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Adam Smith, Virtue, and Sympathy for Animals

by

Phoenix Thompson

Under the Direction of Eric Wilson, Ph.D.

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

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ABSTRACT

Adam Smith builds an account of moral judgment on our capacity for “fellow-feeling,” or sympathy. To view someone’s situation and adopt their sentiment is to sympathize with and thus approve of them. As the basis for approval, sympathy is also how we find the “tone of temper, and tenour of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praise-worthy character.” In short, sympathy tells us if we are virtuous. On Smith’s view, however, animals are largely outside the scope of sympathy and virtue. In this thesis, I argue that Smith’s account of sympathy and virtue can accommodate animals. But while Smith’s account of sympathy and virtue can extend to animals, it's ultimately unsatisfactory given their current situation.

INDEX WORDS: Sympathy, Sentimentalism, Virtue, Animals, Justice, Beneficence

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2023

Adam Smith, Virtue, and Sympathy for Animals

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DEDICATION

For Oma, Mom, and Dana, who feel much for others.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 BASICS OF SYMPATHY	3
3 COMMERCIAL SOCIETY AND SYMPATHY	7
4 VIRTUE A (POSSIBLE) SOLUTION.....	11
5 JUSTICE.....	13
6 BENEFICENCE.....	20
7 CONCLUSION	27
WORKS CITED.....	28

INTRODUCTION

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, two questions drive Adam Smith's inquiry: First, "wherein does virtue consist?", and secondly, "by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us?" (TMS VII.i.2). In other words, which character is praiseworthy and how do we know? The answer to the latter question is sympathy, which for Smith is not a particular feeling but the faculty in the mind that allows us to have "fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (TMS I.i.1.5). If, for example, our friend is grieving and we grieve with them, then we sympathize with them. Sympathy, in short, is the faculty that allows us to share feelings.

It's also the faculty that grounds approval (TMS VII.iii.3.16). For Smith, sympathy allows us not just to share feelings but also feel those sentiments which are proper given a particular situation. So, for instance, we might "blush for the imprudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of impropriety of his own behavior" (TMS I.i.1.10). Because our friend had no sense of impropriety and we feel that in his situation he should, we disapprove of his behavior. If, on the other hand, our friend is apologetic and we share this feeling because that's what the situation calls for, then we approve of our friend (TMS I.i.3.2). As the basis for approval, sympathy is what recommends virtue, or "the character which is the natural object of esteem, honour, and approbation" (TMS VII.i.2). For Smith, the virtuous person will be someone whose sentiments, and whose actions that flow from those sentiments, are consistently proper given their situation (TMS I.i.1.3).

In this paper, I explore how Smith's framework of sympathy and virtue can help us think about our treatment of animals. On Smith's view, virtue and sympathy largely don't apply to

animals (TMS II.iii.1.4). I argue, however, that despite Smith's view of animals there are Smithian reasons to bring animals under the scope of sympathy and virtue. But while there are Smithian reasons to bring animals under the scope of sympathy and virtue, Smith's account is ultimately unsatisfactory given the current plight of animals.

1 BASICS OF SYMPATHY

Let's look at some basics of sympathy. First, sympathy is not a particular feeling but the faculty that allows us to feel a sentiment approaching what others feel. So when we sympathize with someone we can do so across a range of emotions (TMS I.i.1.6-8). Among other emotions, we can sympathize with our friend's anger, joy, or grief. Second, the sentiments we share with other people are different than the ones they feel. Smith explains why this is the case when he writes, "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (TMS I.i.1.2). Here the experiences of other people are not directly accessible to us. Because of this, our friend's anger or joy is different than the anger or joy we feel when we sympathize with them. Often this means our sentiments as spectators are less intense than someone who is directly impacted by a situation, or as Smith calls them "the person principally concerned" (TMS I.i.4.7). So if our friend grieves and we grieve with them, we won't feel their loss as sharply as they do.

Notice that sympathy is based on what we "should" feel in someone else's situation. When we look at a tightrope dancer, for example, sympathizing with them means asking ourselves what it should feel like to balance on a tightrope high above the ground. If we "writhe and twist and balance" along with them, then we feel they are apt to be wary and cautious in their situation. For Smith, when we feel a sentiment is apt given a particular situation, and share this feeling with those in that situation, then we approve of them. We approve of the dancer because we feel they should be wary. Sympathizing with someone, then, is a way of approving of them (TMS I.i.3.2).

Smith makes it clear however that our sentiments are often misguided and that we don't approve or disapprove when we should (TMS III.4.5-6). As such, sympathy by someone who is informed of our situation and impartial, who Smith calls an "impartial spectator" (IS), is the basis for approval (TMS III.1.3). For example, if we are happy that we got promoted but our co-worker is jealous and doesn't share our sentiment, we might think that we aren't worthy of approval. But if we take the view of an IS, of someone who knows how diligently we worked and who isn't tainted by jealousy, we can see that despite our co-worker not being happy for us, an IS would be. Put differently, an IS would sympathize with us. For Smith, having the sympathy of an IS means we are worthy of approval even if no one else approves of us (TMS IV.2.10). So the sympathy of an IS plays an important role in moral judgement.

But it's not yet clear how for Smith sympathy is possible when we don't feel the same sentiments as others. How is it, in other words, that we can feel our friend's anger is apt or our co-worker's jealousy inappropriate when we don't experience what they feel? According to Smith, "it is by the imagination only that we can from any conception of what are his sensations" (TMS I.i.1.2). So the imagination is the faculty that enables sympathy. By allowing us to conceive of ourselves in someone else's situation, the imagination allows us to form an idea of how we should feel in that situation. When looking at the tightrope dancer, for example, the imagination transports us to the dancer's situation and prompts us to try to balance as they do.

The imagination's ability to place us in the situation of someone else is aided by an understanding of that person's situation. As Smith writes, "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from the situation which excites it" (TMS I.i.1.10). Here a view of someone's situation is integral to sympathy. Presumably, the more we understand someone's situation, the better the imagination can conceive of what it's like to be in that

situation, and the better we can gauge how we should feel. Suppose, for example, a friend tells us people are experimenting on monkeys. Given this information we might feel some passing sympathy for the monkeys. Now suppose we are given a better view of the situation. Like the view Harry F. Harlow gives of his experiments on monkeys:

For the past ten years we have studied the effects of partial social isolation by raising monkeys from birth onwards in bare wire cages... These monkeys suffer total maternal deprivation... More recently we have initiated a series of studies on the effects of total social isolation by rearing monkeys from a few hours after birth until 3,6, or 12 months of age in a stainless steel chamber. During the prescribed sentence in this apparatus the monkey has no contact with any animals, human or sub-human.

From these studies, Harlow was able to conclude that:

Sufficiently severe and enduring early isolation reduces these animals to a social-emotional level in which the primary social responsiveness is fear (Harlow 1965; Singer 2009).

Here understanding the monkey's situation matters. Knowing that they're separated from their mothers at birth and that they're kept isolated in a stainless-steel chamber for months affects the imagination's ability to place ourselves in their situation and gauge how we should feel. We might, for example, go from feeling pity for the monkeys to also feeling anger at their situation. For Smith, understanding their situation can also affect not just what we feel but how strongly we feel it (TMS I.i.4.6). If we were angry when our friend told us about the experiments on monkeys, for instance, a clearer picture of those experiments will likely feed our anger. For Smith, this means a clear view of someone's situation brings the spectator's sentiments more in tune with the person principally concerned, which aids sympathy.

Smith also talks of the importance of understanding someone's situation or circumstance when he talks about Greek tragedy. Smith writes,

In all these cases, however, it is not pain which interest us, but some other circumstances. It is not the sore foot, but the solitude, of Philoctetes

which affects us, and diffuses over that charming tragedy, that romantic wildness, which is so agreeable to the imagination (TMS I.ii.1.11).

Here there are a few points to note. Again, understanding Philoctetes's situation allows the imagination to put us in his place and sympathize. But notice Smith's emphasis on the circumstances downplays the role that Philoctetes's actual feeling has. His pain is not what we sympathize with. Rather, it's the circumstance of being alone that captures the imagination. This echoes Smith's claim that we *can't* feel what others feel, so we sympathize with what we should feel if we pay attention to their circumstance. Smithian sympathy, then, with its focus on the circumstances of others and not their particular feelings, appears to include animals. We might not be able to feel what a dog feels, for example, but we can sympathize with them if we understand their situation and the imagination can place us there.

2 COMMERCIAL SOCIETY AND SYMPATHY

Smithian sympathy can include animals. But unfortunately we don't appear to have much sympathy for animals. Roughly 10 billion birds and mammals are killed for food every year, often in terrible conditions, and another 25 million animals are used in experiments for research in the U.S. alone (Singer 2). When we consider (1) our ability to sympathize with animals, (2) our lack of sympathy for animals, and (3) Smith's claim that commercial society has adverse effects on our sympathy (TMS I.iii.3.1), it's worth considering what it is about our current situation in a commercial society that might be causing (2). In this section, I explore Smithian reasons for how commercial society fosters a lack of sympathy for animals.

Recall the impact that understanding someone else's situation has on sympathy. When we understand someone's situation, the imagination can place us there and we can figure out how we should feel in that situation. The impact of understanding someone else's situation is amplified when sympathizing with animals. This is for two reasons. First, sympathy depends in part on resemblance. Smith says, "those persons most excite our compassion and are most apt to affect our sympathy who most resemble ourselves, and the greater the distance the less we are affected by them" (LJA III.109; Hanley 47). Here we sympathize most with those who resemble ourselves because we can more easily enter their situation and understand how we would feel in their situation. Animals don't resemble us in the way that other humans do, and thus sympathizing with them is harder.

Understanding other animals' circumstances is also important because we often don't have any relationship with them. Smith points out that we sympathize more with our brothers and sisters than our cousins, and that "the affection gradually diminishes as the relation grows more and more remote" (TMS VI.ii.1.6.). Many of us don't have relationships with animals

outside of our pets. Given our lack of resemblance with animals, and our lack of relationships, understanding their situation is even more critical to sympathizing with them.

In a commercial society, the division of labor often keeps us from understanding the situation of animals. By “commercial society” Smith is speaking of a society where everybody “becomes in some measure a merchant” by exchanging their labor, or surplus goods from their labor, for other goods (WN 1.4.1). In this kind of society, a division of labor tends to take place. That is, we tend to specialize in a particular job. Smith characterizes the division of labor in the following way:

the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption for such parts of the produce of other men’s labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess (WN 1.2.4).

So we specialize to increase our ability to exchange. If our job is to make widgets, for example, then the more time we can spend making widgets and perfecting them, the more we’ll have to sell and the more we can charge for them since they’re of a higher quality.

Jobs with animals are similar. The veterinarian can help more animals if they dedicate their entire workday to it, which will increase profit and their ability to exchange. On the other hand, those of us not working with animals won’t get much exposure to them outside of our pets, since we’ll be busy with our own occupation. This means not many people will be exposed to the plight of animals because only so many jobs specialize in working with animals, and even less work with animals in stressful conditions. Jobs that do research by experimenting on animals, for example, require a high degree of specialization and education. And as far as agriculture is concerned, only about 1.3 percent of U.S. workers work on a farm (USDA 2021). Due to the division of labor, then, many of us won’t see what animals are going through.

This lack of exposure to animals hampers our sympathy because it means the imagination won't have what it needs to put us in their situation. Details, according to Smith, are what the imagination uses to place us in the situation of someone under distress. He writes:

In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiments between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavor as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents (TMS 1.i.4.6).

Smith speaks here about cases where one person is in distress and one isn't. He's wondering how there can be a correspondence of feeling between the two since partiality to ourselves will likely prevent sympathy with those in distress (TMS 1.i.4.2). It seems we must consider the minutest incidents of someone's situation before we can sympathize with their distress. We might, for instance, imagine how agonizingly boring the stainless-steel chambers are for the monkeys in the isolation experiments, or how bitterly cold it is to be in there alone.

Without details it's harder to place ourselves in the situation of animals. And if the imagination can't put us in their situation, we won't form any conception of how we should feel, and we won't be able to sympathize with them.

Not being able to see the situation of animals doesn't just hamper the imagination and possibly prevent sympathy in the first place. It also makes it easier to temper any sympathy we might have with animals. Smith writes, "we often struggle to keep down our sympathy with the sorrow of others. Whenever we are not under the observation of the sufferer, we endeavour, for our own sake, to suppress it as much as we can" (TMS I.iii.1.3). Here Smith's use of "it" refers to sympathy, and he's pointing out our tendency to protect ourselves by turning off our sympathy when we know it will be painful. Suppose, for example, we hear from a friend or a family member that animals are brutally treated in farms. We might think how terrible that is as we

make our way to the grocery store, but imagining ourselves in their situation and asking how we should feel if we were to endure similar treatment would be painful. So we'll try to suppress our sympathy, and it'll be easier given that we never have to see or smell or hear what animals are going through. Thus, commercial society is damaging to sympathy with animals because it (1) keeps us from seeing what they're going through and (2) makes it easier for us to suppress our sympathy when it's painful.

These reasons might not pertain only to a commercial society. Other societies have brutalized animals like we have and have also had a similar lack of sympathy. In 16th and 17th century England, for example, the practice of fighting animals to the death was very popular and became a commercial business (Andrews 2019). Do these other societies lack sympathy for similar reasons? If so, we haven't pointed to anything particular about commercial societies. What seems to be distinct about the lack of sympathy we see in our commercial society is the removal of exposure to the suffering of animals. At a dog fight, the suffering of the dogs is front and center, not on a secluded farm or lab. Similarly, in some hunter-gatherer societies, members of a community might perform different roles regarding food and survival, but the hunting and killing of animals for food is a main role (Robson & Kaplan 2006). So a lack of exposure to animal suffering doesn't appear to be a main reason for a lack of sympathy in some of these cultures. While the fighting and hunting of animals still happens in our commercial society, the widespread mistreatment of animals is largely kept out of view.

3 VIRTUE A (POSSIBLE) SOLUTION

Let's take stock. So far, we've seen that on Smith's view we can sympathize with animals and that our current treatment of them suggests we don't. We've also seen some reasons for how commercial society might promote a lack of sympathy for animals. While the effect that commercial society can have on our sympathy for animals was outside Smith's concern, he was concerned with how commercial society diminishes our sympathy with other people (TMS I.iii.3.1-8).

Smith suggests that this diminished sympathy is caused in part by abandoning virtue for wealth. He writes, "the candidates for fortune too frequently abandon the paths of virtue" (TMS I.iii.3.8). For Smith, we abandon the paths of virtue because commercial society channels our desire for approval into the acquisition of wealth, making us want to emulate the person whose character consists of "proud ambition and ostentatious avidity" rather than virtue (TMS I.iii.3.2). Marrying approval to wealth instills a "disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition" (TMS I.iii.3.1). This disposition means we'll approve of the rich even when they aren't worthy of approval (TMS I.iii.3.7) and ignore the poor when they are (TMS I.iii.2.5). Put differently, tying approval to wealth distorts who we sympathize with and how we treat them.

Smith seems to think that virtue is a possible solution to this problem. Those who strive to be virtuous care more about being praise-worthy than garnering praise (TMS III.2.7). As such, they'll evaluate their conduct from the view of an IS and they'll be indifferent to praise or approval when it's not warranted (TMS III.2.29). Evaluating their conduct impartially helps them evaluate others impartially, which gives them "a full sense of the merit of other people" and keeps their sympathy from being swayed by wealth or status (TMS VI.iii.25). The person

striving to be virtuous also knows that merely sympathizing with those they should is not enough, and they need to act on this sympathy (TMS II.iii.3.3). Thus for Smith virtue poses a possible solution to some of the downfalls of commercial society.

In what follows, I take up Smith's idea that virtue can help remedy mistreatment caused by a lack of sympathy. More specifically, I explore whether Smith's main virtues of justice and beneficence can remedy our current mistreatment of animals.

4 JUSTICE

Smith tells us about the virtue of justice in the following passage:

There is, however, another virtue, of which the observance is not left to the freedom of our own wills, which may be exhorted by force, and of which the violation exposes to resentment, and consequently to punishment. This virtue is justice: the violation of justice is injury: it does real and positive hurt to some particular persons, from motives which are naturally disapproved of (TMS II.ii.1.5).

There are a few things to note here. First, the virtue of justice is something that can be “exhorted by force.” This fits how many people feel about animals. All fifty states have animal cruelty laws that punish wrongful behavior towards animals and many animal rights activists express the need to increase legal protections for animals. In other words, some conduct towards animals is compelled, even if we disagree with the laws. Second, justice requires that someone be wronged from improper motives. Third, the person wronged feels resentment for their injury, which for Smith is the feeling of anger plus the sense of being wronged (TMS II.iii.1.5). Lastly justice is a “negative virtue,” according to Smith, requiring only that we refrain from harming others (TMS II.ii.1.9).

Our treatment of animals often seems to call for justice. The monkey who was deprived of any social interaction, for instance, whose only social response is fear, has clearly been harmed. And they’ve been harmed from improper motives. Advancing our own interests at the expense of others is “what no impartial spectator can go along with” according to Smith (TMS II.ii.2.1). So depriving a social creature like a monkey of any interaction for our own knowledge would not be something an IS sympathizes with. Experimenting on animals is not the only thing we do that appears unjust. Hunting animals for sport also appear unjust on Smith’s account.

Matthew Scully explains how dolphins are hunted:

As the net closes in, the men shout and clang on metal shafts attached to their boats, frightening the dolphins until at last they are herded into the

shallows, caught between the ship, the net and the quay. A dozen men step in and turn the water red with their clubs and knives and hooks. Dolphins have been observed aiding one another and actually staying in nets to drown with their companions rather than escape. Here, there is no chance for any of them as one by one the frantic victims are lassoed by the flukes and, half dead, hoisted by crane onto the dock (Scully 147).

Here we clearly harm the dolphins. Scully also explains that we hunt them either for meat or because they are competing for the same fish (Scully 148). Again, an IS would not sympathize with these hunter's motives or the harm that they cause. So experimenting on and hunting animals at least partially satisfy the conditions under which Smith thinks justice applies. That is, there is real positive harm from an improper motive.

The other condition for the virtue of justice to apply to a situation is that the harm in question must cause resentment. For Smith, resentment is a complex sentiment where three capabilities come into play. First, one must have the ability to cause pain. Second, one must be able to feel pain. Third, one must be able to produce pain in others *because* they feel that someone has wronged them. Smith explains this last capability: "The object, on the contrary, which resentment is chiefly intent upon, is not so much that our enemy feel pain in his turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon his past conduct" (TMS II.iii.1.6). This last capability is the one that animals don't have according to Smith. They don't have a sense of being wronged and they can't form an intention to produce pain in someone because of their past conduct. Chickens, for example, don't plot against their farmers because they feel they've been wronged.

But, as we've seen, Smithian sympathy allows for spectators to feel sentiments that others don't and are even incapable of feeling (TMS I.i.1.10). According to Patrick Frierson, emphasizing the spectator's feelings allows us to sympathize with animals and even nature. Frierson writes, "Nature does not itself have passions, and the spectator can have sympathy with nature only by importing her humanity into the process of

imagination that gives rise to sympathy” (Frieron 455). By importing ourselves into the situation of a rainforest for example and asking how we should feel if we were getting destroyed for our resources, we can sympathize with the rainforest’s resentment. This idea is supported by Smith’s claim that we can feel “imaginary resentment” on behalf of a friend who was wrongfully killed and “no longer capable of feeling that or any other human sentiment” (TMS II.1.2.5). If we can sympathize with the resentment of nature or the dead who can’t feel any sentiments at all, then feeling resentment on behalf of monkeys, dolphins, and other animals is possible.

It's not clear however that Smithian sympathy can make room for feeling sentiments on behalf of others who can’t feel them. Consider Smith’s following passage:

When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such character and profession, should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters (TMS VII.iii.1.4).

Here we can see that imagining ourselves in the situation of someone else means adopting their person and character. Imagining what it would be like to be a dolphin being hunted, for example, means imagining ourselves *as* a dolphin, not imagining what it would be like for us as human beings to be their situation. If that’s the case, then it seems we can’t feel resentment on behalf of animals because they don’t have the capacity for it on Smith’s view. Put differently, we’d imagine ourselves in the situation of a dolphin with the capacities of a dolphin, and while we would certainly be in pain and most likely be scared, we wouldn’t feel resentment. Because the virtue of justice depends on proper resentment, Smith doesn’t appear to think justice applies to animals.

Smith's claim that the spectator must adopt the perspective of the person principally concerned also means sympathizing with the resentment of animals will be more of a projection than actual sympathy. Smith consistently describes sympathy as "*fellow-feeling*," suggesting that someone else's perspective is an important part of sympathy (TMS I.i.1.5; I.iii.1.1; IV.2.10; emphasis added). In fact, on Smith's account we first develop our sympathetic capacities by adopting the perspectives of other children at school (TMS III.3.22). Adopting another's perspective is important because it provides a corrective tool to evaluate our own conduct. In a different passage, Smith says that the person who cannot adopt another's perspective "is provided with no mirror" through which he can "think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind" (TMS III.I.3). Another's perspective then is integral to sympathy because it allows us to evaluate our own sentiments. Since we can't adopt an animal's perspective and ask whether resentment is the proper sentiment in their situation, feeling resentment on their behalf will be more of a projection because it relies on the spectator's perspective alone. And, moreover, we won't be able to tell whether the resentment we feel is proper.

An IS might be able to help us here. After all, an IS's perspective is often the corrective tool we need to evaluate our own misleading sentiments (TMS III.2.31.fn). But an IS is still a human being. Smith describes an IS as "the man within," "the man within the breast," and "the great inmate of the breast" (TMS III.2.32; VII.ii.1.45; III.3.1). So the perspective of an IS is still going to be a human perspective, which means sympathizing with any resentment on behalf of animals will still lack the corrective tool of the animal's perspective. Given this, feeling resentment on behalf of animals is still both (A) a projection of how we as humans should feel in their situation and (B) a projection that lacks a view that we can use to evaluate and correct our

resentment. We can't enter an animal's situation and ask whether we should feel resentment from their perspective.

Smith is unlikely to condone any resentment that is unreflective in this way. Resentment naturally runs at a pitch that is too high for an IS to condone. In other words, resentment is unlikely to be proper even if we feel it. Smith writes, "Before resentment, therefore, can become graceful and agreeable, it must be more humbled and brought down below that pitch to which it would naturally rise, than almost any other passion" (TMS I.ii.3.1). Elsewhere Smith tells us that when it comes to resentment, "There is no passion, of which the human mind is capable, concerning whose justness we ought to be so doubtful" (TMS I.ii.3.8). Here we can see that resentment needs the corrective lens of a different perspective more than any other sentiment. Any projection of resentment, then, is at serious risk of being improper on Smith's view. For this reason, Smith is unlikely to condone resentment on behalf of animals.

Adopting a different perspective when sympathizing with resentment is important because it's likely improper but also because it's punitive. When someone is the proper object of resentment they deserve punishment (TMS II.i.2.3). So feeling resentment on behalf of animals would mean punishing people who mistreat them without any way to confirm if that resentment is the proper response. Smith tells us what an IS would think of punishing from unchecked resentment when he talks about treason:

That crime immediately affecting the being of the government itself, the government is naturally more jealous of it than any other. In the punishment of treason, the sovereign resents the injuries which are immediately done to himself: in the punishment of other crimes, he resents those which are done to other men. It is his own resentment which he indulges in the one case: it is that of his subjects which by sympathy he enters into the other. In the first case, therefore, as he judges his own cause, he is very apt to be more violent and sanguinary in his punishment than the impartial spectator can approve of (TMS II.iii.2.4).

Here the sovereign resents injuries that they themselves have incurred. Smith is clear that the resentment they feel will lead to unjust punishment that the IS can't condone. The reason the sovereign's resentment leads to unjust punishment is because the sovereign "judges his own cause," suggesting that he doesn't take any perspective outside of his own. Smith juxtaposes it with cases where the sovereign sympathizes with his subjects. In the case of the subjects' resentment, presumably the sovereign adopts their perspective and the resentment is more appropriate. Resentment on behalf of animals is similar to the case where the sovereign is the only judge because our resentment relies only on the feelings of the spectator and not the animal. The animal's perspective doesn't provide any way to evaluate our resentment and thus we become the only judge of our resentment. As such the punishment that stems from our resentment on behalf of animals is likely "more violent and sanguinary" than an IS would approve of.

Notice also Smith is careful not to call the case where the sovereign is their own judge sympathy. He calls it an indulgence. This raises the question of whether sympathy is even conceptually possible if we don't, or in some cases can't, adopt the perspective of someone who could at least in principle feel the same way. In other words, feelings that we don't or can't share are not feelings that Smith would say fall under the category of sympathy. He gives an example that supports this idea:

We are angry, for a moment, even at the stone that hurts us. A child beats it, a dog barks at it, a choleric man is apt to curse it. The least reflection, indeed, corrects this sentiment, and we soon become sensible, that what has no feeling is a very improper object of revenge (TMS II.iii.1.1).

Here the stone is incapable of feeling and thus the feelings we have towards it are improper. Importantly, "reflection" is what informs us that this is the case. Taking the stone's

perspective gives us nothing, which tells us our anger is misplaced. In slightly different way, animals can't feel resentment, and so feeling resentment on their behalf would not be understood as sympathy. Sympathy recall shows us the virtuous character, and sympathy with resentment is partly what determines whether the virtue of justice is appropriate. But if on Smith's account we can't properly be said to feel sympathy with the resentment of animals, then the virtue of justice won't apply to them. The meat eater or even the person who experiments on animals might be selfish and misguided but they can't on Smith's account be unjust.

Even if sympathizing with an animal's resentment was possible, it might not be proper in many cases. Smith tells us that, "Before we can adopt the resentment of the sufferer, we must disapprove of the motive of the agent, and feel that our heart renounces all sympathy with the affections which influenced his conduct" (TMS II.i.4.2). Here sympathizing with the resentment of the sufferer means we can't feel any sympathy with the motives of the person who caused the harm. We might not feel any sympathy with the professor who tortures a monkey for a publication or a fisherman who kills a dolphin to rid themselves of competition, but we can sympathize with the rancher who shoots a wolf to save their cattle or the mother who raises their children on meat because they wrongly believe that meat is the only source of cheap protein. This means that in many cases resentment will not be the proper response and thus that justice won't apply.

5 BENEFICENCE

Smith contrasts justice with beneficence. While justice is a negative virtue, which demands that we don't harm, beneficence is the virtue where we do "real positive good" (TMS II.ii.1.9). This means that beneficence is a broad concept and includes other virtues like "humanity" and "generosity" (TMS I.ii.4.1). Regardless of the form it takes, beneficence promotes gratitude in an IS and makes someone the proper object of reward (TMS II.i.2.3). For example finding a neighbor's lost cat would be a beneficent action.

Even though justice and beneficence have important differences, it seems the same problem that we had with justice arises with beneficence. Animals on Smith's account don't reward others for past conduct in the same way they don't punish people for past conduct, which means they don't feel gratitude (TMS II.iii.1.3). But if animals don't feel gratitude, then it seems any gratitude that we feel on behalf of animals will be a projection in the same way resentment was. For example, just like we can't take the dolphins perspective and ask whether resentment is appropriate when they're hunted, we can't take the perspective of the neighbor's cat and ask whether gratitude is appropriate when we return them to their owner. Any gratitude on behalf of the cat then would be more of a projection than it is sympathy, and Smith would be wary of it.

However, there are reasons to think that Smith has more room in his theory for projecting gratitude than he does resentment. The first reason is that an IS almost always approves of beneficence. Smith writes, "Generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship, esteem, all the social and benevolent affections, when expressed in the countenance or behavior, even towards those who are not peculiarly connected with ourselves, please the indifferent spectator upon almost every occasion" (TMS I.ii.4.1). Here benevolence is almost always proper no matter who the beneficiary is. Elsewhere, Smith tells us benevolence is agreeable even in

excess, “The too tender mother, the too indulgent father, the too generous and affectionate friend...can never be regarded with hatred or aversion” (TMS I.ii.4.3). Since beneficence is always approved of, and overindulging in it is still agreeable, the person who projects gratitude and acts on it does not have to worry that they are doing the wrong thing in the same way the person who projects resentment does. Put differently, the perspective of the person principally concerned is not needed as a guide to proper benevolence in the way it is for proper resentment. So Smith’s theory can condone acting beneficently towards animals even if it involves projection.

Benevolence is also practically possible because we have the resources. Smith writes, “Before we can feel much for others, we must in some measure be at ease ourselves” (TMS V.2.9). If our own desires and distress occupy our time and energy, then we’ll have “no leisure to attend to that of our neighbor” (TMS V.2.9). Commercial society, however, increases our quality of life and in many cases makes it possible for our benevolence to expand (TMS IV.i.10). According to the USDA, in 2021, 89.8% of households in America were food secure, meaning these households had little to no limitation on food-access (USDA 2021). In addition, Americans also average 5 hours of leisure time a day (Cohen et. al. 2017). These numbers suggest that many—though certainly not all—of us have the time and resources to turn our attention to others.

Not only can we satisfy our needs and look to our neighbor but we can do so in a way that includes animals. Commercial agriculture has allowed beans and other vegetables to become cheap alternatives to eating animals (Springmann et. al. 2021). These alternatives can do even more good than they already are. Peas and beans can yield about ten times as much protein per acre as meat, and the resources we would save by growing crops instead of raising animals is

substantial. Roughly half the water consumed in the U.S is by livestock, and in general growing crops is five-times more energy-efficient than grazing cattle and about twenty times more energy-efficient than raising chickens (Singer 167). Saving this much energy means extending our benevolence to animals could very well be a kindness to ourselves. In addition to agricultural alternatives, there are also alternatives to experimenting on animals, including computer simulations, mathematical models, and *in vitro* biological systems (Taylor 2019). So we have the resources to extend our benevolence to animals.

Given that benevolence is almost always approved of, and it's practically possible, what might an IS recommend we do on behalf of animals? Remember that benevolence is a broad concept for Smith. It involves any real positive good. Smith is also clear that benevolence has "no great merit where there is no temptation to do otherwise" (TMS VI.iii.11). So benevolence means doing a real positive good in the face of temptation, which according to Smith is often our own interests (TMS III.4.6). Given this picture of benevolence, it seems an IS would approve of a variety of behaviors towards animals. Among other things, volunteering at an animal shelter instead of picking up a different hobby, getting rid of meat in our diet, and experimenting in ways that don't involve animals, all seem to fit the bill.

One might wonder where the reward part of benevolence fits in this picture. If benevolence is based on gratitude *and* reward, and animals can't reward us with their actions or sympathy, then we might not be motivated enough to extend our benevolence. For Smith, the gratitude of an IS can act as its own reward. He writes, "Though their gratitude should not always correspond to his beneficence, yet the sense of merit, the sympathetic gratitude of the impartial spectator, will always correspond to it" (TMS VI.ii.1.19). Here benevolent actions

always garner the sympathy of an IS. This means that even if someone doesn't express their approval of our benevolence by rewarding us, we know we're deserving.

Knowing we deserve approval is a rich reward according to Smith. He tells us that, "the chief part of human happiness arises from the consciousness of being beloved" (TMS I.ii.5.1). So an awareness of what we are, or our self-approval, is important regardless of whether someone expresses their approval or tangibly rewards us. The importance of self-approval means that benevolence can extend to animals despite being rooted in reward. That's because the self-approval we gain from extending our benevolence to animals is its own reward.

Self-approval can also help us understand why, in a society that doesn't give much consideration to animals, we feel benevolence should extend to animals. Self-approval is based on the sympathy of an IS and according to Smith we have the "greatest desire" to act in ways that an IS sympathizes with (TMS II.ii.2.1). If we take an impartial view of our treatment of animals, however, we'll see many of us falling short of the virtue of benevolence. "To disturb his happiness merely because it stands in the way of our own," Smith writes, "is what no impartial spectator can go along with" (TMS II.ii.2.1). Animals suffer and often exist to be of use to us, which means that we grossly advance our interest at their expense, and we won't have the sympathy of an IS. We won't, at least as far as our behavior towards animals is concerned, be able to approve of ourselves.

It's important to note that an IS would not think that impartially acting on the interests of animals is always the right thing. As we've seen, an IS is a human being and so their sympathy will depend on the circumstances involved. Moreover, for Smith, our human needs can restrict our sympathy (TMS V.2.10). If we are worried about where our next meal is coming from or how we're going to save people from a pandemic, for example, we won't be worried about

extending our benevolence to animals. And on Smith's view we probably shouldn't. As he says, "Regard to our own private happiness and interest, too, appear upon many occasions very laudable principles of action" (TMS VII.ii.3.16). So while our current situation allows for our benevolence to extend to animals, this will not always be the case.

In situations where our benevolence should extend to animals and it doesn't, Smith's theory can't say much. Smith is clear that benevolence cannot be compelled in the way justice can. He writes, "Beneficence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force, the mere want of it exposes to no punishment" (TMS II.ii.1.3). In a different passage Smith explains that "Though Nature, therefore, exhorts mankind to acts of beneficence, by the pleasing consciousness of deserved reward, she has not thought it necessary to guard and enforce the practice" (TMS II.ii.3.4). So while Smith can say that extending our benevolence to animals is approved of, and our current situation recommends it, we can't on Smith's view compel any benevolence to animals.

The inability to enforce a standard of behavior towards animals makes a Smithian response to the current situation of animals unsatisfactory. To see this, we need only look what animals are going through. Take Singer's description of chickens on factory farms for example. Roughly 80,000 birds will be crowded into a small, dim, overheated space. The lack of space means these birds aren't allowed to socialize. Because they can't socialize, they can't establish a hierarchy and so they peck at each other, causing injury and even death. To mitigate the pecking, we debeak them. Singer describes the debeaking process as follows:

Today specifically designed guillotinelike devices with hot blades are the preferred instrument. The infant chick's beak is inserted into the instrument, and the hot blade cuts off the end of it. The procedure is carried out very quickly, about fifteen birds a minute. Such haste means that the temperature and sharpness of the blade can vary, resulting in sloppy cutting and serious injury to the bird (Singer 101).

Singer goes on to explain that the rate at which we are debeaking chicks should not desensitize us to the pain we are inflicting. Debeaking means cutting through bone and sensitive tissue that makes the process excruciating for the chick. Chickens, however, are not the only animal that suffers on the farm. David Barboza describes what happens to pigs when they arrive at one farm in North Carolina:

Squealing hogs funnel into an area where they are electrocuted, stabbed in the jugular, then tied, lifted and carried on a winding journey through the plant. They are dunked in scalding water, their hair is removed, they are run through fiery furnace (to burn off residual hair), then disemboweled and sliced by an army of young, often immigrant laborers (Barboza 2009).

At this farm alone, roughly 2,000 pigs per hour will suffer this treatment. Many will be improperly stunned and go through this process with all their senses intact (Sully 283). Suffering like this doesn't just happen on farms and it doesn't just happen to animals we would think of as farm animals. A variety of animals are involved in experiments that inflict similar pain. One nonprofit focusing on maternal and infant health, funded the following research experiments:

For the researchers, it meant taking a group of kittens, sewing shut the eyelids of half of them while rearing the others for one year in total darkness, and then killing them all to examine the effects of this experience on their brains. The March of Dimes has also funded experiments administering massive doses of cocaine, nicotine, and alcohol to animals...still another experiment involved implanting wires into the uteri of pregnant monkeys who spend fifty to sixty days at a time in a cage, in a straitjacket, tethered to a wall (Sully 379).

Here we see that animal suffering goes beyond the farm. Kittens, monkeys, rats, and various other animals are used in experiments daily. The effectiveness of these experiments has been called into question both on the grounds that animals and humans are too different for there to be meaningful findings and that the overall evidence for their utility is questionable (Akhtar 2015; Marks 2010). We know how alcohol effects the human brain, for instance, administering it to animals won't avail us much. Given the questionable utility of animal experiments, and the

alternatives we have at our disposal to avoid such experiments, it seems a lot of suffering inflicted because of experiments is unnecessary and further indicate a need for change.

These examples are a very small part of the overall suffering that animals endure. As we've seen, Smith can tell us why we should do better by animals, but he doesn't have the resources to tell us why our behavior *must* change. Smith himself might find this unsatisfactory. "Man was made for action," according to Smith, and "He must not be satisfied with indolent benevolence, nor fancy himself the friend of mankind, because in his heart he wishes well to the prosperity of the world" (TMS II.iii.3.3). If, as Smith thinks, our benevolence can embrace animals as well as mankind, then any benevolence that falls short of action will be mere well-wishes.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, we've looked at how Smith's ideas of sympathy and virtue can help us think about our treatment of animals. We've seen that Smith thinks we can sympathize with animals but also that many current practices suggest we don't have much sympathy for animals. We've explored Smith's idea that commercial society diminishes our sympathy and how this might affect animals. For Smith, sympathy depends on the imagination's ability to place us into the circumstances of others, and commercial society impedes our sympathy with animals by depriving the imagination of a good look at their circumstances. Smith's solution to misguided sympathy appears to be virtue, and so we looked at Smith's two main virtues of justice and beneficence to see if they provide an adequate solution. Smith's virtue of justice did not provide an adequate solution because it's not open to animals. Given that animals can't feel resentment, justice for animals would mean projecting resentment on their behalf, something that Smith would not condone. Smith's virtue of beneficence was also an inadequate solution. While beneficence towards other animals is always proper and encouraged, according to Smith it can't be enforced. This is unsatisfactory given the suffering animals are experiencing at this very moment.

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