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# SMITH ON SELF-COMMAND AND MORAL JUDGMENT

by

LAUREN PAPIERNIK

Under the Direction of Eric E. Wilson

## ABSTRACT

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume argues that moral judgments are the product of sentiment. The mechanism of sympathy allows individuals to enter into a common point of view in order to produce judgments that are truly moral, and not merely self-interested. Hume argues that the common point of view is the standard that moral judgments are subjected to. I argue that the common point of view is an inadequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper moral judgments. The common point of view is inadequate because it is subjective and unreflective. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith offers an account of moral judgment that has an adequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper moral judgments. Smith avoids the problems with Hume's account due to his distinction between partial and impartial spectators and the role that self-command plays in his theory of moral judgment.

INDEX WORDS: Adam Smith, David Hume, Moral judgment, Self-command, Sympathy

SMITH ON SELF-COMMAND AND MORAL JUDGMENT

by

LAUREN PAPIERNIK

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

2013

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2013

SMITH ON SELF-COMMAND AND MORAL JUDGMENT

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## DEDICATION

For my father, Serge Papiernik, who told me ten years ago that philosophy would be an essential part of my life. He was right.

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I would like to begin by thanking Eric Wilson, the chair of my thesis committee. Your support and encouragement made this process as easy and enjoyable as possible. Thank you for your patience when I asked for it, and for your stringency when I needed it most. Thank you Sebastian Rand, for making Hegel interesting and intelligible, and for providing me with new ways of thinking about all types of philosophical problems. Thank you Christie Hartley, for your helpful comments, your open mind, and your much appreciated wisdom.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume famously argues that moral distinctions are the product of sentiment, not reason.<sup>1</sup> Moral judgments, and our conception of virtue and vice, are rooted in sentiments of pleasure and pain. Hume's conception of the nature of moral judgment has been a subject of controversy and debate since he first declared reason to be a passive principle, and not the source of our moral judgments. Disagreement with Hume often flows from a disagreement about whether reason, rather than sentiment, is actually the source of moral judgment. This thesis concerns whether or not Hume's account of moral judgment is adequate, *not* whether or not sentiment is the source of moral judgments. In particular, I will argue that Hume's account of moral judgment fails to provide an adequate standard to distinguish between proper and improper moral judgments. I will then argue that Adam Smith's theory of moral judgment *does* provide an adequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper moral judgments.

Hume's account of moral judgment is centered on a psychological mechanism called sympathy. According to Hume, our ability to make moral judgments depends on sympathy. In Section II of this paper, I begin by explaining the mechanics of sympathy, and its role in moral judgment. Sympathy allows individuals to consider sentiments from what Hume calls a "common point of view." According to Hume, entering into the common point of view is what makes particular judgments *moral*. Adopting a common point of view is necessary and useful for societies to function. Furthermore, for Hume, the common point of view provides a standard for moral judgment.

At the end of Section II, I argue that the common point of view fails to provide an inadequate standard of moral judgment for two specific reasons. First, the common point of view is

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); hereafter cited as T by book, part, section, and paragraph number.

subjective—its judgments are the product of particular experiences. What the common point of view approves of is dependent on factors such as cultural norms, traditions, and customs. Second, the common point of view is unreflective—its judgments are the result of an unconscious and automatic process. When the common point of view approves of something, it does so without reasoning and reflecting on the judgment of approval. Due to these two features of Hume’s account of moral judgment, I maintain that it is an inadequate account.

In Section III I hold that Adam Smith proposes an account of moral judgment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that *does* have an adequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper judgments. Smith’s theory, like Hume’s, centers on sympathy. I begin by describing Smith’s notion of sympathy, and then explain the role it plays in Smith’s account of moral judgment. In doing so, I hope to show the differences between Hume and Smith’s account that are relevant to my criticisms of Hume. Smith’s account of moral judgment is superior to Hume’s because of the role of self-command and its relationship to the highest standard of judgment: the impartial spectator.

In differentiating between partial and impartial spectators, Smith overcomes the first objection against the common point of view. The impartial spectator provides an adequate standard of moral judgment because it does not simply reflect what is common, or popular—it is *not* subjective. As a result, the impartial spectator is importantly different from Hume’s common point of view. Secondly, Smith’s account of moral judgment is reflective. Where Hume insists on moral judgments being the result of unreflective and automatic responses, Smith provides a way in which the ultimate standard of moral judgment is the product of reflection. For Smith, mastery of the virtue of self-command differentiates between proper and improper judgments. As a result, Smith’s theory of moral judgment is not, like Hume’s, subjective or unreflective.

## 2. HUME'S ACCOUNT OF MORAL JUDGMENT

### 2.1 The role and mechanics of sympathy

For Hume, sympathy is a propensity we have in virtue of our constitution. Sympathy is present in children as well as in adults, and is responsible for what Hume calls “the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation” (T 2.1.11.2). He describes sympathy as a communication of passions between individuals. At first, sympathy is described as a sort of emotional contagion, by which I mean a tendency to feel emotions that you observe in others. Hume says, “a cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me” (T 2.1.11.2). For Hume, the propensity we have to communicate and share feelings with others is constitutive of our nature and of the utmost importance.

The discussion of sympathy continues with a precise explanation of the mechanics of the process. The process of sympathy depends on a habit or custom of the mind of making causal inferences based on experience. Hume states,

“when any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection” (T 2.1.11.3).

By means of causal inferences, one forms an idea of a sentiment by seeing its effect. Upon perceiving the effect, the mind is determined to infer the cause of that sentiment. This causal inference allows us to form an idea about another person's sentiment. For instance, suppose I am at a park, and I see a little girl crying. I know from experience that crying is an expression of sadness, so this event conveys the idea of her sadness to me. My idea of sadness becomes an impression because I recall feelings of sadness I have experienced in the past.

Hume holds “that in judging of the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects” (T 2.3.1.12). Thus, the operations behind moral judgment are explained by the same principles or maxims at work in Hume’s account of the understanding. In what follows, I will explain the mechanics of sympathy in further detail. In order to demonstrate how the process of sympathy works, I must first give an account of the central ideas presented in Book 1 of the *Treatise*.

In order to understand the mechanics of sympathy, it is necessary to return to the claims Hume makes at the beginning of the *Treatise*. Book 1 of the *Treatise, Of The Understanding*, begins the task of explaining our mental lives and relation to the external world in terms of experience. According to Hume, all perceptions of the mind are either ideas or impressions (T 1.1.1.1). The difference between ideas and impressions is one of degree, not of kind. Impressions are more lively or vivacious than ideas. Impressions include “all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul” (T 1.1.1.1). On the other hand, ideas are “faint images” of impressions found in “thinking and reasoning” (T 1.1.1.1).

Hume further divides perceptions—impressions and ideas—by saying that some are simple, while others are complex. Accordingly, there are both simple and complex impressions, as well as simple and complex ideas. Simple impressions or ideas “are such as admit of no distinction nor separation” (T 1.1.1.2). It follows that complex impressions or ideas can be divided into parts. Hume further distinguishes between original and secondary impressions, or impressions of sensation and impressions of reflection. Original impressions include sensations such as seeing the color blue, or feeling the heat of the sun. These impressions are original because they are not derived from any other mental state. Secondary impressions are what Hume refers to as desires, emotions, and sentiments, and these *are* derived from other perceptions or mental states.

Perhaps Hume's most significant claim in the *Treatise* concerns the relationship between impressions and ideas. According to Hume, "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T 1.1.1.7). In other words, all the ideas human beings have originate in sense experience. For example, my original impression of pain (say, at burning my hand on a hot stove) causes my idea of pain. Hume claims, "when one is born blind or deaf; not only the impressions are lost, but also their correspondent ideas; so that there never appear in the mind the least traces of either of them" (T 1.1.1.9). Hume uses the copy principle as a methodological tool throughout the *Treatise*, and it is the basis of most of his arguments.

Next, Hume explains how the mind associates or links perceptions. This process is understood under the general term of association. Hume lists three types of association: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. Resemblance is the relation that states that two perceptions are connected in the mind because they resemble each other. For example, I associate a picture of my friend with my friend because the picture resembles my friend. According to Hume, resemblance "is a relation, without which no philosophical relation can exist" (T 1.1.5.3). Contiguity concerns perceptions that are contiguous to each other in space or time. For example, I associate the idea of my neighbor's house with the idea of my house, since the houses are next to each other. For Hume, the relation of cause and effect is the strongest, and most often explains how our mind goes from one idea to another.

Hume spends a great deal of time on the subject of where the idea of causation originates. The idea of cause and effect relies in part on the relations of contiguity and priority. First, Hume holds "that whatever objects are consider'd as causes or effects, are *contiguous* and that nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so little remov'd from those of its existence" (T 1.3.2.6). Second, priority consists in the principle that a cause must be prior in time to its effect. However,

more is needed in order to arrive at the idea of causation. Hume points out that two objects can be contiguous, and one can be prior to the other, without any causal relationship existing between them. Hume claims “there is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above-mention’d” (T 1.3.2.11).

According to Hume, two things explain how human beings have ideas about necessary connection between objects: our experience of constant conjunction between perceptions, and causal inferences we make from one perception to another. When we observe two objects, and consider them in only one instance, we do not perceive any necessary connection between them. In other words, no *particular* instance can give us the idea of causation. This idea only arises as a result of *constant conjunction*. It is only when we observe two objects in several instances, and notice that they are always present together, that our minds establish a connection between them. For instance, I notice that each time it rains, the ground outside is wet. These two perceptions, of raining and of wetness, become associated with each other because they are constantly conjoined. According to Hume, “this multiplicity of resembling instances, therefore, constitutes the very essence of power or connexion, and is the source, from which the idea of it arises” (T 1.3.14.16).

Furthermore, our experience of constant conjunction creates “a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant” (T 1.3.14.20). For example, when I walk outside and see that the ground is wet, my mind immediately infers that it has rained, since my perceptions of rain and wetness outside have frequently occurred together. Thus, the idea of causation arises in the mind as a result of *constant conjunction*, and is nothing but the mind’s tendency to infer from what is present to the senses to something else. The notion that the mind is causally structured applies not only to objects in the world, but also to human action, belief, and sentiment. Hume holds, “the union betwixt motives and actions has the same constancy, as that in any natural operations” (T

2.3.1.14). Thus, the Humean account of causal necessity, consisting in constant conjunction and causal inferences, applies to our cognition of human objects as well as natural objects. As a result, this view will have serious implications for Hume's account of moral judgment, as discussed later on.

The conversion of an idea into an impression is due to our relating ourselves to the object. For instance, my idea of a little girl's sadness becomes an impression because I compare it to my own prior experience. Associating the sentiment of another with one of my own sentiments transforms the idea into an impression. Hume claims, "in sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression" (T 2.1.11.8). The idea one has of another's feeling becomes an impression, a feeling itself, because it is upped in vivacity. Hume explains, "this conversion arises from the relation of objects to ourself. Ourself is always intimately present to us" (T 2.1.11.8). In other words, sympathy requires that we identify some sort of relation between ourselves and the objects of our sympathy.

Two principles of association help explain how this conversion process occurs. Hume notes, "for besides the relation of cause and effect, by which we are convinc'd of the reality of the passion, with which we sympathize; besides this, I say, we must be assisted by the relations of resemblance and contiguity, in order to feel the sympathy in its full perfection" (T 2.1.11.8). The relation of resemblance allows us to make connections between ourselves and others that resemble us. Resemblance can be "any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language" (T 2.1.11.5). These resemblances facilitate sympathy, so that sympathy is found to be stronger or weaker in different cases. According to Hume, "the stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition" between ourselves and the object (T 2.1.11.5). The more one resembles an object of sympathy, the more one will be able to sympathize with it.

Similarly, the principle of contiguity also serves as an explanatory factor in the process of sympathy. Hume claims we “sympathize more with persons contiguous than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countryman than with foreigners” (T 3.3.1.14). For instance, we tend to be more affected by tragedies in our neighborhoods than tragedies elsewhere. Similarly, we more easily sympathize with those we are emotionally close to, such as family members or friends. Despite the fact “that nature has preserv’d a great resemblance among all human creatures” (T 2.1.11.5), this resemblance is often insufficient to generate sympathy in its full force. Consequently, the idea we form of another’s sentiment may lack the vivacity of an impression. The variation in the force of sympathy explained by resemblance raises questions concerning the ways in which sympathy may be limited and our moral judgments dependent on personal experience.

## 2.2 A sentimentalist account of moral judgment

It is the task of Book III, *Of Morals*, to explain how human beings distinguish between virtue and vice. In other words, Hume gives an account of the nature and origin of moral distinctions. As a branch of philosophy, morality is practical, rather than speculative, according to Hume. Hume holds that practical philosophy, which studies actions, cannot be devoted to a passive principle, such as reason. Experience has shown us that “morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions” (T 3.1.1.6). Since Hume asserts, “that reason has no influence on our passions and actions” it must be conceded that the origins of moral distinctions are not a mere product of reason (T 3.1.1.7). Given that actions are not produced from reason, actions cannot be said to be reasonable or unreasonable, but rather laudable or blamable. Moral distinctions, according to Hume, “cannot be deriv’d from reason” (T 3.1.1.6) and therefore reason cannot give us a “sense of morals.” Reason only provides us with the necessary information so as to be able to make the sort of connections between ideas that morality requires.



Moral distinctions are not derived from reason, according to Hume, but are the product of sentiment. Hume considers the case of a willful murder in order to demonstrate how morality depends on sentiment. In the case of a willful murder, no matter of fact about vice can be discerned when you limit yourself to considering only the action. Reason can enable you to see that a murder occurred, piece together how and why it may have happened, but will not find vice in the action. Since the vice is not a quality of the action, “you can never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, toward this action” (T 3.3.1.26). Upon perceiving a willful murder, one *feels* disapprobation toward the action. This feeling of disapprobation within an individual attaches vice to the murder. For Hume, “vice and virtue...are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind” (T 3.1.1.26). In other words, human beings project their feelings of approbation or disapprobation onto actions.

Since there are no matter of facts or existences in the world that designate virtue or vice, for Hume, morality is “more properly felt than judg’d of” (T 3.1.2.1). Feelings of pleasure cause approval, while feelings of pain cause disapproval. Hume’s position stems from the fact that, on his view, “the chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain” (T 3.3.1.2). Consequently, we approve of what causes pleasure, and disapprove of what causes pain. Feelings of pleasure or pain are what constitute judgments of all kinds. According to Hume, “an action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? Because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind” (T 3.1.2.3). It is our sentiments about objects that render those objects either virtuous or virtuous. Hence, feelings of pleasure or displeasure explain the moral distinctions we make.

There is something distinctive about the feelings that generate *moral* judgments. Moral evaluations consist in a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind due to the work of sympathy. According to Hume, “no quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its

consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (T 2.1.11.2). As previously noted, sympathy is a psychological mechanism that allows the communication of passions between individuals. Sympathy enables us to “get outside ourselves” and consider objects not from our particular interest, but from a common point of view. This shift in perspective is what allows individuals to make sentiment based *moral* judgments.

According to Hume, sympathy *produces* moral sentiments. By means of sympathy, individuals adopt a common point of view “from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them” (T 3.3.1.30). Hume believes that by adopting the common point of view an individual’s judgments amount to more than mere prejudice and self-interest. Hume states, “t’is only when a character is consider’d in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil” (T 3.1.2.4). Thus, what makes a feeling or sentiment *moral* is that its object is considered in general, and not from one’s own subjective standpoint. The relevant feeling of pleasure or displeasure must arise from a consideration of a character or sentiment from the common point of view.

Sympathy plays a significant role in moral judgment because it allows individuals to live harmoniously with each other. The fact that human beings are endowed with a propensity to share sentiments with those around them is beneficial to society. For instance, in considering whether a certain action is right or wrong, an individual can refer to her own feelings on the matter, or consider the case more generally. Taking on a more general perspective facilitates commodious living. According to Hume, in every society, in both peaceful and warlike nations, “common interest and utility beget infallibly a standard of right and wrong.”<sup>2</sup> Appealing to this standard, rather than to one’s individual standard, is in every individual’s self-interest. Thus, for Hume, sympathy is

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<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 211; hereafter cited as EPM by page number.

especially remarkable because it is the glue that keeps society together. The fact that individuals can share sentiments and appeal to a common moral standard enables societies to function properly.

### 2.3 Objections to Hume's account

The central problem with Hume's account of moral judgment is that it does not provide an adequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper moral judgments. In other words, Hume's account does not have the tools necessary to determine whether or not a particular judgment is correct or incorrect. Hume's account of moral judgment may be descriptively strong—that is, it may describe how we come to have moral judgments, or why we have the moral judgments we do—but it fails to provide an adequate evaluative standard. An adequate evaluative standard should be able to criticize moral judgments for what are typically considered morally relevant reasons. Moral judgments should reflect some awareness of the peculiar authority of morality, and these judgments should be reached in some reflective capacity.

For Hume, all of our causal inferences find their basis in experience. One's personal experience is the starting point for sympathy based inferences as well as inferences in general. When it comes to moral judgment, one might wonder how the difference in personal experience influences the specific ways one is able to sympathize and generate moral judgments. Annette Baier notes that Hume was sensitive to the objection that his account of sympathy in the *Treatise* relied too heavily on individual experience<sup>3</sup>. Given Hume's claim that we “never really advance a step beyond ourselves” (T 1.2.6.10), one might wonder how the shift from first person singular to first person plural perspective required by the common point of view is possible. In other words, how could it be possible that our moral judgments reflect anything but our own feelings or taste?

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<sup>3</sup> Annette Baier, and Anik Waldow, "A Conversation between Annette Baier and Anik Waldow about Hume's Account of Sympathy," *Hume Studies*, 34, no. 1 (2008): 61-87.

Nevertheless, Hume attempts to provide an explanation for how moral judgments are subject to a standard. Hume acknowledges that there must be some way of distinguishing between personal sentiments and those that we nominate moral sentiments. Such a standard is necessary given that individuals have different experiences and preferences, which in turn will influence their moral judgments. Much of what makes our judgments moral is that they have the proper starting point. For Hume, *moral* judgments are moral simply because they do not originate from an individual point of view. What makes certain sentiments *moral* is that they originate from the common point of view. The common point of view is meant to overcome the limits of individual experience.

For Hume, individuals can look towards the common point of view in order to direct their sentiments properly. Hume states, “in order [to]... arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation” (T 3.3.1.15). Placing oneself in the common point of view is what, on Hume’s view, accounts for the shift from first-person singular to first-person plural perspective. According to Hume, “in general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable...but these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain’d in one point of view” (T 3.3.1.16). In other words, when we view things from the common point of view, we correct our sentiments by making them more general. Sentiments originating from the common point of view are general in the sense that they do not spring from a personal standpoint but from a common viewpoint.

Correcting our sentiments through use of the common point of view is useful to us. According to Hume, “experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable” (T 3.3.1.16). Through experience, individuals learn that it is necessary to correct one’s sentiments or moderate one’s expression of said sentiments in order to live harmoniously with others. Although

individuals are heavily swayed and influenced by their particular situations, if everyone followed only his personal standard of judgment, discourse among individuals would be impossible. The essential function of the common point of view is to render our sentiments more social, thereby making us appear more amiable to our fellows.

My objection to the common point of view is two-pronged. First, the common point of view, despite making moral judgments more general, remains subjective. While the common point of view stresses moving away from *individual* opinion or experience, it simply replaces it with a common subjective standpoint. In other words, the common point of view is an aggregate of subjective viewpoints. While it does not refer to one individual viewpoint, the problem of subjectivity remains. This common standpoint is subjective because it reflects the customs, beliefs, and desires of a particular group of people. What distinguishes between proper and improper judgments is merely the standards of a particular society. Another, perhaps more common, way of phrasing this objection would be to say that Hume supports some sort of moral relativism.

It seems that on Hume's account, individuals must correct their sentiments in order to gain the favor of others. Correcting one's sentiments properly depends on particular features of a society. When engaging in public discourse about moral matters, Hume stresses that it is necessary to neglect the differences in sentiments that may exist in order to "render our sentiments more public and social" (EPM, 229). The ways in which individuals will correct their sentiments and thereby be judged is determined by what is common in a certain society. So, correcting our sentiments is simply a matter of making them align more perfectly with the sentiments of our fellows.

For Hume, the correction of sentiments *is* important. The importance placed on correcting our sentiments can be explained by Hume's conception of virtue. Hume distinguishes between two types of virtues. For Hume, virtue is a mental quality that tends to produce behavior that is either agreeable to its possessor or his fellows, or useful to its possessor or his fellows (T 3.3.1.30). Natural

virtues are those that arise directly out of human psychology, such as benevolence. Artificial virtues, such as justice, are rooted in conventions and practices that emerge gradually. Hume is particularly interested in the origin of the artificial virtues, and our regard for them. The correction of sentiments through use of the common point of view is a gradual process, rooted in convention, and is an essential part in maintaining the stability of society.

Hume's account of artificial virtue is relevant to his account of moral judgment because the common point of view, like the artificial virtues, arises out of the needs of society. For Hume, the artificial virtues are "human contrivances for the interest of society" (T 3.3.1.9). Hume's discussion of justice sheds particular light on the way general rules are formed for the interest of society. On Hume's account, the rules of justice arise gradually out of conventions that the human condition requires. Human beings are naturally partial, meaning they prefer themselves and those close to them to others (T 3.2.2.6). This "opposition of passions" between individuals is augmented by the fact that there is a scarcity and instability of resources (T 3.2.2.6). The understanding that these conditions lead to disadvantages for all leads to the establishment of the rules of justice, which help secure one's interest. The rules of justice prove to be beneficial both for society as a whole and to individuals.

Similarly, the common point of view is beneficial to individuals and to society in that it combats the opposition of passions by appealing to a common standard. To Hume's credit, the common point of view *does* seem to explain how individuals can come to properly direct their sentiments in the interest of maintaining stability and sociability with each other. The common point of view explains why individuals may be motivated to moderate their sentiments when those sentiments will offend their fellows or conflict with common opinion. So, in one sense, Hume does provide a way of correcting moral sentiments. The problem lies in the fact that this mechanism of correction is inadequate. Put more plainly, the common point of view does not offer a method of

correction that necessarily *corrects* sentiments. Rather, the common point of view seems to align one's sentiments with others. However, it seems that an adequate normative standard must say more than what would be prudent or in one's self-interest.

In order to motivate this objection to Hume, let us consider a virtuous individual that happens to find himself in a corrupt society. Hume offers such an example in his discussion of justice in *EPM*. Hume asks us to suppose “that it should be a virtuous man's fate to fall into a society of ruffians, remote from the protection of laws and government; what conduct must he embrace in that melancholy situation” (*EPM*, 187). The answer Hume provides speaks volumes about the kind of standards he can apply to morality—namely, that this standard is subjective, or relative. In light of such a depraved situation, the virtuous man has no other recourse than to look after his self-interest. According to Hume, “he must consult the dictates of self-preservation alone, without concern for those who no longer merit his care and attention” (*EPM*, 187). The virtuous man is no longer required to be virtuous.

One might respond on Hume's behalf and claim that it is perfectly natural that in a completely amoral society, one should tend to one's self-preservation alone. Hume's example is extreme, and is meant to show that justice applies only when it is useful. My point is to show that when an individual finds himself in a depraved society, this individual has no higher standard to look to but the common point of view shaped by clearly immoral people. There is a sense in which morality calls on us to make judgments despite the fact that they unpopular, or imprudent. The common point of view only *corrects* sentiments when that point of view reflects proper judgments, and calls on an agent to take those judgments on.

However, as has been noted, when the common point of view is improper, an agent is called upon to take on this improper viewpoint as well. If an individual's sentiments conflict with the common point of view, it does not necessarily follow that the common point of view provides the

proper sentiments in a certain situation, and that the individual should adopt those sentiments. And yet, morality should provide some standard that agents can look to for guidance. The common point of view simply does not provide the kind of guidance expected by moral agents. The common point of view produces arbitrary judgments. If the common point of view is the only resource one has to correct improper sentiments, then sentiments may be changed and yet not directed properly.

My second objection is related to the first, and it consists in the claim that Hume's account of moral judgment is unreflective. As previously noted, the common point of view is the standard of moral judgment that Hume provides. This standard is further undermined by the way it comes about. The starting point of moral judgment is sympathy, which is based in ideas that correspond to impressions. As discussed in section 2.1, our impressions, and thus ideas, are rooted in individual experience. On Hume's account, the ideas we have about the world are the result of custom, or of the mind being determined in particular ways. Our ideas are linked together by the principles of association—resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. Individuals are largely unaware of how their minds are determined, and the way the mind is determined in turn influences sympathy. Hence, individuals are unaware of how or why they approve or disapprove of others.

For instance, consider the role that resemblance plays in the sympathetic process. Hume admits that sometimes, when resemblance is lacking between oneself and one's object of sympathy, one may not sympathize with the object. We may form an idea, but not an impression, of another's suffering, if resemblance fails to give sympathy its full force. Surely, we want to be able to say that it is possible to sympathize with those that are very different from us. It seems as though I want to be able to sympathize with starving children in Africa, even if I cannot relate to certain aspects of their situation. Alternatively, we may sympathize with others *because* they resemble us, and *not* because they are actually worthy of our sympathy. But more importantly, it seems as though Hume lacks the resources to say that one can reflect and approve or disapprove of other's sentiments for



the right reasons. Because sympathy relies on automatic principles of association, such as resemblance, an individual is unlikely to recognize the faults in his judgments.

The common point of view is unreflective because the standard it provides is completely dependent on automatic principles, determined by habit or custom. The work of the principle of resemblance in the sympathetic process demonstrates this weakness. On Hume's account, we simply will judge people that resemble us more favorably—and may not even be conscious that we are doing so. In this way, human beings are engaged in a non-reflective process. Hume notes, “the custom operates before we have time for reflection” (T 1.3.8.13). In other words, individuals do not reflect on the ideas they are moved to have, or the judgments they make. That sympathy is non-reflective might not seem problematic in itself. However, it is difficult to understand how an account of moral judgment is actually an account of judging when nothing that seems like judging occurs. Hume asserts “that the understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience, without reflecting on it; much more without forming any principle concerning it, or reasoning upon that principle” (1.3.8.13). Hence, for Hume, moral judgments are the product of an automatic process, a process which largely depends on subjective experience, and which cannot be reflected upon.

One might object on Hume's behalf that I have exaggerated the degree to which moral judgment is automatic for Hume. It may be argued that Hume *does* provide examples of individuals reflecting on their sentiments in order to change them. That very well may be the case. Even so, the kind of reflection allowed in Hume's account is limited due to the issues I raised in my first objection. Put more plainly, an individual can reflect and change his or her sentiments to align them with the common point of view. Changing one's sentiments this way is a habit gained through experience, and often requires very little reflection. More importantly, the reflection concerns what others will approve of, or what will render one's sentiments more sociable. So, even if Hume allows

for individuals to reflect and change their sentiments, this reflection concerns figuring out what will be greeted with approval, and not reflecting on what is right or proper.

An adequate account of moral judgment must contain a standard that is objective and reflective. Individuals must look beyond custom in order to determine what sentiments are actually proper. Appealing to this sort of higher standard often requires a great deal of reflection. Gilbert Harman poses this problem nicely in “Moral Agent and Impartial Spectator.” According to Harman, spectator theories—such as Hume’s—are open to the objection that “the desire to do what is right is the desire to act in a way that spectators will approve”<sup>4</sup>. In other words, having the proper sentiments is only a matter of gaining approval from others who may or may not be in a position to determine what is right. Harman, like myself, argues that Hume cannot properly respond to this objection, but finds that Adam Smith has a convincing response. Smith’s account is able to provide an adequate standard of moral judgment because, unlike Hume, Smith describes a moral standard that accurately tracks what is proper—it is objective and reflective. Smith’s discussion of the impartial spectator, and its relationship to self-command, renders his theory superior to Hume’s. At this juncture I will explain in greater detail the aspects of Smith’s theory that allow him to avoid Hume’s shortcomings.

### 3. SMITH’S ACCOUNT OF MORAL JUDGMENT

#### 3.1 Sympathy and spectatorship

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<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Harman, “Moral Agent and Impartial Spectator,” *Explaining Value: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181-195, 184.

In *The Impartial Spectator*, D.D. Raphael notes the influence of Hume on Adam Smith. He writes, “I think Adam Smith took it for granted that Hume had demonstrated beyond challenge his conclusion that moral distinctions arise from feeling. Smith therefore proceeded on the assumption that any further contribution to moral philosophy must make ‘sentiment’, in the sense of feeling, the basic element of its account”<sup>5</sup>. Accordingly, Smith does *not* argue for the position that moral distinctions arise from feeling. Taking that as his starting point, he gives an account of *how* moral distinctions arise from feeling or sentiment.

Smith provides an alternative to Hume’s account, and it is one that provides an adequate standard of moral judgment. By differentiating between partial and impartial spectators, and stressing the role of self-command in moral judgment, Smith is able to give an account of moral judgment that is objective and reflective. Additionally, Smith provides a better account of sympathy’s role in moral judgment, specifically by identifying how sympathy can produce proper judgments. In this section, I explain Smith’s conception of sympathy, in order to later describe his account of moral judgment and argue for its strength.

Smith begins *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by boldly asserting that human beings are naturally social and, to some degree, sensitive to the sentiments of others<sup>6</sup>. The belief that human beings are *not* fundamentally selfish underlies his notion of sympathy. Although sympathy has traditionally been understood as compassion for the plight of others, Smith’s definition is broader. For Smith, sympathy is the faculty of the mind “made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (TMS I.i.I.5). Like Hume, Smith understands sympathy as enabling us to share passions with others. For example, sympathy explains why we feel resentment towards someone who we know has wronged someone else.

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<sup>5</sup> D.D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by K. Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); hereafter cited as TMS by part, section, chapter, and paragraph number.

Sympathy requires more than simply perceiving a sentiment or emotion in an agent. Although “upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person” (TMS I.i.I.6), Smith clearly believes that sympathy of this type is imperfect. When we witness some sign of grief or joy in an agent, we form the idea that some good or bad event has caused this sentiment in them. In these cases, our sympathy is imperfect until “we are informed of the cause” (TMS I.i.I.9). Hence, simply witnessing some sign of suffering generates curiosity in the spectator, “along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actually sympathy that is very sensible” (TMS I.i.I.9).

When an agent observes an expression of a passion, he or she becomes curious as to the cause of that passion. This curiosity is accompanied by a disposition to sympathize, before any actual sympathy takes place. Until one is familiar with the cause of the passion, one’s sympathy is not very considerable. Hence, Smith asserts that sympathy “does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (TMS I.i.I.10). For example, we often feel for others what they do not or cannot feel for themselves—this type of sympathy is often referred to as illusive sympathy. Such is the case with our sympathy with the dead. We sympathize with their situation, and with the situations of those affected, but *not* with a passion. In the case of the dead, this is clear, because the dead do not have any passions at all which could be the grounds for sympathy. Rather, we *imagine* what it would be like to feel forgotten, or to miss our loved ones, even though the dead are incapable of feeling anything.

Similarly, we often sympathize with those that are not capable of feeling or acting properly, such as the mentally ill or children. Smith notes that “we blush for the imprudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behavior” (TMS I.i.I.10). The cause of our reactive attitude in this case is that we imagine ourselves in the other’s situation, and feel that were we in that situation, we would be embarrassed of our behavior. This

principle explains why, for example, I might cringe upon observing a child speak rudely, or feel regret when an elderly person forgets their manners.

Sympathy requires the use of the imagination because we must imagine ourselves in another's place in order to "conceive or to be affected by what he feels" (TMS I.i.I.3). The imagination allows us to place ourselves in another's situation and form some idea of what that person is feeling. This process allows us to feel what that person is feeling, although to a weaker degree. The imagination, giving rise to sympathy, in turn provides the necessary tools for moral judgment within Smith's framework. Raphael is correct to point out that "on most occasions imagination is a prerequisite for sympathy"<sup>7</sup>. Imagination is what constitutes our disposition to sympathize. However, imagination itself does not result in sympathy that is very sensible, as Smith puts it.

Smith carefully explains that sympathy varies depending on the passion one is sympathizing with. He states, "there are some passions of which the expressions excite no sort of sympathy, but before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them, serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them" (TMS I.i.I.7). For example, we tend to express disgust at the behavior of an angry man, rather than at the cause of his anger, until we are acquainted with that cause. Smith reasons this is so, because, "as we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves, nor conceive any thing like the passion which it excites" (TMS I.i.I.7). Hence, for Smith, a certain amount of information is necessary in order for sympathy to work. Smith holds, "even our sympathy with the grief and joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect" (TMS I.i.I.9).

Smith holds that sympathy is *always* pleasurable. He goes as far as to claim that "nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own

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<sup>7</sup> Raphael, 13.

breast” (TMS I.i.II.1). This claim is a result of Smith’s conception of our fundamental nature as human beings. Smith’s conception of our sentiments is fundamentally social, as is his view of morality. He rejects the notion that human beings are primarily or solely self-interested. To the contrary, Smith holds that individuals are highly affected and motivated by their relationships with others, and that we care deeply about others’ opinions of us. Sympathy, which allows us to connect emotionally with others, is crucial to our psychological and emotional well-being. For Smith, “the correspondence of the sentiments of others with our own appears to be a cause of pleasure, and the want of it a cause of pain” (TMS I.i.II.2). For instance, sympathy increases our joy, since we take satisfaction from sharing our joy with another, and observing their experience of it. On the other hand, grief is alleviated by sympathy, as we feel a sort of pleasure at our grief being recognized and shared, to some degree, by others.

Sympathy pleases us when we are sympathizing with other’s passions, as well as when they sympathize with our own. It gives us pleasure to celebrate the joy and accomplishments of others, as well as to share in their grief. Smith stresses that sympathy causes pleasure even when the sentiment we are sympathizing with is unpleasant. Hume objects to this point, finding it implausible that sympathy with grief, for instance, could be pleasurable. Surely, sharing in the grief of another cannot be pleasurable. But Smith replies, “the pleasure which we find in the conversation of one whom in all the passions of his heart we can entirely sympathize with, seems to do more than compensate the painfulness of that sorrow with which the view of his situation affects us” (TMS I.i.II.6). For Smith, the act of sympathizing is pleasurable because it fulfills an important emotional need we have to connect with others. It follows that when we cannot sympathize, we feel pain or displeasure at our inability to do so.

### 3.2 Spectatorship and moral judgment

Sympathy plays a crucial role in the process of making moral judgments. First, sympathy explains how we make judgments about other people. When we enter into another's situation by means of the imagination, we "form some idea of his sensations" (TMS I.i.I.2) and then can observe whether or not his sentiments agree with our own. A positive judgment of another's sentiments occurs when a spectator and an agent's sentiments are in perfect concord. Hence, "to approve of the passions of another...is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them" (TMS I.i.III.1). Similarly, when we do not approve of another's sentiments, we judge their sentiments negatively, and this "is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them" (TMS I.i.III.1). When we make judgments about other's sentiments, our own imagined sentiments are the only standard available to us.

Secondly, sympathy explains how we form judgments about ourselves (TMS I.i.IV.8). Smith holds that self-assessment entails the division of the self into two people, the spectator and the agent (TMS III.i.I.6). By dividing oneself this way, the agent places himself in the spectator's situation and views his own case as "if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation" (TMS I.i.IV.8). To approve or disapprove of one's own conduct consists in feeling "that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man...we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it" (TMS III.i.I.2). Due to "an original desire to please" (TMS III.i.II.6) the people around us, we learn to moderate our sentiments so that others can sympathize with them. Nevertheless, the people we know are imperfect judges since they are partial spectators. As a result, although God "has made man...the immediate judge of mankind," when we judge ourselves, we must also refer "to a much higher tribunal," that of the impartial spectator (TMS III.i.II.32).

In order to be certain that we judge ourselves fairly we must consult the impartial spectator. The impartiality of our judgments is important to us because we naturally desire to be praise-worthy

(TMS III.i.II.1). Smith insists that the desire for praise-worthiness cannot be satisfied by undeserved praise. As a result, we want to be certain that the judgments we receive are warranted. Since interests and inclinations shape our companions' judgments of us, we cannot rely on their judgments to be fair. In order to judge ourselves impartially, "we conceive ourselves as acting in the presence of a person quite candid and equitable" (TMS III.i.II.32). This imagined impartial spectator is disinterested and well informed. This "man within the breast" is an internalized external perspective that represents our conscience in its ideal form (TMS III.i.II.32). In other words, the perspective of the impartial spectator is one that individuals internalize, much in the same way one develops a conscience. One approves of one's own sentiments "by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge" (TMS III.i.I.2). By contrast, one disapproves of one's sentiments when the impartial spectator cannot sympathize with them.

When judging our own sentiments, we need to view ourselves in an impartial light in order to properly weigh our interests against those of others (TMS III.i.II.32). Although we naturally prefer ourselves to others, when we view ourselves as others do, we realize that they cannot sympathize with our self-love (TMS II.ii.II.1). The impartial spectator curbs the power of self-love by reminding us "that we are but one of the multitude" (TMS III.i.III.4). Still, the violence of our self-love can "pervert the rectitude of our own judgments" even when the impartial spectator is present (TMS III.i.IV.1). Smith asserts that although we must strive for impartiality, we often fall short. Smith explains that, as a result, general rules of morality are formed, based on our experience of what is naturally approved or disapproved of.

Smith focuses on two types of moral judgments we make: judgments about propriety, and judgments about merit. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on judgments about propriety. For judgments about propriety, we consider a sentiment "in relation to the cause which excites it, or the motive which gives occasion to it" (TMS I.i.III.5). Propriety concerns the suitability or



appropriateness of a certain sentiment or action given its cause. For example, when judging the propriety of someone's grief, we consider the cause of the grief to determine whether or not the sentiment is appropriate. Thus, to approve of a sentiment is to find that it is proper, given its cause, and to disapprove of a sentiment is to judge it improper, given its cause.

There are two distinct types of judgment made concerning propriety. First, "when the objects which excite them are considered without any particular relation, either to ourselves or to the person whose sentiments we judge of" (TMS I.i.IV.1). Judgments of this sort include aesthetic judgments, such as our sentiments about the beauty of flowers, or the vastness of the ocean. Smith notes, "all the general subjects of science and taste, are what we and our companion regard as having no peculiar relation to either of us. We both look at them from the same point of view" (TMS I.i.IV.2). Judgments of this sort do not require sympathy. According to Smith, human beings naturally share sentiments on these matters.

The concordance of sentiments is not found as easily when objects stand in peculiar relations to oneself or others. Smith explains, "with regard to those objects, which affect in a particular manner either ourselves or the person whose sentiments we judge of it, it is at once more difficult to preserve this harmony and correspondence, and at the same time, vastly more important" (TMS I.i.IV.5). It is more difficult because it is difficult for me to perfectly understand and feel another's grief, even when I change places with him. This difference is due to the fact that "we do not view them from the same station, as we do a picture, or a poem, or a system of philosophy, and are, therefore, apt to be very differently affected by them" (TMS I.i.IV.5). The difference in our sentiments with what personally concerns us is more likely to cause conflict than mere aesthetic disagreements. One can overlook disagreement with regards to taste, but this is not the case when, for instance, someone does not sympathize with your misfortune. In that case, one feels slighted, and resentment towards those who does not sympathize with his sufferings, or celebrate his success.

Sympathy allows for a correspondence of sentiments, even when the sentiments are of particular concern. In these cases, the spectator must put himself in the place of the agent, or the person principally concerned. This requires that the spectator consider all the circumstances of the case, and how they might affect the agent. Even when a spectator imagines himself in that situation which the agent is in, “the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer” (TMS I.i.IV.7). Although human beings *are* naturally sympathetic, sympathy only takes us so far. What the spectator feels will differ from what the agent feels “because the secret consciousness that the change of situations, from which the sympathetic sentiment arises, is but imaginary, not only lowers it in degree, but, in some measure, varies it in kind, and gives it a quite different modification” (TMS I.i.IV.7). Despite these differences, Smith maintains that sympathy, although imperfect, is sufficient for the needs of society.

There is much controversy in Smith literature concerning what work the imagination does in the sympathetic process. This subject bears significance in how sympathy figures in moral judgment. In “Adam Smith’s Concept of Sympathy and its Contemporary Interpretations,” Bence Nanay notes that the imagination involved with sympathy requires imagining from the inside. There are two ways imagining from the inside can be interpreted:

- 1) Imagining having X’s experiences: X occurs in the content of my imaginative episode, I myself may not.
- 2) Imagining being in X’s situation: X herself does not even occur in the content of my imaginative episode.<sup>8</sup>

Who appears in this imaginative episode is significant for the strength of Smith’s theory. When a spectator imagines being in another’s situation, are they imagining themselves, or the agent? Darwall suggests, “when we judge someone’s feeling or reaction, we do so from her patient’s perspective,

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<sup>8</sup> Bence Nanay, “Adam Smith’s Concept of Sympathy, and its Contemporary Interpretations,” *The Adam Smith Review*, vol. 5 edited by Vivienne Brown and Samuel Fleischacker (New York: Routledge, 2010), 85-105, 88.

viewing the situation as we imagine it to confront her as someone responding to it. Both judgments involve an implicit identification with, and thus respect for, the other as having an independent point of view.”<sup>9</sup> But this misses the mark. What Darwall suggests is too subjective, and more akin to what Hume describes. If a spectator is meant to judge the propriety of an agent’s sentiments, then identifying and respecting these sentiments simply because the spectator has adopted them does *no work for Smith*. All this would require would be for the spectator to *imagine* being X, and feeling what X feels.

The kind of imagination Smith has in mind must be more similar to (2), although it’s unclear whether or not that even captures the process perfectly. Whereas (1) stresses that a spectator imagines being X in a situation, (2) only requires that a spectator imagine the situation itself. In this case, imagination is only a vehicle for moral judgment. It allows the spectator to gain relevant information about the *situation* to judge what is proper. What is proper will be a result of the particular situation, not of the mental state of X. The importance of this point cannot be stressed enough. If, as Darwall suggests, a spectator were to adopt the agent’s point of view, moral judgment would arise from a subjective point of view—just a different one than the spectator’s. Moreover, viewing the situation as the person currently in the situation views it adds nothing new. What is needed in moral judgment is *another* perspective, not adopting the perspective of a particular agent.

Although it is indisputable that the imagination plays a significant role in Smith’s account of sympathy, I take it that while the imagination is a pre-condition for sympathy, it is not what is significant about sympathy. The real work in the sympathetic process, what, in turn, makes moral judgment possible is self-command. Self-command enables the spectator to take on a different point of view, but it is not merely the point of view already embodied by a particular agent. The practice of self-command is what allows a spectator to actually judge the propriety of a sentiment that the

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<sup>9</sup> Nanay 91-92.

imagination allows the spectator to feel. Furthermore, self-command has an important connection to the impartial spectator. The impartial spectator and self-command enable Smith to respond to the objections concerning subjectivity and reflection that I raised against Hume.

### 3.3 Self-command and the impartial spectator

Smith's emphasis on the impartial spectator and self-command is an attempt to provide an adequate standard of moral judgment. The impartial spectator is the normative standard one appeals to in distinguishing between proper and improper judgments, and it is made possible through self-command. By emphasizing the roles that the impartial spectator and self-command play in moral judgment, Smith is able to avoid the criticisms leveled against Hume—namely, that moral judgments merely reflect subjective and unreflective sentiments. By distinguishing the impartial spectator from partial spectators, Smith can provide a standard that goes above and beyond Hume's common point of view.

The process of sympathy makes moral judgment possible, but for Smith, only sympathy with the impartial spectator results in proper judgments. Fleischacker notes, "sympathy functions as the mechanism by which the impartial spectator can operate, but it is only the sympathy *of the impartial spectator* that provides a standard for moral judgment"<sup>10</sup>. Smith's impartial spectator importantly differentiates him from Hume. Fleischacker adds, "Smith's insistence that sympathy be impartial would by itself be at least a shift of emphasis from Hutcheson's and Hume's theories of moral approbation"<sup>11</sup>. The impartial spectator is able to do for Smith what the common point of view fails to do for Hume. For Hume, sympathy that generates moral judgments looks to the common point of view. But the common point of view is *not* impartial. The common point of view is biased or

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel Fleischacker, "Philosophy in Moral Practice: Kant and Adam Smith," *Kant-Studien*, 82. no. 3 (1991): 249-269, 258.

<sup>11</sup> Fleischacker, 258.

prejudiced by a society's particular manners, customs, and beliefs. As mentioned earlier, the common point of view merely shifts from an individual subjective viewpoint to a common one that is limited and shaped by certain factors. The impartiality in Smith's theory provides him with grounds for responding to objections concerning the subjectivity of moral judgment.

In section 2.3, I argued that Hume's common point of view is open to two damning objections. The first involved the fact that the common point of view, by emphasizing the utility of sympathy, lacks certain normative force. Smith disagrees with Hume concerning utility, and the role it has in our moral approbation. Smith rejects the idea that utility is what first leads us to approve of certain qualities. According to Smith, "originally, however, we approve of another man's judgment, not as something useful, but as right, as accurate, as agreeable to truth and reality" (TMS I.i.IV.4). The appeal to truth sets a higher standard than to what is useful or popular. Smith holds, "it seems impossible that the approbation of virtue should be a sentiment of the same kind with that by which we approve of a convenient and well-contrived building" (TMS IV.i.II.4). In other words, in making *moral* judgments, our sentiments reflect more than what is useful, or pleasant. Smith is especially sensitive to the fact that what is true, correct, or proper, often differs from what is deemed useful, or what is praised.

One way Smith emphasizes the unique character of moral judgments is in distinguishing between praise and praiseworthiness. In Part III of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith distinguishes the love of praiseworthiness from the love of praise. The latter is the natural desire to obtain the favorable sentiments of others. Additionally, Smith claims that "man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love" (TMS III.i.II.1). Similarly, Smith claims that man naturally fears not only being hated, but being the proper object of hate. The love of praiseworthiness is the love of what is honorable and noble, *not* a mere love of approval. Smith also distinguishes praise and praiseworthiness by likening them to what *is*

and what *ought* to be. As regards the sentiments of others about one's conduct, "praise and blame express what actually are" (TMS III.i.II.25). Praiseworthiness is meant to provide a higher standard of evaluation. Hence, Smith posits that praiseworthiness and blameworthiness express "what naturally ought to be the sentiments of other people with regard to our character and conduct" (TMS III.i.II.25). The distinction between praise and praiseworthiness captures the weakness of Hume's appeal to the common point of view, which maps on to what is praised, and not necessarily what is praiseworthy.

According to Smith, because the desire for praise and the desire for praiseworthiness are distinct, they cannot be satisfied in the same way. For example, if one receives compliments on a meal he or she did not cook, their desire for praise might be satisfied, but not their desire for praiseworthiness. The knowledge that the praise was unwarranted, since the individual does not actually possess the qualities being admired, signals to the individual that he is *not* praiseworthy. Smith calls this "the most humbling of all reflections, the reflection of what we ought to be, but what we are not" (TMS III.i.II.4). According to Smith, the desire to actually *be* what the people around us approve of, rather than just appear to be that way, demonstrates how human beings are naturally endowed with the capacity for virtue.

Smith's account suggests that the strength of these desires differs depending on the individual. One's character depends, in many respects, on whether one primarily desires praise or praiseworthiness. Despite his remarks to the contrary, Smith does concede that praise *can* provide satisfaction when it is unwarranted. It is the "foolish liar" and the "important coxcomb" who are pleased with unwarranted praise (TMS III.i.II.4). Unwarranted praise satisfies only "the weakest and most superficial of mankind" (TMS III.i.II.7). In contrast, the virtuous person finds no pleasure in groundless applause. Moreover, the virtuous person's highest source of satisfaction often comes from doing what he knows to be praiseworthy, even when he knows it will receive no praise. The

love of praiseworthiness is stronger than the love of praise in “every well-formed mind” (TMS III.i.II.7). Thus, the strength of the desire for praiseworthiness serves as a standard to distinguish between good and bad characters. Unfortunately, the love of praise and the love of praiseworthiness are often hard to distinguish. Smith notes that these two principles “resemble one another” and are “often blended with one another” (TMS III.i.II.2). As a result, it is difficult to determine whether an agent is motivated by the desire for praise or the desire for praiseworthiness.

Nevertheless, in order to distinguish between these desires, there must be some standard that distinguishes between what receives praise and what deserves praise. For Smith, the impartial spectator serves as the standard that distinguishes between what is praised and what is praiseworthy. When it comes to determining what is proper, we cannot depend on partial spectators whose judgments are influenced by their interests and inclinations. Conversely, the impartial spectator, the “man within the breast,” is well-informed and fair (TMS III.i.II.32). One approves of sentiments “by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge” (TMS III.i.I.2). In other words, we defer to the impartial spectator when it comes to making judgments about what is praiseworthy.

The higher standard of the impartial spectator is especially important because the judgments we make are often incorrect. For instance, a man is accused of stealing and, although he is innocent, he is punished and ostracized by his peers for the crime. If this man cared solely about what others thought of him, his happiness would depend completely on their opinions of him. Smith wants to avoid this consequence, especially given how often people make incorrect judgments. Thus, Smith claims “the man who is conscious to himself that he has exactly observed those measures of conduct which experience informs him are generally agreeable, reflects with satisfaction on the propriety of his own behavior” (TMS III.i.II.5). Just as the desire for praiseworthiness varies in individuals, so does the reflective ability to view oneself as the impartial spectator would.

An individual's development of the ability to consult the impartial spectator depends on experience. Individuals must be able to imagine the sentiments of others that do not actually take place, but which are "natural and ordinary" in response to a behavior (TMS III.i.II.5). Through experience, individuals develop the habit of connecting certain sentiments to actions, and are therefore able to imagine what the proper sentiments would be in a particular situation. Similarly, one way to understand the origin of the love of praiseworthiness is as a development of what we naturally approve of and admire in others. For instance, Smith explains that the anxious desire we have to succeed "is originally founded in our admiration of the excellence of others" (TMS III.i.II.3). In other words, we naturally desire to be as amiable and admirable as those whom we consider to be the most amiable and admirable. In order to satisfy this desire, "we must become the impartial spectators of our own character and conduct" (TMS III.i.II.3). Due to the desire to be praiseworthy, in order to feel satisfied that we are truly deserving of the praise we receive, we must examine ourselves from an impartial perspective. At the very least, the virtuous person must be able to distinguish between what receives praise and what deserves praise by appealing to the impartial spectator.

The distinction between praise and praiseworthiness clarifies one way in which Smith is concerned with finding a standard of moral judgment that is not subjective. The issue of the appropriate standard is important in considering what type of spectator one is dealing with. Smith is careful to distinguish between partial and impartial spectators, and as readers of Smith, we must be careful as well. Raphael suggests that Smith developed his impartial spectator theory as a result of an objection by Sir Gilbert Elliot. The objection challenged Smith to differentiate the impartial spectator—the highest tribunal of judgment—from normal spectators. Raphael defends Smith, explaining that the impartial spectator, the man within the breast, is not "purely a reflection of actual



social attitudes”<sup>12</sup>. Although the impartial spectator is initially developed through experience, Raphael suggests it gains its independence through the use of the imagination. While I agree that the impartial spectator does gain independence, I believe that it is through the practice of self-command, not through use of the imagination.

One reason for the distinction between partial spectators and the impartial spectator is that partial spectators exercise self-command to a different degree than the impartial spectator. Just as Smith distinguishes between real spectators and the impartial spectator, he distinguishes between different stages of self-command. The “rudimentary stage” of self-command depends on the sentiments of real spectators, whereas the higher stage depends on conscience—on the man within the breast. Self-command is what makes the sympathy of the impartial spectator a standard above the sympathy we feel with partial spectators. Self-command also accounts for why Smith escapes the second objection I raised against Hume. Smith’s theory of moral judgment is not unreflective in the way Hume’s is due to the role of self-command.

Self-command—the regulation of one’s passions—is central to Smith’s conception of impartial judgment. Self-command is obtained through a regard for “real or supposed” spectators (T.M.S. III.i.III.21). For Smith, self-command is both a psychological capacity and a virtue. It is a capacity that must be developed. We first develop this capacity as children in order to gain the approval of our parents, teachers, and classmates. All human beings have the capacity for self-command, and exercise it to different degrees. Smith explains the different degrees of self-command by describing three people: the weakest man, the man of a little more firmness, and the man of real constancy.

The weakest man has barely developed the capacity of self-command. Although he can moderate his sentiments, he does so only briefly. He soon returns to his situation, “and endeavors,

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<sup>12</sup> Raphael, 36.

like a child that has not yet gone to school, to produce some sort of harmony between his own grief and the compassion of the spectator, not by moderating the former, but by importunately calling on the latter” (T.M.S. III.i.III.23). In other words, the weakest man is infrequently moved to practice self-command, and is not very good at doing it. The man of a little more firmness does a better job, according to Smith. This man takes greater interest in the approval of those around him—of partial spectators. The man of a little more firmness “approves and applauds himself by sympathy with their approbation, and the pleasure which he derives from this sentiment supports and enables him more easily to continue this generous effort” (T.M.S. III.i.III.24). In other words, the approval of partial spectators motivates the man of a little more firmness to practice self-command, at least when he is in the presence of others.

Finally, the man of real constancy has developed the capacity of self-command to its fullest degree. According to Smith, “the man of real constancy and firmness, the wise and just man who has been thoroughly bred in the great school of self-command...maintains this control of his passive feelings upon all occasions” (T.M.S. III.i.III.25). This man practices self-command regardless of whether or not he is alone, or in the company of others. Unlike the man of a little more firmness, the man of real constancy is not motivated by the approval of partial spectators. Smith asserts, “[the man of real constancy] has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent one moment from his attention” (T.M.S. III.i.III.25). The man of constancy has developed the capacity of self-command into a virtue, and therefore always consults the impartial spectator.

As a virtue, self-command is the psychological capacity developed to an excellent degree. The virtuous person, the man of constancy, not only “enters into the great school of self-command” but exercises discipline to become the master of himself (T.M.S. III.i.III.21). The master of self-

command is virtuous because he is in control of his passions. This person acts “with cool deliberation in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties” (T.M.S. VI.iii.III.11). The master of self-command is able to make proper judgments even in the most challenging situations. Self-command of this sort is possible through “constant practice” (T.M.S. III.i.III.25). In other words, mastery of self-command takes a great deal of effort and reflection.

The practice of self-command is essential for virtue. According to Smith, self-command “is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the other virtues seem to derive their principal lustre” (TMS VI.iii.11). Smith’s theory of moral judgment stresses the importance of placing oneself in another’s place in order to make impartial judgments. The act of sympathizing requires a sort of humbling of sentiments, so that a concord of sentiments can be reached. For Smith, this practice of humbling oneself is the most important virtue. The reflective nature of Smith’s account is underscored by the connection between moral judgment and the virtue of self-command.

Raphael notes that the first use of the term “impartial spectator” occurs in the discussion of self-command. Raphael suggests that “self-command is essentially to feel for ourselves only what we see others can feel for us”<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, in consulting the impartial spectator, we approve of sentiments only if a well-informed and disinterested spectator could sympathize with them. Both self-command and the impartial spectator help us moderate our sentiments in order to make proper judgments. Hence, Raphael holds that the role the impartial spectator plays in humbling self-love “is closely akin to self-command”<sup>14</sup>. In other words, becoming the impartial spectator is an act of self-command. The most notable aspect of Smith’s theory of moral judgment is tightly connected to what he deems to be the virtue from which all other virtues are derived.

Proper moral judgment requires the virtue of self-command. The virtuous person, who has mastered the practice of self-command, sets “the idea of exact propriety and perfection” as his

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<sup>13</sup> Raphael, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Raphael, 40.

standard (T.M.S. VI.iii.III.23). Smith posits that the virtuous person has studied this standard more than other people have, and as a result understands it better and is more motivated by it. Thus, although the virtuous person cannot reach this standard, “he endeavors as well as he can, to assimilate his own character to this archetype of perfection” (T.M.S. VI.iii.III.25). Due to the exercise of self-command, the virtuous person has a higher moral standard than the non-virtuous person. The exercise of self-command activates “the real love of virtue” that we are enabled to have due to the natural desire to be praise worthy (T.M.S. III.i.II.7). Hence, Smith’s standard of propriety is the result of much reflection and care, unlike Hume’s, which arises automatically and without reflection.

Due to the roles of the impartial spectator and self-command, Smith’s account of moral judgment is tightly linked to a conception of virtue. To be virtuous consists in part in making proper moral judgments, or, to appealing to the right standard. Making proper moral judgments *requires* the exercise of self-command, so that we can judge impartially and *not* merely report our subjective feelings or preferences. Smith’s account is significant in its attention to the problem of self-deception. Fleischacker notes, “Smith is practically unique, among eighteenth century British thinkers...in making the dishonesty of the self to itself a prime issue in moral philosophy”<sup>15</sup>. Smith’s discussion of sympathy, and of moral judgment, is unique in that he spends a great deal of time on the question of how individuals can come to judge themselves properly. Smith notes, “rather than see our own behavior under so disagreeable an aspect, we too often, foolishly and weakly, endeavor to exasperate anew those unjust passions which had formerly misled us” (TMS III.i.IV.4). Smith emphasizes that our moral feelings are weak and easily corrupted, and provides a way to at least partially overcome this inevitable truth about our nature.

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<sup>15</sup> Fleischacker, 256.

To sum up, Smith's theory of moral judgment has a theory of virtue built into it. The standard he provides for moral judgment, that of the impartial spectator, reflects the perfection of the *virtue* of self-command. For Smith, the person who has internalized the impartial spectator's perspective is analogous to the master of self-command. These two people are the same, for they both have overcome self-preference in order to make fair judgments. This gives Smith a clear way to distinguish between proper and improper judgments, and to deny that moral judgments are subjective and unreflective. For Smith, the impartial spectator is the ideal spectator because she has learned how to sympathize correctly. In other words, the impartial spectator's judgments reflect an impressive development of the faculty of sympathy. When the impartial spectator sympathizes with some given sentiment, we can feel comfortable with the fact that the impartial spectator is sympathizing with something that should be sympathized with. Put more clearly, the impartial spectator sympathizes with the right things. The impartial spectator's sympathy is synonymous with the approval of virtue.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this project, I began by summarizing Hume's account of moral judgment and raising two objections to it. I argued that Hume fails to provide an adequate standard of moral judgment

because the common point of view is subjective and unreflective. Then, I hoped to show that Smith's account of moral judgment provides an adequate standard for distinguishing between proper and improper judgments. In doing so, my primary goal was to highlight an aspect of Smith's theory that I believe is often overlooked—the role of self-command. Smith is often lauded for his impartial spectator—the feature that most obviously sets him apart from contemporaries such as Hume. But it is his commitment to self-command that informs the development of the impartial spectator, and his decision to stress the difference between partial spectators and the impartial spectators.

In clearly distinguishing between partial and impartial spectators, Smith is able to show that his standard of moral judgment is not, like Hume's, subject to the criticism that it merely reflects public opinion, or is subjective. Smith goes to great lengths to avoid this objection, not only by introducing the impartial spectator, but also by distinguishing between the desire for praise and the desire for praiseworthiness. He condemns the former, and holds up the latter as an ideal we should all aspire to—an ideal that self-command and the impartial spectator can help us achieve. Furthermore, Smith's discussion of self-command shows how reflection is necessary in order to distinguish between proper and improper judgments. For Smith, only the master of self-command, who has put a great deal of reflection into his judgments, is able to accurately distinguish between proper and improper judgments by occupying the impartial spectator's perspective.

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