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## **Making Sense of Smith on Sympathy and Approbation: Other-Oriented Sympathy as a Psychological and Normative Achievement**

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Abstract: Two problems seem to plague Adam Smith's account of sympathy and approbation in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS). First, Smith's account of sympathy at the beginning of TMS appears to be inconsistent with the account of sympathy at the end of TMS. In particular, it seems that Smith did not appreciate the distinction between 'self-oriented sympathy' and 'other-oriented sympathy', that is, between imagining being oneself in the actor's situation and imagining being the actor in the actor's situation. Second, Smith's account of approbation, according to which a sentiment of approval arises when there is recognition of concordance between the spectator's sympathetic passion and the actor's original passion, seems to face the following problem: since the spectator attains both his own sympathetic passion and the actor's original passion by sympathizing with the actor, the sympathetic passion of the spectator and the original passion of the actor will necessarily be identical. Therefore, Smith's account of approbation requires that the spectator utilize *both* self-oriented and other-oriented sympathy ('the double-sympathy model of approbation'). I offer a novel *developmental* account of sympathy in TMS that renders Smith's account of sympathy consistent and allows for the utilization of the double-sympathy model of approbation.

Keywords: Adam Smith; Self-Oriented and Other-Oriented Sympathy; Approbation and Disapprobation; Moral Judgment; Impartial Spectator

## 1. Introduction

Two problems seem to plague Adam Smith's account of sympathy and approbation in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter 'TMS'). First, Smith's account of sympathy at the beginning of TMS appears to be inconsistent with the account of sympathy at the end of TMS. In particular, it seems that Smith did not appreciate the distinction between 'self-oriented sympathy' and 'other-oriented sympathy', that is, between imagining being oneself in the actor's situation and imagining being the actor in the actor's situation (hereafter 'the inconsistency problem').<sup>1</sup> Second, Smith's account of approbation, according to which a sentiment of approval arises when there is recognition of concordance between the spectator's sympathetic passion and the actor's original passion, does not work if we focus exclusively on either self-oriented or other-oriented sympathy: since, according to Smith, the spectator attains both his own sympathetic passion and the actor's original passion by sympathizing with the actor, the sympathetic passion of the spectator and the original passion of the actor will necessarily be identical, and so there is no room to compare the spectator's feeling with what the actor does or does not feel (hereafter 'the new sympathy-apprrobation problem'). Therefore, Smith's account of approbation requires that the spectator utilize *both* self-oriented and other-oriented sympathy: if the spectator imagines both what he would feel in the actor's situation and what the actor would feel in the actor's situation, he can compare these two passions and come to recognize whether or not there is concordance between them (hereafter 'the double-sympathy model of approbation').

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<sup>1</sup> The terms I use for the two forms of sympathy play on Amy Coplan's 'self-oriented perspective-taking', in which 'a person represents herself in another person's situation,' and 'other-oriented perspective-taking', in which 'a person represents the other's situation from the other person's point of view' (Coplan, 'Understanding Empathy', 9-10). I do so primarily for the sake of convenience—that is, so that I can consistently use two different terms to refer to two different forms of sympathy—and the reader should not assume that I endorse all of Coplan's philosophical commitments. For additional discussion of this distinction and related ones, see in particular Goldie, *The Emotions*, Velleman, 'Self to Self', Williams, 'Imagination and the Self', and Wollheim, 'Imagination and Identification'.

My aim in this paper is to offer a novel *developmental* account of sympathy in TMS in the following sense: fully developed other-oriented sympathy—other-oriented sympathy that is not distorted by the spectator’s self-love or his idiosyncratic point of view—is a psychological and normative achievement, and the standpoint of the impartial spectator is needed in order to explain its development. Hence, while Smith emphasizes self-oriented sympathy at the beginning of TMS, he had good reason to emphasize other-oriented sympathy only towards the end of the book, after he has presented his account of the impartial spectator. This reconstruction of Smith’s argument renders his account of sympathy consistent and allows for the utilization of the double-sympathy model of approbation. I proceed as follows. I first present Smith’s account of sympathy and the inconsistency problem (section 2) as well as Smith’s account of approbation and the new sympathy-approbation problem (section 3). I also discuss the double-sympathy model of approbation and explain its apparent absence in TMS (section 4). I then provide a detailed account of the development of fully developed other-oriented sympathy in relation to the construction of the standpoint of the impartial spectator (section 5). I briefly defend other-oriented sympathy against certain textual and philosophical challenges (section 6) and conclude by offering a unified account of sympathy, approbation, and moral judgment (section 7).

## **2. Smith’s Account of Sympathy and the Inconsistency Problem**

The hallmark of Smith’s account of sympathy is that we use our ‘imagination’ in order to ‘place ourselves’ in the actor’s ‘situation’ (TMS I.i.1.2),<sup>2</sup> so that sympathy ‘does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it’ (TMS I.i.1.10). The

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<sup>2</sup> *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* will be referenced as ‘TMS’ with the part, section, chapter, and paragraph in the Glasgow Edition. *A Treatise of Human Nature* will be referenced as ‘T’ with the book, chapter, section, and paragraph in the Clarendon Edition (followed by the relevant page number in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch Edition).

importance of this *projection* or *simulation* account of sympathy, according to which we project ourselves via our imagination into the situation of another person and thus simulate his or her mental states, can be appreciated against the backdrop of Hume's *contagion* account of sympathy, according to which we can 'catch' emotions directly, much like a contagion.<sup>3 4</sup> While the contagion account limits the spectator's sympathy to a version of the actor's *actual* feelings, the projection/simulation picture can account for the many familiar instances when we sympathize with a person *without* feeling exactly as he does, perhaps because he or she is incapable of feeling a particular feeling. As Smith notes regarding this 'illusive sympathy' (TMS II.i.2.5 & II.i.5.11), as he dubs it, 'we sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality' (TMS I.i.1.10).

Now, at times it does seem as if Smith also endorses Hume's contagion account of sympathy, for example, when he writes that 'upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned'. This is exemplified by grief and joy, which 'strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any person, at once affect the spectator

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<sup>3</sup> T 2.1.11.2, SBN 317; T 3.3.1.7, SBN 576; T 3.3.2.2-3, SBN 592-593; T 3.3.3.5, SBN 605. Hume's account of sympathy is a bit more complicated. He argues that the *idea* of the actor's feeling is transformed in the spectator's mind into an *impression*. First, the spectator observes the actor's behavior and attains an idea of the relevant passion as cause of the behavior as follows: the spectator infers that passion X is the cause of the actor's behavior Y from his memories of passion X being associated with behavior Y in his own case (T 2.1.11.1-8, SBN 316-320 & T 3.3.1.7-8, SBN 575-577). Second, the idea of the actor's passion is converted into an impression in the spectator's mind by relating this idea to a lively impression that the spectator has of himself (T 2.1.11.4, SBN 317).

<sup>4</sup> On the differences between Hume's contagion account and Smith's projection/simulation account of sympathy, see Darwall, 'Empathy, Sympathy, Care', 264-270, Debes, 'Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination', 194-195, & Fleischacker, 'Sympathy in Hume and Smith', 276-282. When discussing Smith's account of sympathy, Fleischacker uses the term 'projection', Debes uses the term 'simulation', and Darwall uses both terms interchangeably. I do not believe that much hangs on preferring one term to the other: projecting oneself into the actor's situation can be understood as the *means* via which the *end* of simulating the actor's mental states is attained.

with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion’ (TMS I.i.1.6).<sup>5</sup> However, a closer reading of this passage, and the passages that follow, reveals a different story. First, note that in this passage, Smith states that ‘sympathy may *seem* to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person’ and that ‘the passions [...] may *seem* to be transfused from one man to another’. Second, Smith quickly clarifies that ‘if the very appearances of grief and joy inspire us with some degree of the like emotions, it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person in whom we observe them’ (TMS I.i.1.8). In other words, knowledge of the *causes* of the actor’s passion is necessary for the spectator to experience full-blown sympathy, a point that Smith makes explicit in the following paragraph:

Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect. General lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to enquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible. The first question which we ask is, What has befallen you? Till this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-feeling is not very considerable. [TMS I.i.1.9]

Thus, while Smith was well aware that the contagion phenomenon that Hume discusses does in fact occur, full-blown sympathy requires us to know the causes of the actor’s passion, which, according to Smith, means using our imagination in order to understand the actor’s situation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Given the fact in this sixth paragraph of TMS, Smith also notes that ‘a smiling face is, to everybody that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance [...] is a melancholy one’, which echoes an observation made by Hume (T 2.1.11.2, SBN 317), it is perhaps not surprising that some commentators have argued that Hume and Smith hold a similar view of sympathy (Raynor, ‘Adam Smith and the Virtues’, 240). Moreover, given the fact that Smith makes claims that seem to downplay the role of imagination in sympathy, some commentators have argued that Smith has a conception of sympathy without the use of the imagination (Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, ch. 2).

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see Debes, ‘Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination’, 194-195 & Fleischacker, ‘Sympathy in Hume and Smith’, 280-282. The fact that the sympathetic agent needs to have knowledge of causes—and, indeed, relies on counterfactuals—does not undermine the simulationist nature of Smith’s account of sympathy, because when we simulate another’s situation, we can imagine causal chains and counterfactuals from the perspective of an agent in that situation. See Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, 118-121, for an excellent discussion of counterfactual reasoning in Smith’s account of sympathy.

While this *prima facie* inconsistency between Smith's projection/simulation account of sympathy and what appears to be his endorsement of the contagion account can be easily set aside, there is a different inconsistency *within* Smith's projection/simulation account of sympathy that is much harder to explain away. This inconsistency has to do with the question how much of the spectator's self is transported into the actor's situation when the spectator sympathizes with the actor. If we consider Smith's account of sympathy in part I of TMS, the answer seems to be obvious: when A sympathizes with B, A imagines how A would feel in B's situation. Thus, Smith notes that spectators' sympathy 'arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner' (TMS I.i.1.3). He then goes on to provide multiple examples in sections 10-13 of chapter I.i.1 that support this conceptualization of sympathy.<sup>7</sup> However, in part VII of TMS, Smith argues that when A sympathizes with B, A imagines how B would feel in B's situation. This would need to be the case when, for example, a man sympathizes with a woman in labor: 'it is impossible that he should conceive himself as suffering her pains in his own proper person and character' (TMS VII.iii.1.4). But Smith makes a more general point earlier in the same paragraph, writing:

[T]hough sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize. 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 a character and

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<sup>7</sup> Smith argues that 'we blush for the impudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behavior; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner' (TMS I.i.1.10). Moreover, when someone has lost his mind and is incapable of appreciating his miserable condition, 'the compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and [...] was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment' (TMS I.i.1.11). And while a sick infant only feels the uneasiness of his present situation, his mother 'joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder' (TMS I.i.1.12). Finally, Smith argues that by 'putting ourselves in their situation', we can even sympathize with the dead (TMS I.i.1.13).

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. My grief, therefore, is entirely upon your account, and not in the least upon my own. [TMS VII.iii.1.4]

Therefore, it seems that Smith did not make a clear distinction between ‘self-oriented sympathy’ and ‘other-oriented sympathy’, that is, between imagining being oneself in the actor’s situation and imagining being the actor in the actor’s situation. Indeed, by the time he reaches the end of TMS, Smith might have changed his self-oriented account of sympathy into an other-oriented account of sympathy without even noticing that he had done so, thereby making the account of sympathy in part I of TMS inconsistent with the account of sympathy in part VII of TMS.

So the first problem that is the subject of this paper is ‘the inconsistency problem’: Smith’s self-oriented account of sympathy in part I of TMS appears to be inconsistent with his other-oriented account of sympathy in part VII of TMS. While this inconsistency has been noted by several commentators,<sup>8</sup> others have tried to explain it away by arguing that there is a common denominator between the two forms of sympathy: since Smith’s account of sympathy does not assume correspondence between the mental states of the spectator and those of the actor, Smith can use the term ‘sympathy’ to cover cases in which the spectator’s conception of the actor’s situation either contains or excludes elements of the actor’s psychology (Nanay, ‘Smith’s Concept of Sympathy’, 88-100). However, this proposal does not explain, in and of itself, why Smith chose to emphasize self-oriented sympathy at the beginning and other-oriented sympathy at the end of TMS. Moreover, a striking feature of the secondary literature on Smith’s account of sympathy is the fact that various commentators have quite different attitudes towards other-

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon notes that ‘Smith misses the distinction [...] between just imagining being in X’s situation and making the further adjustments required to imagine being X in X’s situation’ (Gordon, ‘Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator’, 741). Griswold also notes that the account of sympathy in part VII of TMS “seems markedly different” and “quite far” from the account of sympathy in the book’s opening paragraphs (Griswold, ‘Smith and Rousseau in Dialogue’, 67). See also Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, ch. 2.

oriented sympathy in particular. On the one hand, some commentators have championed Smith's talk of other-oriented sympathy, thus downplaying the role of self-oriented sympathy in his theory. Stephen Darwall, for example, has argued that, according to Smith, when we sympathize with someone, we do so from their perspective, viewing the situation as we imagine it confronting them.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, championing other-oriented sympathy is especially attractive if we consider the possibility that self-oriented sympathy might lead us to simply project our own feelings into the actor's situation and then attribute them to the actor.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, some commentators have raised textual and philosophical worries regarding other-oriented sympathy. For example, Charles Griswold, who argues that Smith presents us with 'a spectrum of sympathy' (Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 87), also argues that Smith does not provide an *argument* in 'the key passage' (VII.iii.1.4) for the possibility of other-oriented sympathy; rather, Smith merely insists that this is what is 'supposed' to occur when one sympathizes with the sufferer. Moreover, Griswold is skeptical of conceptualizing sympathy in the way that he believes Smith did, namely, as an unmediated imaginary change of situations, for the spectator always needs to *interpret* the actor's situation. Such interpretations have to be made from a particular standpoint, which is embedded in cultural norms, so that the ego of the onlooker is not simply left behind (Griswold, 'Smith and Rousseau in Dialogue', 66-71). This is particularly problematic for the feasibility of other-oriented sympathy, when the spectator is to imagine being the actor in the actor's situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Darwall, 'Empathy, Sympathy, Care', 268; Darwall, 'Sympathetic Liberalism', 141-142; Darwall, 'Equal Dignity in Adam Smith', 131-132. Forman-Barzilai endorses Darwall's championing of other-oriented sympathy in her *Circles of Sympathy*, 66-67, but develops an interpretation of Smithian sympathy as a social practice in which spectators judge actors and communicate these judgments to them, thereby motivating actors to modify their conduct.

<sup>10</sup> Griswold raises this possibility in connection with Smith's talk of 'illusive sympathy' (Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 90), which is generally associated with what I have been calling 'self-oriented sympathy'.



### 3. Smith's Account of Approbation and the New Sympathy-Approbation Problem

I wish to argue that the inconsistency problem is closely associated with a second problem that pertains to the relations between sympathy and approbation in Smith's account. When TMS was first published, one of the most well-known objections to the theory was aimed at Smith's conceptualization of the relations between sympathy and approbation. Smith's account of approbation and disapprobation is based on the observation that 'every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another', so that 'I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love' (TMS I.i.3.10). This includes the judgments of affections, about which Smith notes that 'it is scarce possible that we should make use of any other rule or canon but the correspondent affection in ourselves' (TMS I.i.3.9). When implementing these observations specifically to approbation and disapprobation and when taking into account that our patterns of approval and disapproval are based on our sympathetic reactions, we get the following picture:

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. To approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such, is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them. [TMS I.i.3.1]

This formulation might make it seem as if Smith *identified* a sentiment of approbation with sympathy, which leads to a problem, identified by Hume, in the relations between sympathy and approbation: since approval is necessarily agreeable, identifying sympathy with approval would mean that sympathy is necessarily agreeable. However, it is not the case that sympathy is always agreeable; in particular, sympathy is unpleasant when we sympathize with unpleasant sentiments

(Hume, *Letters of David Hume*, 311-314). In response to Hume, Smith notes in a footnote added to the second edition of TMS that we should differentiate between (a) ‘the sympathetic passion of the spectator’, and (b) ‘the emotion which arises from his observing the perfect coincidence between this sympathetic passion in himself, and the original passion in the person principally concerned’ (TMS I.iii.1.9). While the former, the passion that is the product of sympathy, may be agreeable or disagreeable according to the nature of the original passion, the latter, the sentiment of approbation, is always agreeable. Therefore, the key idea underlying Smith’s account of approbation can be formulated as follows: when the spectator recognizes that there is concordance between her sympathetic passion and the original passion of the actor, a sentiment of approval arises; and when she recognizes that there is a lack of concordance in passions, a sentiment of disapproval arises.<sup>11</sup>

The problem I have in mind is a different one. This problem, identified by Robert Gordon, also pertains to the relations between sympathy and approbation on Smith’s account, but arises because the method that the spectator utilizes to form his sympathetic passion is identical to the method that she utilizes to attain the original passion of the actor (Gordon, ‘Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator’, 741). Recall that in part I of TMS, Smith argues that the spectator forms her sympathetic passion by imagining herself in the actor’s situation. Note how, according to the second paragraph of TMS, the spectator attains the original passion of the actor:

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<sup>11</sup> Smith makes this point in regards to the propriety of an action: ‘The approbation of propriety [...] requires, not only that we should entirely sympathize with the person who acts, but that we should perceive this perfect concord between his sentiments and our own’ (TMS II.i.5.11). Smith does mention situations where we seem to approve *without* sympathy. For example, we may approve of a jest but not laugh from it because we are preoccupied with other thoughts. However, even in such cases our approbation is founded on sympathy: experience has taught us that this jest is capable of making us laugh in regular conditions and so we approve of the laughter of the people around us and judge their laughter as appropriate. Smith calls this ‘conditional sympathy’, as we approve or disapprove of an object based on rules we have formed from previous sympathetic experiences (TMS I.i..3.3-4).

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. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. [TMS I.i.1.2]

Thus, the original passion of the actor is also attained when the spectator imagines himself in the actor's situation. But since both the sympathetic passion of the spectator and the original passion of the actor are attained in the same way, both passions will necessarily be identical, and so there is no room for the spectator to compare his reaction with what the actor does or does not feel. While Smith does not discuss his account of approbation in connection with other-oriented sympathy, an analogous problem could be created if we focus merely on that form of sympathy: the spectator attains both the sympathetic passion and the original passion of the actor by imagining being the actor in the actor's situation. Once again, the sympathetic passion and the original passion will necessarily be identical. If Hume's attack on Smith's conception of the relations between sympathy and approbation was the original sympathy-apprrobation problem, this problem can be dubbed 'the new sympathy-apprrobation problem': Smith's account of approbation, which relies on a comparison between the spectator's sympathetic passion and the actor's original passion, appears to be flawed, since these two passions will necessarily be identical.

Given their importance, I wish to emphasize the claims in the second paragraph of TMS that generate the new sympathy-apprrobation problem: (a) we do not have direct access to other minds ('our senses will *never* inform us of what [another person experiences, since] they never did, and

never can, carry us beyond our own person’);<sup>12</sup> (b) sympathy is *necessary* in order to attain information about other minds (‘it is by the imagination *only* that we can form any conception of what are [another person’s] sensations’). Claim (b) is so strong that it might be tempting to brush it off as mere rhetoric. However, the entirety of chapter I.i.1 of TMS, not just its second paragraph, is devoted to showing that we can ‘form [an] idea of the manner in which [others] are affected’ only by imagining their situation.<sup>13</sup> Thus, one cannot, I believe, write off paragraph I.i.1.2 as mere rhetoric and ignore the way the argument of that paragraph structures the chapter. Moreover, Smith has good reason for endorsing claim (b). Given his commitment to claim (a), as well as to a version of Hume’s Copy Principle,<sup>14</sup> the only impression Smith can find behind our ‘idea’ of other people’s feelings is one drawn from our own imagination (‘It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy’). Now, Smith does also indicate that we can infer people’s feelings from their external behavior.<sup>15</sup> This might seem like a problem for my account, since it would allow the spectator to attain the original passion of the spectator by means other than sympathy and so the new sympathy-approbation problem would not arise. However, note that this would also mean that there seems to be yet another inconsistency in TMS, since in the second paragraph Smith argues that *only* sympathy gives us a conception of another person’s sensations. I believe that this apparent discrepancy can be explained away as follows: Smith thinks we can know *that* a person is sad, happy, or angry by

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent discussion of Smith’s ‘private access’ conception of the mind and a Wittgensteinian reconstruction of Smith’s account, see Fleischacker, ‘Sympathy in Hume and Smith’.

<sup>13</sup> Smith makes use of this point in practically every paragraph of the chapter, responds implicitly to challenges to it in Hume’s *Treatise* in sections 3 and 6-9, and gives cases that he thinks only his view, not Hume’s, can answer in sections 11-13.

<sup>14</sup> According to Hume’s Copy Principle, ‘*all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv’d from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent*’ (T 1.1.1.7, SBN 4). Smith’s talk, in the second paragraph of TMS, of not having an ‘idea’ of X because we do not have ‘immediate experience’ of X, as well as his talk of ‘impressions’ that ‘our imaginations copy’, suggests that he retained the general idea according to which (certain types of) ideas are derived from (certain types of) impressions. For a discussion of Smith’s use of Hume’s Copy Principle, see Fleischacker, ‘Sympathy in Hume and Smith’, 279-280.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, TMS I.i.1.7, I.i.2.1, I.i.2.6 I.i.3.1, I.i.3.4, and I.ii.1.1.

way of inductive inferences, but we can know *what it feels like* to be sad, happy, or angry—the ‘qualia’ of sadness, joy, and anger—only by way of a simulationist process. Thus, simulation is necessary in order to *experience* another’s feelings, which is required for Smith’s account of approbation, an account that necessitates the comparison of two *sentiments* rather than one sentiment and inferential knowledge of another (the latter would be lacking the relevant qualia).<sup>16</sup> So Smith’s account is consistent on this point and the new sympathy-apprbation problem is ‘saved’.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. The Double-Sympathy Model of Approbation and Its Apparent Absence in TMS**

It should now be clear how the new sympathy-apprbation problem ought to be solved and why this solution is related to the inconsistency problem, namely, the spectator simply needs to utilize *both* self-oriented and other-oriented sympathy when approving or disapproving of others: if the spectator imagines both what he would feel in the actor’s situation and what the actor would feel in the actor’s situation, he can compare these two sentiments and come to recognize whether or not there is concordance in sentiments. This suggestion, which can be referred to as ‘the double-sympathy model of approbation’, presents a viable model of approbation on Smith’s behalf.<sup>18</sup> So it seems that (a) Smith had good reason to postulate the existence of both self-oriented and other-

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<sup>16</sup> Smith uses both the term ‘passions’ and the term ‘sentiments’ when presenting his account of approbation (TMS I.iii.1.9 & II.i.5.11). He also uses the term ‘sentiments’ in a way that resembles his use of ‘impressions’: he refers to ‘lively impressions’ (TMS V.2.4) and the ‘liveliness’ and ‘vivacity’ of ‘sentiments and sensations’ (‘History of Astronomy’ I.8). This suggests that sentiments resemble impressions (at least) in the sense that they have qualia-like features. I am arguing that it is these qualia-like features that can be attained only via simulation and not via inferences from behavior.

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous referee for pressing me to develop the issues in this paragraph as well as to Samuel Fleischacker for helping me to articulate many of the key points in the paragraph. Fleischacker is developing some of these points in a book on Adam Smith that he is writing for *The Routledge Philosophers*.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon notes that Smith’s account of approbation requires the spectator to ‘imagine being in X’s situation, once with the further adjustments required to imagine being X in that X’s situation and once without these adjustments’ (Gordon, ‘Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator’, 741). One of my aims in the paper is to demonstrate that TMS does contain all of the components needed to construct this model of approbation.

oriented sympathy, and (b) commentaries that downplay one of the two forms of sympathies will not be able to solve the new sympathy-approbation problem. The key question is why Smith is hesitant about explicitly noting the existence of other-oriented sympathy at the beginning of TMS and about explicitly endorsing the double-sympathy model of approbation. I believe that the beginnings of an answer can be found in the remainder of the second paragraph of TMS:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow, so to conceive or to imagine that we are in it, excites some degree of the same emotion, in proportion to the vivacity or dulness of the conception. [TMS I.i.1.2]

While Smith seems to be concerned with self-oriented sympathy throughout this passage, he also writes that as we imagine ourselves in the actor's situation, 'we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him', experiencing 'some degree of the same emotion'. Smith is suggesting that as we imagine ourselves in the actor's situation, we begin to understand the actor from the inside: we start to comprehend the way in which the actor experiences the situation by becoming the person he is. However, Smith is careful to note in the passage that this happens 'in some measure' and to 'some degree'. Thus, it seems that we do experience some degree of other-oriented sympathy from the get-go, but our initial ability to do so is limited.

Why is our initial ability to experience other-oriented sympathy limited? First, note the context in which Smith discusses other-oriented sympathy in section VII.iii.1.4 (in the chapter entitled 'Of those Systems which deduce the Principle of Approbation from Self-Love'):

Sympathy [...] cannot, in any sense, be regarded as a selfish principle. When I sympathize with your sorrow or your indignation, it may be pretended, indeed, that my emotion is founded in self-love, because it arises from bringing your case home to myself, from putting myself in your situation, and thence conceiving what I should feel in the like circumstances. [*Discussion of other-oriented sympathy*] How can [other-oriented sympathy] be regarded as a selfish passion, which does not arise even from the imagination of any thing that has befallen, or that relates to myself, in my own proper person and character, but which is entirely occupied about what relates to you? [...] That whole account of human nature, however, which deduces all sentiments and affections from self-love, which has made so much noise in the world, but which, so far as I know, has never yet been fully and distinctly explained, seems to me to have arisen from some confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy. [TMS VII.iii.1.4]

Smith discusses other-oriented sympathy in the context of his broader discussion of the moral systems that deduce the principle of approbation from self-love in order to clarify that these moral systems misunderstand the nature of sympathy, since they conceptualize sympathy as self-oriented rather than other-oriented: while the former is ‘founded in self-love, because it arises [...] from putting myself in your situation’, the latter is *not* rooted in self-love, because it is ‘entirely occupied about what relates to you’. However, Smith also argues earlier in TMS that each one of us is ‘first and principally recommended to his own care’ and ‘is much more deeply interested in whatever immediately concerns himself, than in what concerns any other man’ (TMS II.ii.2.1). Indeed, our initial sympathetic abilities are limited because of this excessive self-love: while mankind is ‘naturally sympathetic’, the ‘imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary’, because ‘the thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferers, continually intrudes itself upon them’ (TMS I.i.4.7). In particular, it is self-love that makes it difficult for us to see things from *other* people’s perspectives: when we initially attempt to sympathize with others, the ‘fury of our own passions constantly calls us back to our own place, where every thing appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love’, resulting in the fact that we obtain only ‘instantaneous glimpses’ of ‘the manner in which those objects [that interest us] would appear to another, of the

view which he would take of them' (TMS III.4.3). Thus, our initial ability to experience other-oriented sympathy, which is not rooted in self-love, is limited precisely because of our excessive self-love, which hinders our ability to see things from other people's perspectives. Therefore, Smith is hesitant about noting the existence of other-oriented sympathy at the beginning of TMS and endorsing the double-sympathy model of approbation, not because we cannot experience other-oriented sympathy at all, but because we cannot experience *fully developed* other-oriented sympathy—namely, other-oriented sympathy that is not distorted by our self-love and idiosyncratic point of view—before certain developments occur in our psychology: our excessive self-love needs to be humbled, so that we can fully see things from others' perspectives. The key question now is what happened between part I, where Smith champions self-oriented sympathy, and part VII, where he champions other-oriented sympathy.

### **5. The Impartial Spectator and Other-Oriented Sympathy**

The answer I wish to develop is that Smith emphasizes other-oriented sympathy only towards the end of TMS, *after* he has developed his account of the impartial spectator, because the attainment of the standpoint of the impartial spectator is needed in order to experience fully developed other-oriented sympathy. As noted, we do experience some degree of other-oriented sympathy before the standpoint of the impartial spectator is constructed. Indeed, it is crucial that we are able to make some use of Smith's account of approbation *before* the emergence of the impartial spectator, since this spectator is supposed to correct our initial patterns of approbation, and other-oriented sympathy is, as argued, required for Smith's account of approbation. However, the impartial spectator does a couple of things that are crucial for the refinement of



other-oriented sympathy. First, Smith argues that the impartial spectator has a key role to play in humbling self-love:

It is [the impartial spectator] who, whenever we are about to act so as to affect the happiness of others, calls to us, with a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions, that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it; and that when we prefer ourselves so shamefully and so blindly to others, we become the proper objects of resentment [...]. It is from him only that we learn the real littleness of ourselves, [...] and the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of this impartial spectator. [TMS III.3.4]<sup>19</sup>

Since Smith recognized that people tend to be affected by self-love, his insistence that other-oriented sympathy is not grounded in self-love, but rather in our selfless ability to imagine being the actor in the actor's situation, makes sense if this type of sympathy is fully developed only after the impartial spectator emerges and humbles our self-love. The fact that the impartial spectator allows us to control our excessive self-love explains how we come to be emotionally ready to experience fully developed other-oriented sympathy. Second, an agent can correct his perception of his own interests versus the interests of others by using the standpoint of the impartial spectator, who views the situation from a neutral perspective: if we want to weigh the importance of our interests versus the importance of someone else's interests, '[w]e must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us' (TMS III.3.3). Importantly, 'by consulting this judge within', we not only make a 'proper comparison between our own interests and those of other people', but we 'see what relates to ourselves in its proper shape and dimensions' (TMS III.3.1). In other words, the standpoint of the impartial spectator allows the spectator to make a comparison between his interests and other people's interests by affording him an *understanding*

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<sup>19</sup> See also TMS II.ii.2.1.

of the aspects of the situation that pertain to himself, but perhaps not to others. The spectator is then ready to appreciate the difference between the situation as it confronts him and the situation as it confronts others. Therefore, in addition to making us emotionally ready to experience fully developed other-oriented sympathy, the impartial spectator makes us cognitively ready to do so.

The psychological explanation of the development of other-oriented sympathy provided thus far can be substantially enriched if we follow the construction of the standpoint of the impartial spectator.<sup>20</sup> Smith writes: ‘There exists in the mind of every man, an idea of [exact propriety and perfection], gradually formed from his observations upon the character and conduct both of himself and of other people. It is the slow, gradual, and progressive work of the great demigod within the breast’ (TMS VI.iii.25). The demigod in the breast is the impartial spectator, who plays a key role in the workings of our *conscience*. In other words, the standpoint of the impartial spectator is not merely one from which we judge others, but it is a standpoint from which we also judge *ourselves*. Smith’s account of conscience builds on the fact that while we judge others, we also learn that others judge us, and thus ‘become anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause’ (TMS III.1.5). We thereby learn to make judgments of the propriety of our own passions and conduct ‘by considering how they would appear to us if in [other people’s] situation’ (TMS III.1.5). Three features of this process are of particular interest. First, Smith argues that ‘we can never form any judgment concerning [our sentiments and motives], unless we remove ourselves [...] from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us [...] by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people’ (TMS III.1.2). That is, as we judge ourselves through the eyes of others, we attain a certain distance from ourselves, which allows for the development of a reflective capacity: we reflect *as*

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<sup>20</sup> I present the construction of the standpoint of the impartial spectator in more detail in Ben-Moshe, ‘An Adam Smithian Account of Moral Reasons’.

*spectators* on ourselves *as actors*. Indeed, Smith argues that in judging one's own conduct one divides oneself into 'two persons', 'the judge' and 'the person judged of': 'The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion' (TMS III.1.6). Second, imagination plays a key role in this process, since as we 'suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour', we 'endeavour to *imagine* what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us' (TMS III.1.5). Third, we approve and disapprove of our own conduct in the same manner in which we approve and disapprove of the conduct of other people, namely, 'we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man [...], we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it' (TMS III.1.2).

Thus, as we interact with others and learn to judge ourselves through their eyes, we develop a certain distance from ourselves that allows us to refine our ability to experience other-oriented sympathy towards *ourselves*: we can imagine, as spectators, the effects of our own behavior as actors. When experiencing other-oriented sympathy towards ourselves, we need not imagine being B in B's situation; rather, we merely need to imagine the manner in which B views our situation, where most of B's defining characteristics can remain unknown to us. Indeed, we ultimately come to sympathize with ourselves through the eyes of an impartial spectator: 'If, upon placing ourselves in [the impartial spectator's] situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge' (TMS III.1.2). Therefore, at this stage of our psychological

development, we come to experience sympathy with ourselves from the standpoint of a person whose only characteristics are being ‘quite candid and equitable’, a person ‘who has no particular relation either to ourselves, or to those whose interests are affected by our conduct, [...] but is merely a man in general [...] [an] abstract man, the representative of mankind’,<sup>21</sup> in other words, a *notional* or *hypothetical* other person. Of course, the creation of an impartial spectator does not happen *ex nihilo*. Smith was sensitive to the fact that agents in human society might come to realize that the actual spectators who judge them and whose reactions they internalize are biased, either because they are not sufficiently informed or because they have a personal stake in the circumstances, and are thus unreliable sources for determining what is worthy of approval (TMS III.2.4-5). Indeed, it is because people do not merely desire praise and dread blame, but also desire to be *praise-worthy* and dread being *blame-worthy* (TMS III.2.1), that they are not satisfied with approval from such spectators. Thus, agents in human society will be motivated to adopt the standpoint of an impartial spectator, whose jurisdiction is ‘founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness, and in the aversion to blame-worthiness’ (TMS III.2.32). These agents will seek to go beyond the actual bystanders that they encounter and use their *imagination* to create a well-informed and impartial bystander: ‘We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it’ (TMS III.1.2). Once the standpoint of the impartial spectator is in place, we are ready to imagine, as argued, being B in B’s situation, without self-love or our idiosyncratic point of view interfering with our ability to do so, and therefore experience fully developed other-oriented sympathy.

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<sup>21</sup> This quote is taken from a passage that first appeared in the second edition of TMS, remained with minor variations in editions three through five, and was replaced by a slightly different passage in the sixth edition (sections III.2.31-32). The quoted passage can be found in a footnote on pages 129-130 of the Glasgow Edition (Liberty Fund, 1976) of TMS.

I have thus far presented the development of fully developed other-oriented sympathy as a *psychological* achievement following the emergence of the impartial spectator. While this already explains Smith's emphasis on other-oriented sympathy at the end of TMS, the explanation can be strengthened by also appealing to the *normative* dimension of Smith's account. Let me begin with the observation that approbation is different from moral judgment: while the former pertains to the question of whether we approve or disapprove of X, the latter pertains to the question of whether the objects of our sentiments of approval and disapproval *merit* that approval/disapproval.<sup>22</sup> In Smith's account, the standard of the impartial spectator serves as the standard of moral judgment: the 'precise or distinct measure by which this fitness or propriety of affection can be ascertained or judged of [...] can be found nowhere but in the sympathetic feelings of the impartial and well-informed spectator' (TMS VII.ii.1.49).<sup>23</sup> Note that while both self-oriented and other-oriented sympathy are needed in order to vindicate Smith's account of approbation, the former is not needed for his account of moral judgment to work: instead of comparing what we would experience in the actor's situation with what the actor experiences in the actor's situation, we can compare what an impartial spectator would experience in the actor's situation with what the actor experiences in the actor's situation. Therefore, an additional reason why Smith might have downplayed the importance of self-oriented sympathy towards the end of TMS is that, while his account of approbation requires this type of sympathy, he has also developed an account of *moral judgment* that can work without it.

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<sup>22</sup> For an excellent discussion of the distinction between approbation and moral judgment in Smith's thought, see Sayre-McCord, 'Hume & Smith on Sympathy, Approbation and Moral Judgment'.

<sup>23</sup> Smith also notes that only 'when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes' with the 'passions of human nature' are these passions 'proper' (TMS II.i.2.2). Indeed, Smith argues that the standpoint of the impartial spectator can sometimes be used to *correct* the reactions of the actual people we encounter—actors as well as spectators reacting to actors—when these reactions are not deemed appropriate from this standpoint (TMS III.2.32 & VII.iii.3.9).

Furthermore, in addition to being a psychological achievement, the attainment of other-oriented sympathy is a *normative* achievement. This becomes apparent if we recall that Smith aims to show in VII.iii.1.4 that while the account that ‘deduces all sentiments and affections from self-love’ arose ‘from some confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy’—namely, self-oriented sympathy, which is ‘founded in self-love, because it arises [...] from putting myself in your situation’—other-oriented sympathy is not rooted in self-love because it is ‘entirely occupied about what relates to you’. Smith’s insistence that other-oriented sympathy, rather than self-oriented sympathy, is not rooted in self-love suggests that other-oriented sympathy is the *proper* form of sympathy, especially given the association of self-oriented sympathy with the ‘confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy’. More generally, given (a) Smith’s account of the impartial spectator as a standpoint that humbles self-love and (b) the fact that the attainment of the standpoint of the impartial spectator leads, in turn, to the attainment of proper sentiments, Smith clearly believed that a sentiment that is not founded in self-love is a more proper sentiment for us to experience. Therefore, Smith also emphasizes other-oriented sympathy at the end of TMS because it is ultimately the proper form of sympathy.

## **6. Other-oriented Sympathy: A Defense**

My proposed developmental account of sympathy in TMS provides the argument that Griswold claimed was missing in ‘the key passage’ (VII.iii.1.4) for the possibility of other-oriented sympathy. However, as we saw, Griswold raises additional philosophical challenges for other-oriented sympathy, which I wish to address. But first, one might argue, more generally, that the notion of other-oriented sympathy is unintelligible, since the spectator and the actor are necessarily two *distinct* individuals. In particular, imagining being B cannot entail an imagined

*identity* between B and the spectator, as identity is transitive, whereas imagining being B is different from imagining B being me (Nanay, 'Smith's Concept of Sympathy,' 90).<sup>24</sup> Smith was well aware that the person judging and the person being judged are two distinct individuals. For example, he concludes the passage about dividing oneself into two persons, the judge and the person whose conduct is being judged, by noting: 'that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect' (TMS III.1.6). Moreover, Smith seems to have been sensitive to the fact that there cannot be an imagined identity between spectator and actor, as he notes that the sentiments of spectators and those of actors 'will never be unisons', but 'they may be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required' (TMS I.i.4.7). Thus, a plausible interpretation of what Smith takes other-oriented sympathy to be is not an imagined identity between spectator and actor, but rather the spectator imagining the actor's situation as confronted by someone with the actor's characteristics, that is, by someone with the actor's beliefs, attitudes, character traits, and so on.<sup>25</sup> Does this mean that Griswold was right in arguing that we need to experience sympathy from some particular standpoint, which is embedded in cultural norms, so that the ego of the onlooker is not left behind? While the ego of the onlooker is not left behind in the sense that there is no imagined identity between spectator and actor, it is left behind in the more modest sense that the onlooker has the ability of abstracting away from his own idiosyncratic characteristics and imagining the situation as confronted by someone with the actor's defining characteristics.

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<sup>24</sup> Nanay's claim is based on both Wollheim, 'Imagination and Identification', and Velleman, 'Self to Self'.

<sup>25</sup> Nanay argues for this point in connection with Smith's account of sympathy (Nanay, 'Smith's Concept of Sympathy', 90), but it also has been discussed by Williams, 'Imagination and the Self', and Velleman, 'Self to Self'.

However, Griswold's challenge is not merely one that contests the possibility of an imagined identity between spectator and actor, but one that contests the very possibility of an unmediated imaginary change of situations, for the spectator always needs to *interpret* the actor's situation. The response to this worry is that despite his use of ocular imagery when discussing sympathy, Smith did in fact believe that sympathy involves an interpretative act on the part of the spectator. In particular, recall Smith's insistence in the ninth paragraph of TMS that knowledge of the *causes* of the actor's passion is necessary for the spectator to experience full-blown sympathy. This knowledge of causes requires, of course, that the spectator interpret the actor's situation. That is, even in his discussion of self-oriented sympathy, Smith is not positing an unmediated imaginary change of situation, but rather a change of situation that requires a certain degree of interpretation: only when the spectator has interpreted the actor's situation as including certain causes, can the spectator fully sympathize with the actor.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation-based understanding of sympathy can easily cover other-oriented sympathy: the causes of the actor's sentiments now include defining characteristics of the actor himself, so that the spectator needs to interpret the actor's situation as experienced by someone with those characteristics. Of course, once we have gained experience with the standpoint of the impartial spectator, the imaginary change of situation, while a mediated, interpretation-based process, can occur effortlessly, giving the impression that no interpretation has taken place. Indeed, it is striking that Smith makes precisely this point when he discusses the way in which we use our imagination to make corrections in sense perception by transporting ourselves into different situations. He concludes the passage by noting: 'Habit and experience have taught me to [make the relevant corrections in sense perception] so easily and so readily, that I am scarce sensible that I do it; and a man must be, in some measure, acquainted with the philosophy of vision, before he can be

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<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Fleischacker, *Being Me Being You*, 42-43.



thoroughly convinced how little those distant objects would appear to the eye, if the imagination, from a knowledge of their real magnitudes, did not swell and dilate them' (TMS III.3.2).

## **7. Conclusion: A Unified Account**

It is time to take stock and present a unified account of Smithian sympathy, approbation, and moral judgment. We are initially capable of experiencing self-oriented sympathy and have a rudimentary ability to experience other-oriented sympathy. We can thus make use of Smith's account of approbation, though only imperfectly: we can imagine being ourselves in the actor's situation, imagine *to some degree* being the actor in the actor's situation, and compare the two sentiments; but the sentiment that arises from the second exercise of imagination will be distorted by our self-love and inability to break free from our own point of view. A crucial development occurs when we are able to step away from ourselves as actors and see ourselves through the eyes of others: we develop the capacity to reflect on our own sentiments and actions and to sympathize as spectators with ourselves as actors. At this stage of the process, we refine our ability to sympathize from the point of view of another agent, one that does not necessarily have clear defining characteristics. Indeed, we ultimately come to sympathize with ourselves through the eyes of the impartial spectator. Once the standpoint of the impartial spectator is in place, our excessive self-love is humbled and we can fully appreciate the difference between the situation as it confronts us and the situation as it confronts others. We now have the ability of experiencing *fully developed* other-oriented sympathy, namely, other-oriented sympathy that is not distorted by our self-love or our own idiosyncratic point of view. Moreover, at this final stage of the process, we can make better use of Smith's account of approbation, since we can more accurately represent the actor's original passion. Therefore, Smith's account of sympathy is

consistent and we have provided a viable model of approbation on Smith's behalf: both self-oriented and other-oriented sympathy are needed for Smith's account of approbation, but other-oriented sympathy is a psychological achievement in the sense that it is fully developed only *after* the emergence of the impartial spectator. Hence, Smith emphasizes other-oriented sympathy towards the end of TMS, after he has presented his account of the impartial spectator. I further argued that this emphasis might also be a function of the fact that by the end of TMS: (a) Smith has developed an account of moral judgment that can work without self-oriented sympathy; (b) Smith believed that other-oriented sympathy is *normatively* superior to self-oriented sympathy.

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