Austin Lamb

The Conditional Imperative: Smith and Kant on Moral Duties

*Introduction*

Recent comparisons between Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant have tended to emphasize the similarities between their theories of moral motivation (Mordacci, “From Sympathy to Respect”; Welsh, “Respect and Adam Smith’s Impartial Spectator”), the parallels in their moral and economic thought (White, “Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant: On Markets, Duties, and Moral Sentiments”) or their shared project of cooling the passions through their generalization (Fleischacker, “Philosophy in Moral Practice”). Neil MacCormick has even offered a synthesis between the two in the form of a “Smithian Categorical Imperative” (*Practical Reason in Law and Morality*).[[1]](#footnote-1) Whatever the value of these contributions in moral philosophy at large, and however similar the aim of each moral system may be, too close a *rapprochement* between Smith and Kant risks obscuring their radically different conceptual grounds. I suggest that Smith cannot be Kantified, nor Kant Smithified, without losing the unique virtues of Smith’s sentimentalism or Kant’s rationalism. This is clearest, I believe, in each thinker’s treatment of moral obligation. What is the ground of duty? Smith bases his account of duty or general moral rules in a broader analysis of sympathetic moral approbation and the imaginative construct of the impartial spectator. Kant, meanwhile, believes he had found a universal and objective ground for duty in the categorical imperative. In brief, Smith sees moral duties as abstractions from sympathetic judgments, while Kant sees duty as the immediate dictate of a practical reason that has been divorced from sentiment entirely; and while Kant places duty at the peak of his moral system, Smith subordinates duty to an account of virtue that transcends mere rule-following.

Susan Shell has called the categorical imperative Kant’s solution to the problems of Smith’s impartial spectator (*The Rights of Reason* 102). The solution to problems of the impartial spectator may create its own problems, however. Just as one could accuse Smith of failing to adequately ground moral obligation, one could accuse Kant of a formalism that is bereft of content and a description of duty that fails to answer our moral sentiments. By putting Smith and Kant in conversation on this subject, I hope to shore up the unique and incompatible features of each view of duty—features which efforts to synthesize the two tend to obscure. I will begin with a brief account of Kant’s grounding of moral obligation in practical reason. I will then turn to a close reading of Smith’s treatment of general moral rules in Part III of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, putting him in dialogue with Kant where appropriate. I hope what follows will help clarify the conceptual differences between the Enlightenment’s two greatest moralists, as well as elucidate some of the problems inherent in any philosophic account of moral obligation.

*The “Division of Labor” in Moral Philosophy*

Kant opens his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* with what is in all likelihood a reference to Smith: “All trades, crafts, and arts have gained by the division of labor.” When work “is not so differentiated and divided…there the trades remain in the greatest barbarism” (4:388).[[2]](#footnote-2) And yet Kant immediately uses Smith’s economic principle to cut the legs out from Smith’s moral philosophy. If the division of labor benefits the trades, Kant asks, why not apply it to moral philosophy? If “the nature of science [requires] that the empirical part always be carefully separated from the rational part,” such that “the metaphysics of morals” must stand apart from “practical anthropology,” then a so-to-speak specialized study of moral concepts would reveal, contrary to Smith’s own intentions, the possibility and superiority of a *pure* moral philosophy, unadulterated by any need for sympathetic moral approbation. Already we can see why duty will take on a radically different meaning for Kant than it does for Smith, whose sentimentalist moral theory is fundamentally empirical. Smith embraces empiricism for several reasons. For one, Smith’s is a theory of moral *sentiments* which takes the imaginative faculty of sympathy to be what makes moral judgments possible. Judgments of moral propriety or impropriety are made through the consideration of whether an idealized impartial spectator would approve of an action or sentiment in a particular circumstance. This process is both sentimental and social: sentimental because moral judgment is rooted in the sense of approbation, and social because one’s sense of approbation naturally implicates the approbation of others—first the approbation of other particular human beings, and later the approbation of an idealized general humanity (Cropsey 639). If this is the case, then moral reasoning is impossible without appeal to experience.

Additionally, Smithian morality is less about the discovery of a fixed rational standard for right action in all circumstances than it is the development of a conscience that can act and feel rightly in any circumstance. It is good to remember here that Smith is not doctrinaire about the division of labor, and he would certainly not apply it to moral reasoning. Even as Smith lauds the material increase made possible by the division of labor, he is well aware of its shortcomings. He fears that too great a division of labor would lead to alienation and the degradation of mankind to a condition of stupidity and animality (*Wealth of Nations* V.i.f.50-g.14). More to the point, Smith’s ambition in TMS is to create *one* systematic account of moral reasoning on the basis of sympathy—not a divorce of reason from empirical sentiments but a synthesis between them in the imagination. It is not as if Smith has not considered the possibility of a strictly rational morality; Smith has simply judged that a morality restricted to general rules established by reason would be inadequate to the subject matter. Smith is ultimately a virtue ethicist (albeit a distinctly modern one), and his account of virtue, like Aristotle’s, admits only the exactness that its subject matter permits (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b13-15). Part IV of TMS, “Of the Character of Virtue,” provides not a fixed definition of virtue but a series character portraits exemplifying three or four cardinal virtues—portraits whose compatibility with one another is unclear—and he later argues that generalities are often more appropriate to moral treatises than are tables of abstract duties (VII.iv.2-5). Smith’s account of general moral rules in Part III accounts for their origins (the sentiments), uses (providing a secure moral standard in times of distress), and authority (God), but if virtue transcends mere rule-following, then general moral rules cannot be the last word on ethics.

Now, this is not to say that Smith had seen the critical philosophy in advance. That a rationalist moral philosophy should consist not of rule-following but the autonomous rule-*making* of practical reason is a Kantian innovation, and it may provide a more compelling ground for moral obligation than Smith’s empiricism. Kant is of course aware of the virtues of empirical moral reasoning, which he calls “practical anthropology” (4:388). Kant nonetheless eschews empiricism as a proper ground for moral reasoning because experience cannot establish moral duty as obligatory or necessary. Smith’s general moral rules, Kant would say, are not *duties*. Smith gives an account of the “sense of duty” but fails to ground duty itself, precisely because he is entangled in empiricism. “Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity,” Kant argues. The “ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in the concepts of pure reason; and…any other precept, which is based on principles of mere experience—even if it is universal in a certain respect—insofar as it rests in the least part on empirical grounds, perhaps only in terms of a motive, can indeed be called a practical rule but never a moral law” (4:389). Smithian morality is indeed “universal in a certain respect,” in the sense that its standard is the approbation of an idealized general humanity, and that it escapes moral relativism despite its sentimental basis (See Carrasco, “Adam Smith: Virtues and Universal Princples” (2014) and Frazer, “Sentimentalism Without Relativism” (2013)). But this is to no account, for Kant, if Smith is unable to establish the judgments of the impartial spectator as *necessary* for the person principally concerned—to say what is the interest of the impartial spectator in the good, and why one must obey him.

Kant believes he, on the other hand, is able to ground the necessity of morality in the logic of the will alone, quite apart from instinct or sentiment. The only thing we call good without limitation, Kant argues, is a good will. The talents of the mind, virtue, character, and fortune—all of these are desirable only on the condition of a good will, which is for that reason “the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.” Kant seems to suggest this is true even on Smithian terms, as “an impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will” (4:393). Be that as it may, Kant declares that the aim of natural instinct is happiness, but that because reason rules or supervenes on instinct, it must have a different aim and a different satisfaction (4:495). Reason’s “highest practical vocation” is therefore not happiness but “the establishment of a good will,” and its satisfaction comes from "fulfilling an end which in turn only reason determines, even if this should be combined with many infringements upon the ends of inclination” (4:396). A good will—the aim of a reason understood as distinct from and ruling over the sentiments—must have an end distinct from the empirical state of happiness.

What, then, is a good will? In order to explicate this, Kant says, “we shall set before ourselves the concept of duty, which contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances, which…bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the more brightly” (4:397). The concept of duty, that is, contains the concept of a good will and makes it intelligible for us. Kant goes on to distinguish between actions done in conformity with duty and actions done from duty. Actions done *in conformity with* duty are actions which align with the dictates of reason but are undertaken for some other “self-seeking purpose” or immediate, natural inclination. Actions done *from duty* are done for the sake of duty alone, over and against natural inclination. To preserve one’s life, for example, is a duty. But most people preserve their life because they want to live, not because they have a duty to live. In this case, the preservation of one’s life has no moral content, as it would in the case of a man who “wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty” (4:398). Only in the latter case is the concept of duty, and thus the goodness of the will, operative and intelligible.

One might say that the distinction between acting in conformity with and acting from duty is made for two reasons, one epistemological and one moral. The epistemological reason is that the concepts of duty and the good will are intelligible only if they are divorced from any other motives or inclinations. Only if one acts out of respect for the concept of duty alone can one be sure one’s action is determined entirely by the goodness of one’s will. To be sure, a man who loves life can nonetheless preserve his life simply because he has a duty to live, but the admixture of the natural desire to live for its own sake makes it awfully hard to tell. The moral claim implicit in this distinction is that, even if one’s actions *conform with duty*, they are only moral in the precise sense if they are done *for the sake of duty*. This is not the case for Smith, who is at great pains to align the exercise of duty with happiness, and who argues that the cooperation of other motives alongside respect for duty often supervenes on and perfects the observance of duty—a point I will return to later. For Kant, meanwhile, the *only* permissible ground of a moral action is respect for law or duty as such (4:400).

The result of Kant’s insistence on acting from duty alone is that moral obligations must be understood as laws, which can be commanded as duties, and not the result of “melting sympathy,” which as a natural inclination, cannot be established as a duty.[[3]](#footnote-3) Law alone rises to the level of necessity and obligation. Now, law is not the material object of an action but the formal principle according to which it is done. The concept of duty implicates and requires the moral law because “an action from duty has moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon,” that is, “the *principle of volition* in accordance with which an action is done without regard for any object of the faculty of desire” (4:399-400). In other words, the very notion of acting according to principle entails a will whose subjective ground for action is nothing other than respect for the formal requirements of law as such. And, as it turns out, the will *is* practical reason: “Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary.” But reason does not infallibly determine the will. Subjective conditions and incentives conflict with reason, and so the objectively necessary moral law is subjectively contingent for human beings (4:412-3).

Kant defines duty as the necessity of an action from respect for law (4:400). To act *from duty* is therefore the exclusive means to make the objective moral law subjectively necessary: One acts objectively on the basis of the universal form of law as such, and subjectively through the autonomous generation of subjective maxims which align with the objective ground of universality (4:431). A good will, then, is a rational will—a will that represents the universal, objective requirements of law as such as at the same time necessary for itself. The goodness of the will is the emancipation of the will from empirical contingency and its deliverance to the universal requirements of autonomous self-legislation. A full account of the categorical imperative would take me beyond my aims in this essay.For my purposes here, it is sufficient to explain why Kant believes duty must take the form of universal imperatives: The will *is* practical reason; if reason is to determine our actions, our actions must be determined by the will and the will alone; the goodness of the will consists in its autonomous self-legislation; and the logic self-legislation—the giving of laws to oneself—requires that the laws one gives oneself hold immediately and universally. With this ground-laying done, let me turn to Smith.

*The Uses and Abuses of Moral Duty*

Smith discusses duty and general moral rules in Part III of TMS. But his subject is not duty in itself so much as our “sense” of duty; and the subject of Part III is more properly “our Judgments Concerning our own Sentiments and Conduct,” of which the sense of duty is one aspect (III.1.1). Duty does not command, for Smith—it is essentially an abstraction from ground-level sympathetic judgments of propriety. Where such an abstraction can be made well, Smith will say, the sense of duty ought to be the governing principle of our conduct; where the matter at hand does not admit of such an abstraction, or where a general rule cannot reliably determine one’s action on its own, “other motives” ought to coincide with duty (III.6.1). Kant, as we saw, argues that duty or respect for law ought to be the sole determinant of our conduct. For Smith, duty cannot do this. His chapter introducing general rules of morality is titled, “Of the Nature of Self-deceit, and the Origin and Use of general Rules” (III.4.1). Moral duties, we are meant to understand, do not precede but proceed from sympathetic judgments of propriety: Each general moral rule has a problematic “origin” and a “use” which is not exhaustive.

Smith’s treatment of duty is preceded by chapters on self-approbation and self-disapprobation; praise and praise-worthiness; and the conscience and the self-command. Part III of TMS marks a turn from judgments concerning the sentiments and conduct of others to self-judgments. This turn occasions TMS’s most explicit discussion of the impartial spectator and the virtue of self-command, which together constitute Smith’s standard for reflective moral judgments. The discussion of general moral rules comes only afterward, and its relationship to this standard is not straightforward. General rules of morality are first presented as a solution to the problem of self-deceit or faulty self-approbation (Chapter 4), then interpreted as the commands of God (Chapter 5), and finally tempered in light of the danger of a fanatical, overdetermined sense of duty (Chapter 6).

It seems that Smith does not reason from duty but builds toward it, assigning it a crucial but subordinate place in his moral system. Moral duties are conditioned by the ideal of an impartial general humanity and the virtue of self-command (Chapter 3), restricted to those matters that admit for exact rules of conduct (such as the negative rules of justice in III.6.8-11), and in large measure overcome by the perfectly virtuous man, whose moral sense transcends the mere exercise of duty (III.5.1-2). Thus while general moral rules or duties play a crucial role, they are by no means the peak of Smith’s moral thought, as they are for Kant. This is partly because Smith fears the dangers of dogmatic moral reasoning in a way that Kant, who has purged reason of its dogmatic tendencies in advance through critique, does not believe he needs to. If general moral rules provide a minimal moral standard that makes good for the dangers of selfish self-deceit, that is, they open up the possibility of a deeper kind of self-deceit: fanaticism. When one mistakes abstractions from moral judgments for the essence of morality, and allows false abstractions to take their place, one replaces a defect of principle with an excess of principle that is even more dangerous. Nowhere is the impartial spectator “at a greater distance,” or the will of God more obscure, than in great conflicts of principle: “Of all the corrupters of moral sentiments, therefore, faction and fanaticism have always been by far the greatest” (III.3.43). Smith’s general moral rules, one might say, chart a middle course between unprincipled, passionate conduct on the one hand and an overdeveloped, fanatical sense of duty on the other. They are at the same time a defense of the duties we can know and a critique of duties we cannot know.

Let me turn to the text. Smith begins Chapter 4 with a treatment of the difficulty of remaining impartial in times of great passion or distress: “So partial are the views of mankind with regard to the propriety of their own conduct, both at the time of action and after it; and so difficult is it for them to view it in the light in which any indifferent spectator would consider it,” that our passions can induce our imagined spectator to make a report that is partial to our own interests (III.4.5, III.4.1). The difficulties of the impartial spectator—both the difficulty of adhering to the judgments of the impartial spectator and, more importantly, the susceptibility of the impartial spectator himself to our “misrepresentations of self-love” and “paroxysms of emotion”—lead Smith to introduce “general rules of morality,” which are first formed “by finding from experience, that all actions of a certain kind, or circumstanced in a certain manner, are approved and disapproved of,” and then adhered to regardless of our own sentiments when we find ourselves in like circumstances (III.4.8). By observing that certain actions are universally approved of or condemned, and resolving to trust in our present judgment of the propriety or impropriety of those actions in advance, we can make up for the defects of the impartial spectator in the heat of the moment.

Strikingly, Smith’s concept of self-deceit describes not only the failure to adhere to the judgments of the impartial spectator but the corruption of the impartial spectator *himself*. Rejecting the correct judgments of the impartial spectator in favor of our own self-interest would be a forthright rejection of duty. A deeper kind of self-deceit involves the belief that we are acting morally when we really are not—for example, carving out a casuistical exception for ourselves in the “heat and keenness with which our peculiar situation inspires us,” in which “the passions…all justify themselves, and seem reasonable and proportioned to their object” (III.4.3). Once the moment has passed, we can appraise the situation more coolly, but this is often to no avail: “The opinion which we entertain of our own character depends entirely on our judgments concerning our past conduct,” and it is a rare man who does not allow “the mysterious veil of self-delusion” to cover “the deformities of his own conduct” (III.4.4). But if the impartial spectator is Smith’s standard for moral judgment, how could he be susceptible to such delusions? It is helpful to remember here that Smith’s impartial spectator is not a fixed external standard that is *arrived at* through proper moral reasoning, but an imaginary construction that is *developed* through constant self-reflection. One therefore cannot *know* in the precise sense whether the “man within the breast” is sufficiently impartial, especially in the throes of passion. Given this difficulty, general moral rules are a means to develop the conscience by holding fast to sound judgments when the conscience fails, at least in situations which admit for the application of a general rule.

Where, then, do general moral rules come from? The answer is “nature,” which in this case means the sentiments of mankind in general. General moral rules mediate between the judgments of mankind and our self-judgments (III.4.7). The innate interest in the happiness of others which Smith announces in the first sentence of TMS—the immediate pleasure we take in knowing that our judgments are in concord with the judgments of others—is now called nature’s remedy for self-deceit, “the fatal weakness of mankind” (III.4.6). Self-approbation would be worth little if it had no connection to the actual or ideal judgments of society—which is at any rate the “mirror” which makes self-approbation possible in the first place (III.1.3). When we see that actions we ourselves condemn are universally condemned by others, our judgment is confirmed, and we “resolve never to be guilty of the like”; and when we see actions that we ourselves approve are universally approved by others, we “become ambitions of performing the like.” In both cases, we “naturally” lay down a rule for ourselves to perform or avoid certain actions categorically, regardless of what our impartial spectator will later tell us in the heat of the moment (III.4.7).

Note what has happened. Smith has found a way to account for the origin (the natural drive to seek concord with the judgments of others) and purpose (correcting for the unreliability of self-judgments) of moral rules without leaving the plane of the sentiments. He does not need to argue, as Kant does, that morality means the rule of reason over sentiment. Instead of distinguishing between pure reason and empirical instinct, Smith distinguishes between the impartial sentiments of general humanity and the partial sentiments of the agent principally concerned. From this perspective, general moral rules appear as the sentiments of an idealized general humanity which have been abstracted through experience into fixed principles. Smith thus retains sentiment, or particular judgments of propriety based on sentiment, as the standard for moral reasoning: General rules of morality “are ultimately founded upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve, or disapprove of” (III.4.8). Conformity to rules does not determine the propriety of conduct; the propriety of conduct, ascertained through experience, creates rules.

This is, obviously, the exact opposite of Kant’s account of the origin of moral duties. For Kant, any experiential or sentimentalist account is unable to establish the universality and necessity of a duty. In order to say that an exhortation or prohibition is obligatory and necessary—that it is truly a duty—its ground of obligation must be shown to lie beyond (or rather prior to) experience. All moral concepts, Kant argues, “have their seat and origin completely a priori in reason, [and] they cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognitions” (4:411). If they are merely abstracted from experience, as Smith says they are, they are not really *moral* concepts, and they are not binding as duties. In Kant’s terms, they would be hypothetical rather than categorical (4:413): *If* one seeks an imaginative concord with the judgments of general humanity, *then* one ought to follow the rules of an idealized general humanity when those conflict with one’s own judgments. Even if all humanity agreed on a moral rule, and one’s own sense of approbation endorsed it, it would still be ungrounded, because any law that is to hold for all rational beings universally must be derived purely from the concept of a rational being as such (4:412).

This is not to say that Smithian morality is in any sense relativistic. A developed impartial spectator is shown to able to resist the judgments of society (III.2.32-33), and Smith condemns the ancient practice of infanticide as a perversion of natural sentiments even though it was supported by custom (V.2.15-16).[[4]](#footnote-4) The question at hand is the proper grounding of moral obligation, not whether morality should be understood as general or universal—a point on which Smith and Kant agree. Samuel Fleischacker is therefore right to point out that Kant’s categorical imperative, “like Smith’s conscience and moral rules, seems to function as a remedy for self-deceit” (“Philosophy in Moral Practice” 264). Both Smith and Kant use generalization or universalization as a means to cool the passions and arrive at sound moral judgments. But there are important conceptual differences between Smithian generality and Kantian universality, and Fleischacker goes too far in interpreting Kantian universality as an effort “not so much to found a morality that will embrace or transcend all empirical differences between people, as to cast a moral net wide enough to entangle the empirical self in the strictures it would rather apply only to others” (264). It is certainly true that the categorical imperative requires empirical or subjective considerations *for its application*: The negative, objective ground of practical lawgiving is universality—the form of rule-making as such—against which positive, subjective maxims are to be tested (4:431). But if practical lawgiving is not grounded in rational universality—if universal self-legislation is not established as the immediate command of transcendental reason—then it is not clear why the generalization or universalization of subjective maxims would constitute a duty. Kant is clear that the objective ground of practical lawgiving cannot be derived from “the special natural constitution of humanity.” The peculiar nature of human beings “can indeed yield a maxim for us but not a law; it can yield a subjective principle on which we might act if we had the propensity and inclination, but not an objective principle on which we would be *directed* to act even though every propensity, inclination, and natural tendency of ours were against it” (4:425). The only objective principle that can so direct our action is the universality of pure practical reason, unadulterated by the anthropological investigation of a merely human nature.

As Susan Shell puts it, Kant’s solution to the problems of Smith’s impartial spectator “is based in universal self-legislation, rather than in a neutrality fostered by non-participation.” It is “not the negation of interest but its universalization that yields results in touch with the interest of all men” (Shell 102). In other words, while Kant universalizes critical reason in order to ground moral duties, Smith generalizes the sentiments in order to orient human beings toward virtue—an ordering in which the sense of duty plays a vital but limited role. Fleischacker disagrees with Shell on this point, and would like to dismiss the universality of reason as an unclear, unsatisfying, and unnecessary piece of Kant’s moral system (265). Contrary to a common reading of Kant, Fleischacker argues, “the categorical imperative is not intended to be a recipe for the invention of a universal morality” (264). But Fleischacker’s divorce of universality from reason seems to be predicated on a misunderstanding of what universality means in this context. It is true that Kant’s universalism and cosmopolitanism need not be read as a movement to abolish all differences between people or peoples. But if reason is freedom, and if reason is prior to the infinite regress of empirical considerations—as Fleischacker admits—then reason must be universal. A priori truths are defined by universality and necessity (*Critique of Pure Reason* B3-4). The only way in which we can arrive at moral truths prior to experience, that is, is by derivation from a rational faculty that universally and necessarily belongs also to all other rational beings: If a moral truth did not hold universally, we would not be able to recognize it as a truth that precedes experience. Thus the very attempt at a pure moral philosophy implicates the Kingdom of Ends as regulative, cosmopolitan ideal (4:433). Universality is not the extension of reason but an attribute of reason itself. To interpret Kant’s practical reason as a strategy to make Smithian generalizations more effectively not only reads Kant into Smith in a way that makes Kant unrecognizable, but leads to Fleishhacker’s curious claim that Kantian morality is compatible with cultural relativism—a result that both Kant and Smith are at great pains to avoid (264). Here again the Smithification of Kant (or the Kantification of Smith) at the same time obscures the conceptual differences between the two and frustrates their shared moral aims.

To return from this digression, Smith goes on to address the perils and promise of reasoning from general moral rules. Reasoning fromgeneral rules that have already been acknowledged and established, Smith says, is useful in moral practice but misleading in moral reasoning (III.4.11). Its usefulness consists in “correcting the misrepresentations of self-love concerning what is fit and proper to be done in a particular situation” (III.4.12). A man overtaken by passion recalls the general rule prohibiting the action he is about to undertake and is restrained by his sacred regard for the rule. The utility of moral rules in practice and debate, however, has “misled several very eminent authors”—Smith seems to mean natural law theorists—to the theoretical error of taking general moral rules to be “the ultimate foundations of what is just and unjust in human conduct…as if they had supposed that the original judgments of mankind with regard to right and wrong, were formed like the decisions of a court of judicatory, by first considering the general rule, and then, secondly, whether the particular action under consideration fell properly within its comprehension” (III.4.11). In moral practice, a general rule *pre*scribes or *pro*scribes a certain course of action; but in truth, a general rule *de*scribes the more fundamental phenomenon of sympathetic approbation or disapprobation.

It is important to note, however, that the application of this critique to Kantian moral thought is questionable. The natural law theorists Smith critiques had regarded knowledge of moral rules as a product of theoretical reason: Through reason, one discerns true moral standards and takes them to be the dictates of nature, God, or nature’s God. But Kant denies that there can be *theoretical* knowledge of morality (or for that matter, of God), and he denies that following the dictates of a higher power (whether that be nature, the sovereign, or God) is morality in the precise sense. In the first place, our knowledge of morality is practical, not theoretical, meaning that moral rules are imposed by reason upon nature rather than derived from our observations of it. In the second place, to follow a natural, human, or divine law for the sake of attaining happiness or avoiding punishment is not yet morality, because the former entails acting in conformity to a rule for the sake of something other than respect for duty or the formal requirements of rule-making itself. Hence Kant’s derivation of morality from freedom—his insistence that morality is essentially autonomous self-*legislation* rather than *judgment* according to principles discovered by theoretical reason. Moral laws must be generated by the rational subject, not arrived at, as Smith says, “like the decisions of a court of judicatory.” Curiously enough, then, Kant would follow Smith’s rejection of the natural law basis for moral duty.

For now, the problem remains for Smith: Why, besides the innate pleasure Smith claims we take in concord with the judgments of others, should one follow the general rules of morality? What interest does the impartial spectator have in the good?[[5]](#footnote-5) Smith thus turns from the “origin and use” of general moral rules to their “influence and authority” (Chapter 5).

*The Theodicy of the Moral Sentiments*

Having accounted for the genealogy of duties, Smith now defines the “sense” of duty: “The regard to those general rules of conduct, is what is properly called a sense of duty, a principle of the greatest consequence in human life, and the only principle by which the bulk of mankind are capable of directing their actions.” Note that “the bulk of mankind” stand in greatest need of general moral rules. While “the happiest mould are capable of suiting, with exact justness, their sentiments and behaviour to the smallest difference of situation…[the] course clay of which the bulk of mankind are formed cannot be wrought up to such perfection” (III.5.1). Perfectly virtuous men, we are led to understand, have little need for general moral rules; but because perfectly virtuous men are extremely rare, human society “would crumble into nothing if mankind were not generally impressed with a reverence for…rules of conduct.” Hence the “sacred regard to general rules” marks “the most essential difference between a man of principle and honour and a worthless fellow” (III.5.2). There may be a natural elite whose mature sense of propriety makes the sense of duty more or less superfluous, but the sense of duty gives steadiness and coherence to the lives of most men, saving them from slavery to passion, self-interest, and chance.

But if this “most essential difference” between principle and passion is to have any currency, general moral rules must be given sacred authority. The sense of duty, Smith says, is “enhanced by an opinion which is first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy, that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will finally reward the obedient, and punish the transgressors of duty” (III.5.3). General moral rules, we now learn, are also the commands of God. And yet general moral rules arise from nature (not God), as we have seen; and Smith says that the religious reverence for general moral rules is first impressed by *nature* (not God). Religion is treated here as a natural support for the basic moral requirements of human society; religion is nature’s practical guarantee of morality in the face of reason’s inability to make morality effective for the great bulk of mankind. Even pagan religion, Smith argues, had its basis in the sympathetic propagation of natural moral sentiments: “That the terrors of religion should thus enforce the natural sense of duty, was of too much importance to the happiness of mankind, for nature to leave it dependent upon the slowness and uncertainty of philosophic researches” (III.5.5). But Smith does not mean to leave duty in thrall to “the terrors of religion.” Now that reason is able to account for the true origins and aims of the sense of duty, Smith’s task is both to defend reason’s interpretation of duties as divine laws and to qualify our embrace of those laws in light of their natural origin. In other words, the defense of general moral rules as “the commands and laws of the Deity” is at the same time a limitation of divine laws *to* the natural sentiments, which Smith calls the “viceregents” of God within us (III.5.6).

The following passages of TMS could be said to constitute Smith’s theodicy of the moral sentiments—his attempt to defend the authority of moral reason in general, and moral rules in particular, against unprincipled inclination on the one hand and fanatical religion on the other. Smith gives four arguments in favor of the divine authority of the moral sentiments. The first is that the moral faculties have a unique authority because they alone rule the other faculties and determine our conduct. “Upon whatever we suppose that our moral faculties our founded,” Smith argues, “whether upon an original instinct, called a moral sense, or upon some other principle of nature, it cannot be doubted, that they were given us for the direction of our conduct in this life” (III.5.5).[[6]](#footnote-6) No matter how they are founded, the argument runs, the existence of our moral faculties is sufficient to establish their right to rule the sentiments: “Love does not judge of resentment, nor resentment of love,” but moral sentiments do judge of other sentiments, and thus “[t]hey carry alone with them[selves] the most evident badges of this authority” (III.5.5). Because the moral sentiments are uniquely and naturally able to judge of other sentiments, they ought to.

In other words, the authority of sympathetic moral approbation and disapprobation stems from a natural hierarchy within the sentiments. The very ability of some sentiments to sanction or restrain others implies the existence of a set of faculties that is sovereign over them, and these are, by definition, the moral faculties. They are sovereign because they have the exclusive power to determine moral judgments: “The very words right, wrong, fit, improper, graceful, unbecoming, mean only what pleases or displeases those faculties” (III.5.5). Because our sentiments are at least in principle capable of ordering themselves under the natural authority of the moral faculties, there is no need to appeal to an authority beyond the plane of the sentiments. One might say that the reflective, sympathetic exercise of the moral faculties isthe sentiments’ self-critique.

And yet Smith wants to argue in addition that divine authority should be attributed to the moral sentiments. Precisely because there is no need to appeal beyond moral sentiment—because our moral faculties “were plainly intended to be the governing principles of human nature”—we are justified in appealing beyond them to the will of God. If the moral faculties carry their own badge of authority, why do we need God in addition? Note also the carefulness of Smith’s language here and throughout this section of TMS: The moral faculties *are* the governing principles of human nature; they *are to be regarded* as the commands of God.

The second argument in Smith’s theodicy is that we are justified in regarding general moral rules as divine laws because general moral rules are more like divine laws than natural laws. All general rules are called laws, but the rules set by our moral faculties are more properly called laws than are the laws of motion, because whereas laws of motion merely *de*scribe natural patterns, general *moral* rules *pre*scribe and *pro*scribe—they “direct the free actions of men” like a human sovereign with the power to reward and punish. The analogy between general moral rules and human laws is most complete when moral rules are taken to be “viceregents of God within us,” “prescribed most surely by a lawful superior” (III.5.6). Furthermore, we are rewarded or punished for our adherence or nonadherence to general moral rules—either by the “contentment of self-satisfaction” or “the torments of inward shame”—as if they really had been laid down by a higher power. This punishment mechanism, as I argued above, depends on the conscience. *If* general moral rules are authoritative—*if* the impartial spectator is developed enough to accept them *as* authoritative—*then* they appear by analogy to be at the same time the commandments of God.

Kant also attributes divinity to duty, and speaks of practical reason as “the unmediated definition and voice of God through which he gives meaning to the letter of his creation” (*Theodicy* 8:265). But here something else is meant. Kant’s argument is that because we cannot know the purposes of God through the investigation of nature, and because the very attempt at theodicy, as a rational justification of God’s moral purposes, precludes the conclusion that God’s will is at cross purposes with reason, we are justified in taking pure practical reason to be at the same time God’s immediate command. Far from arriving at a moral concept of God through natural observation (“physicotheology,” which is impossible), Kantian “moral theology” interprets reason itself as divine—as setting the standard *for* nature, the natural sentiments, and the conscience (*Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment* §85, 5:436). The task of reason is to *legislate* the divine moral law over and against the sentiments, not to *justify* a moral law that is already implicit in the empirical constitution of the sentiments. Kant thus rules out Smith’s physicotheological derivation of divine laws from the natural sentiments as ungrounded: Because it is based on the empirical observation thatthe general moral rules *are* constituted in such-and-such a way, and not an a priori demonstration that they *must* be so and not otherwise, it does not rise to the level of necessity and universality that would establish them as obligatory. The question of why to obey moral rules when one’s inclinations or sense of self-approbation conflict with the judgments of general humanity remains unanswered.

The third argument in Smith’s theodicy, an argument from happiness, attempts to answer this motivational question. It is any many ways the most curious of his arguments. “The happiness of mankind, as well of all other rational creatures,” Smith argues, “seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature, when he brought them into existence. No other end seems worthy of that supreme wisdom and divine benignity we necessarily ascribe to him.” A benevolent God would intend our happiness; an “examination of the works of nature” shows that the world is designed for our happiness; and if our moral faculties are also works of nature, we are justified in believing that they, too, are made by God for the sake of our happiness. To obey general moral rules is therefore to participate in God’s intention for the world, while to shirk them is to obstruct that intention and declare ourselves “enemies of God.” If we act as friends of God, “we are naturally encouraged to hope for his extraordinary favor” (III.5.7). But if general moral rules aim at happiness, why would we need reward in the afterlife in addition? And *whose* happiness do general moral rules intend, exactly? Smith’s claim is that God intends the happiness “of mankind, as well as of all other rational creatures.” Smith does *not* say that following general moral rules promotes *individual* happiness (at least not directly—a point I’ll return to later) but the happiness of mankind as a species and of rational creatures in general.

Put otherwise, Smith seems to suggest that general moral rules point to our own happiness. His argument, however, is that general rules ought to be followed *even though they may not point to our own happiness*, because they point to the happiness of mankind in general. In the case of the perfectly virtuous man—who exhibits self-command and is secure in his sense of self-approbation—this is a moot point. General moral rules are necessary only in the case of a conflict between inclination and the judgments of an ideal general humanity. The perfectly virtuous man, however, finds his happiness precisely in his exercise of virtue; the conflict between inclination and general moral rules never arises for him because he is “capable of suiting, with exact justness, [his] sentiments and behaviour to the smallest difference of situation, and of acting upon all occasions with the most delicate and accurate propriety” (III.5.1). He has, in a sense, identified his happiness with the happiness of mankind in general; and when he must undertake a disagreeable action for the sake of duty, his self-approbation makes good for it. Now, hardly anyone is able to do this, even with education and training: “The coarse clay of which the bulk of mankind are formed, cannot be wrought up to such perfection.” Luckily, there is another standard—lower but solider—which most men *can* meet: Nearly everyone can find some happiness in their adherence to general moral rules, *if* these moral rules are held in “sacred regard” (III.5.1-2).[[7]](#footnote-7) The foregone pleasure of breaking a general moral rule may be made good by the pleasure of sober self-approbation once the “paroxysms of emotion” militating against the rule have passed—but then again, it might not be (III.5.7). At the same time, as we have seen, the moral faculties which give rise to general rules are themselves natural sentiments, and the consciousness of having broken a rule is itself a source of displeasure. For those who fall short of perfect virtue, there is an inescapable internal conflict involved in the decision whether or not to follow a general moral rule. The present hope of future reward for following a general moral rule, however, goes a long way toward overcoming this internal conflict and making good for the pleasures foregone by acting dutifully. One might say that if general moral rules aim at the happiness of mankind, the *sacredness* of general moral rules allows the great bulk of men to interpret the happiness of mankind as the condition for their own happiness.

To recapitulate the argument so far, general moral rules are in reality abstractions from the sober and impartial sentiments of an idealized general humanity. A very few men (the “happiest mould”) have little need for them. These men will be able to understand this “origin” and “use” general rules as a tool to remain impartial in conditions of great passion, temptation, or distress. For many men, however, this is not enough: They will need to attribute to general moral rules an independent “influence and authority.” Nature, which intends a unity between the happiness of the individual and the happiness of mankind, thus permits us to interpret general moral rules as at the time the commandments of God. What Michael Zuckert said of the Declaration of Independence appears to be true also of Smith’s account of moral duties: Most men will need to hold as self-evident principles which are in fact derived (“Self-Evident Truth and the Declaration of Independence” 329). None of this is to say that Smith is being deceptive—that he does not actually believe there is a God, or that general rules can be legitimately interpreted as his will. The question here is not the existence of God but the status of our knowledge of moral duties. To this end, we have a rather clear picture: Smith locates the truth of moral judgments, at least insofar as human reason can access that truth, in the sentiments and their ordered extension through imaginative faculty of sympathy. The sacredness of moral rules, meanwhile, is derived by analogy from the moral faculties which in fact govern our judgments: Our moral faculties “prescribe” rules to us which are later “regarded as” divine laws (III.5.6). Because nothing prevents us from attributing divine authority to the duties nature gives us, and because doing so is such a powerful subjective support for the fulfillment of those duties, our belief in divine sanction for natural duty is justified as a regulative ideal.

Smith has one final argument in his theodicy of the moral faculties: that the disparity between our moral sentiments and the actual distribution of “prosperity and adversity” in this life—the problem of evil, in other words—is both an invitation on the part of nature to make the world more moral and evidence that a more just distribution will be made in the afterlife (III.5.8-13). Earlier, it was argued that the moral faculties were a natural means to happiness; now it is argued that the moral faculties are in tension with nature and prompt us to correct it. Smith argues that a careful consideration of the way of the world shows that even in this life, “every virtue meets with its proper reward.” The proper reward for industry, prudence, and circumspection is wealth, not love and esteem; and the proper rewards for truth, justice, and humanity are love and esteem, not wealth (III.5.8). Nature has appropriately fixed each virtue to its reward, and so one cannot say that the goods of this world are poorly distributed in every sense. More than this, affixing wealth to industry rather than moral virtue improves the material situation of mankind (III.5.10). And yet mankind is dissatisfied with nature’s distribution: “The industrious knave cultivates the soil; the indolent good man leaves it uncultivated. Who ought to reap the harvest? ...The natural course of things decides it in favour of the knave: the natural sentiments of mankind in favour of the man virtue” (III.5.9). One could easily conclude from this, as Kant does, that morality and nature have separate bases and aims. But Smith re-aligns morality and nature by interpreting morality as an invitation on the part of nature “to correct, in some measure, that distribution of things which she herself would otherwise have made” (III.5.9). By holding fast to the sense of duty, man can make good for the defects of nature; and by interpreting both the moral sentiments and the course of nature as “the will of the Deity,” man can be content with the way of this world while hoping for a more just distribution of happiness in the next one (III.5.13).

*Fanatical Duties*

Smith closes Part III, “Of the Sense of Duty,” with a remark not on duty but on virtue: “No action can be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation” (III.6.13). To say that no action is virtuous if unaccompanied by self-approbation is to say that virtue requires both proper action and the consciousness that one acts properly. Now, the consciousness that one’s action is a proper action can be the result of adhering to a general moral rule, or it can come from elsewhere. In the case of acting for the sake of a general rule, we have something like a Kantian action done “from duty”: One acts for the sake of the rule because, given the uncertainty of the passions, the rule provides a certain standard for right action. For Kant, duty—the necessity of an action from respect for law, understood as the logical requirements of autonomous self-legislation—is the *highest* and *exclusive* standard for moral action (4:400). But Smith builds from duty toward virtue, which he understands as a higher standard than dutiful rule-following.

The difference between these positions may become clearer in Smith’s treatment of the dangers of too strong a sense of duty. Indeed, Chapter 6—“*In what cases the Sense of Duty ought to be the sole principle of our conduct; and in what cases it ought to concur with other motives*”—is a significant qualification of the reach of general moral rules. The apex of the sense of duty, for Smith, is religion (which is also the first word of the chapter). He fears that if moral thinking is determined by general rules alone, the result will be fanaticism, wherein commonsensical moral sentiments are overtaken by “a false notion of duty” (III.6.13). His preceding defense of the divine status of general moral rules derived from the natural sentiments now comes to light as an argument *against* the divine of status of rules derived elsewhere. By grounding the religious sense of duty in natural sentiment, Smith can reject religious duties that conflict with natural sentiment. Man does not live by duty alone; a virtuous ordering of the sentiments subsumes duty, giving jurisdiction to general moral rules where the sense of duty leads to virtue, and letting sentiment rule where virtue requires right feeling in addition to right action.

Smith begins by interpreting religious duty to include not only sacred regard for the commands of God but the cooperation of other sentiments: “That the sense of duty should be the sole principle of our conduct, is no where the precept of Christianity; but that it should be the ruling and the governing one, as philosophy, and as, indeed common sense, directs.” Just as God commands us to love others, he commands us to love ourselves; and because we love ourselves for our own sake as well as because we are commanded to, the religious sense of duty should be understood to include sentiments beyond pure regard for general moral rules (III.6.1) Contra Kant, that is, sometimes one should act from duty, and sometimes one should act in conformity with duty on the basis of some other motivating factor. The question becomes when general moral rules ought to determine our conduct, and when “some other sentiment or affections ought to concur, and have a principal influence” (III.6.1). Smith’s answer is that this depends on the “natural agreeableness” of the sentiment in question to its object as well as “the precision and exactness” of the general rules available to us (III.6.2). These in turn depend on the distinction between benevolence and justice.

Benevolent actions, Smith argues, should be determined primarily by sentiment, whereas unsocial or malevolent actions should be determined primarily by our regard for general moral rules (III.6.4-6). Another way to put this is that when we naturally admire a dutiful action, we should do it for its own sake, but when we naturally abhor a dutiful action, we should to it reluctantly and from a regard for duty alone. A father who fulfills his duty to his son should do so because he loves his son, not simply because it is required of him. But a ruler who punishes breaches of the law would seem monstrous if he did so because he loved to see his subjects on the rack; in this case, the sense of duty alone is the appropriate motivation—he should punish for the sake of necessity or justice. This is not to contradict my earlier claim that the virtuous man in a sense overcomes the need for general moral rules: Even if the perfectly virtuous man performs his “awful” duties with appropriate reluctance, he still takes pleasure in the self-judgment *that* he acts dutifully. When Smith says that disagreeable actions should be done as much as possible from regard for general moral rules, then, he does not mean that the sense of duty *itself* should be disagreeable. He means only that, in the case of disagreeable actions, one should be motivated by the sense of duty alone. The “happiest mould” of men, whose feelings and actions are perfectly suited to each circumstance, act from duty where it is appropriate and from other motives where it is not. Their relative independence from general moral rules consists in their ability to act from duty for its own sake, without need for divine reward in addition. Their sense of propriety and self-approbation is perfectly aligned with the exercise of duty.

As for the “precision and exactness” of general moral rules, Smith argues that the commands of justice are more amenable to being laid down as rules than are the positive exhortations “of prudence, of charity, of generosity, of gratitude, [and] of friendship” (III.6.9). “The rules of justice are accurate in the highest degree,” Smith argues, “and admit of no exceptions or modifications” (III.6.10). Justice is here understood in a contractual sense—if I have agreed to pay a sum of money, or to follow a law, I perfectly understand the terms of my duty, and must follow them exactly. The virtue of justice can be subsumed by general moral rules because justice is essentially the following of clear contractual obligations. In the case of the positive virtues, however, “our conduct should rather be directed by a certain idea of propriety, by a certain taste for a particular tenor of conduct, than by any regard to a precise maxim or rule; and we should consider the end and foundation of the rule, more than the rule itself.” The virtues of justice, Smith says, are like grammar, while the virtues of benevolence are like style. The former virtues are precise, exact, and susceptible to being laid and followed in the form of general moral rules. The latter virtues give us only a “general idea of the perfection we ought to aim at”—they cannot “infallibly be taught,” and so must be developed through constant reflection and practice (III.6.11). Again, we see that general moral rules provide a minimal moral standard that is good enough for most men, while complete virtue transcends rules and requires the cooperation of the sentiments. Before concluding that this is purely a distinction between “the great bulk of mankind” and a natural elite, however, we should remember that Smith says “almost all the virtues” transcend general moral rules (III.6.9).

Smith turns finally to fanaticism, the “false notion of religion” that extends the authority of general moral rules beyond their bounds and thereby perverts the natural sentiments. Because religion is “that principle which gives the greatest authority to the rules of duty,” it is also the principle that is “alone capable of distorting our ideas of them in any considerable degree” (III.6.12). Smith gives three portraits of extremist religion in tension with the natural sense of duty: Seid and Palmira of Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, whose religious sense of duty leads them to kill an innocent man (III.6.12); a “bigoted Roman Catholic” who chooses compassion over his perceived religious duty in saving Protestants from the massacre of St. Bartholomew; and a “very devout Quaker” who neglects his rule-bound pacifism to dispense some much-needed justice (III.6.13). Each example demonstrates, in its own way, the proposition that “no action can be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation” (III.6.13). We are horrified by the actions of Voltaire’s protagonists but admire their unhappy dedication to principle; we admire the actions of the Catholic and the Quaker but would admire them more if their sentiments aligned with their actions—if they regarded their own actions as appropriate rather than a breach of duty. Contra Kant’s insistence that duty is the only praiseworthy subjective ground of moral action, Smith argues that true virtue requires self-approbation in addition to duty, and that ordered natural sentiments can be an antidote for false notions of duty.

Kant is of course aware of the dangers of fanaticism and false notions of duty—indeed, the critical project is unintelligible if it is not an attempt to put metaphysics on solid moral ground and make reason safe for duty. Kant’s solution to fanaticism, however, is not to temper the sense of duty by limiting it to the natural moral sentiments, but to set limits on reason itself through critique. Having denied the possibility of theoretical knowledge of God—and indeed of all theoretical knowledge of moral concepts—as well as rejected a morality that merely follows the commands of God as heteronymous, Kant is free to insist on a strict, rule-bound adherence to the duties of practical reason without fear of fanaticism. Thus while Smith exhorts us to follow general moral rules “as if” they were given by the Deity—“first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy” (III.5.3)—Kant exhorts us to hear reason as the “immediate” voice God: Duty is impressed firstly and exclusively by reason, and supported by analogy to the “artistic intelligence” of nature (5:440-1). Thus while Smith seeks a synthesis between sentiment and reason in the imaginative faculty of sympathy, Kant goes beyond sentiment entirely in favor of a rational faculty that has already been radically altered by the critical philosophy. Because the critical project has purged reason of fanaticism in advance, one can embrace a conception of moral duty that is essentially dogmatic (Velkley 25-26). A practical reason that is divorced from sentiment has nothing to fear from dogmatism, but a theory of moral sentiments must provide a golden mean between unprincipled passion on the one hand and an overdeveloped, fanatical commitment to principle on the other.

In the last analysis, then, much is at stake in Kant’s revision of his “Liebling” (favorite) writer on the moral passions—what Susan Shell describes as Kant’s solution to the problems of the impartial spectator. Both Smith and Kant are consummate Enlightenment moralists in their rejection of superstition and enthusiasm. But Smith tempers superstition and enthusiasm by making sentiment reflective and impartial, while Kant does so through the self-critique of a reason that remains, for all that, universal and dogmatic. One uses the imagination to build from sentiment to virtue; the other uses universal reason to establish a deontological rule of sentiment by reason. At stake is the question of whether human beings are essentially social creatures who strive for virtue through the proper ordering of the sentiments, or whether human beings are essentially rational creatures whose philosophic yearning for the whole is realized in the ideal of a universal moral order. From the perspective of the categorical imperative, virtue is an element and a steppingstone in the realization of mankind’s highest duties. From the perspective of the impartial spectator, duty is an element and a steppingstone in the development of the excellent human being. It could very well be that moral philosophy has something to gain from a refinement of Kant in light of Smith, or Smith in light of Kant. But Part III of TMS shows us in no uncertain terms that the imperatives generated by the impartial spectator are not categorical in the Kantian sense: They are *conditional* imperatives, both in the sense that they are *conditioned* bythe sentiments of an idealized general humanity, and in the sense that they *condition* the sentiments of the agent. A *categorical* imperative would determine the behavior of the agent immediately, universally, and prior to experience—and there is no room for this in any theory that takes its lights from the sentiments. Any possible *rapprochement* between Smith and Kant, that is, must decide whether it is at the end of the day an attempt to more effectively rationalize or universalize the sentiments (i.e., a Kantification of Smith) or an attempt to satisfy the objective requirements of rational rule-making with subjective maxims that better align with the empirical constitution of human nature (i.e., a Smithification of Kant). Smith and Kant both aim to account for the sense of duty through a systematic critique of human faculties. But between understanding duty as a conditional imperative of sympathy or as a categorical imperative of reason, one simply has to choose.

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1. For engagements with MacCormick’s synthesis of Kant and Smith, see Jes Bjarup, “Practical Reason and Autonomous Persons” (2009) and Maksymilian Del Mar, “The Smithian Categorical Imperative: How MacCormick Smithified Kant” (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Samuel Fleischacker, “Philosophy in Moral Practice: Kant and Adam Smith” (1991) and “Values Behind the Market: Kant’s Response to the ‘Wealth of Nations’” (1996) for accounts of the historical evidence that Kant read Smith. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sympathy in Smith’s sense, of course, has a more capacious, reflective dimension than is meant here. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See again Maria A. Carrasco, “Adam Smith: Virtues and Universal Principles.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See again Fleischacker, “Philosophy in Moral Practice” pp.268-9. Fleischacker rightly emphasizes that Kant is animated by the problem of why one ought to obey the impartial spectator if one is not inclined to do so, and that he escapes the “infinite regress of empirical explanation and justification” by grounding moral obligation in reason, which lies beyond the natural inclinations entirely. Fleischacker is also correct to attribute to Kant a shared interest in combatting self-deceit. As I argued above, however, a Smithian interpretation of Kant’s solution to this problem cuts the legs from his unique solution. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This anticipates Smith’s later claim that the grounding of moral approbation, “though of the greatest importance in speculation, is of none in practice” (VII.iii.intro.3). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For treatments of the two levels of morality in Smith, see Norbert Waszek, “Two Concepts of Morality: A Distinction of Adam Smith’s Ethics and its Stoic Origin” (1984) and Maria A. Carrasco, “Virtues and Universal Principles” (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)