory of virtue that I mentioned above.

44. I use ‘contractarian’ to refer to a view like Gauthier’s and ‘contractualism’ to refer to a view like Rawls’s or Scanlon’s. Smith’s ideas do bear some resemblance to Scanlon’s formulation of contractualism in terms of rules that no one could reasonably reject. David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); T. M. Scanlon, “Utilitarianism and Contractualism,” in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).