Journal of Markets & Morality
Volume 24, Number 2: 269–288
Copyright © 2021

God, Commerce, and Adam Smith through the Editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments**

Erik W. Matson
Senior Research Fellow
Mercatus Center at George Mason University

This article provides an overview of the major changes across the editions of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*). It deals with two issues relating to Smith's theological and economic perspectives. Although Smith pares away some of the orthodox Christian theology in the later editions of *TMS*, even evincing a skeptical attitude in some moments about revealed theology and divine providence, his theory of conscience and the impartial spectator increasingly takes on a theological dimension. Second, the final edition of *TMS* implicitly presents honest commerce as a way of cooperating with the Deity in serving human happiness. The evolution of *TMS* points to a complexity in Smith's theological perspectives and highlights interrelations of those perspectives with aspects of his economic philosophy.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*) has enjoyed an increase in popularity.[1] Little-known to nonspecialists is the fact that *TMS* underwent significant changes across its six editions. The first edition appeared in 1759 during Smith's time on the faculty at the University of Glasgow; the last edition was published in 1790, just before his death. In D. D. Raphael's and A. L. Macfie's introduction to the Glasgow variorum edition of *TMS* (and in footnotes throughout that edition),[2] changes across the editions are catalogued to a great extent, but they are not presented in a readily accessible manner. One

purpose of the present article is to provide a concise overview of these changes, and also to dispute two editorial decisions in the variorum edition.

A broader purpose is to reflect on the development of Smith's perspectives in theology and economic philosophy. Some scholars allege Smith to have moved from Christian orthodoxy toward atheism or skepticism as he aged.[3] These scholars point to alterations and removals of key passages across the editions of *TMS*, for instance, the removal of the passage on the doctrine of atonement in the final edition.[4] When read in their full context, the implication of such changes are perhaps less obvious than they initially appear.[5] It is here argued that Smith's shifting ideas across the editions about conscience and the impartial spectator, moreover, point to a subtle but increasingly important theological dimension of his philosophy. Drawing out this dimension complicates claims about Smith's skepticism.

In part 6 of *TMS*, which was new to the final edition, Smith included a chapter called "Of Universal Benevolence."[6] When paired with the earlier chapters and section of part 6, it can be read as an affirmation of honest commerce as a principal way that we "co-operate with the Deity" in serving the happiness of humankind.[7] "The administration of the great system of the universe," Smith writes, "is the business of God and not of man."[8] But as we direct our attention to bettering our own condition, and that of our family, friends, and country, we cooperate with the providential order of nature:

> That wisdom which contrived the system of human affections … seems to have judged that the interest of the great society of mankind would be best promoted by directing the principal attention of each individual to that particular portion of it, which was most within the sphere both of his abilities and of his understanding.[9]

The specific theological provenance of the ideas in *TMS* part 6 is not immediately clear. Throughout part 6 Smith engages—quite critically at some points—with Stoic thought, especially with the Stoic doctrine of cosmopolitanism.[10] Aspects of his thought in part 6 also resonate with British natural theology.[11] What is clear, however, is that the idea of a providential order plays a significant part in the added material to the final edition of *TMS*. In addition to providing some insight into Smith's mature theological presuppositions, these additions to part 6, especially when paired with material from *The Wealth of Nations*, serve to integrate central aspects of Smith's theological bearings, ethics, and economic philosophy. Smith indicates that as we direct our focal awareness toward our spheres of influence, we may be said to cooperate with God in serving the whole of humankind.[12] Such an interpretation, as Paul Oslington has documented,

dovetails with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century readings of Smith, for instance those of Dugald Stewart, Robert Malthus, Thomas Chalmers, and Richard Whatley.[13]

The First Five Editions

The first edition of *TMS* was published in 1759 during Smith's tenure as Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow.[14] The book grew out of Smith's lectures, as evidenced by testimonies of his contemporaries John Millar and James Woodrow. Part of the rhetoric of *TMS* indicates its origin from lecture notes. As if addressing a lecture hall, Smith writes at one point that "it has been observed on a former occasion."[15] Similar phrases recur throughout.

An immediate success, the first edition of *TMS* is written in elegant prose and presents what was—and is still—seen by many as an original account of moral judgment via sympathy. Edmund Burke wrote to Smith of the "ingenuity," "solidity," and "Truth" of his theory and praised his "elegant Painting of the manners and passions."[16] David Hume relates the book's reception in a letter to Smith:

> I proceed to tell you the melancholy News, that your Book has been very unfortunate: For the Public seem disposed applaud it extremely. It was lookd for by the foolish People with some Impatience; and the Mob of Literati are beginning already to be very loud in its Praises.[17]

A second edition of *TMS* appeared in 1761. Part of the changes in the second edition were made in response to critical feedback from Gilbert Elliot of Minto and Hume. Hume presses Smith on his claim that sympathy is necessarily agreeable. Hume writes to Smith,

> I wish you had more particularly and fully prov'd, that all kinds of Sympathy are necessarily Agreeable. This is the Hinge of your System, and yet you only mention the Matter cursorily in p. 20.… It is always thought a difficult Problem to account for the Pleasure received from the Tears and Grief and Sympathy of Tragedy; which woud not be the Case, if all Sympathy was agreeable. An Hospital woud be a more entertaining Place than a Ball.[18]

Smith responds in a footnote,[19] elaborating different moments of the sympathetic process: (1) the sentiment of the spectator that emerges as she enters into the situation of the actor, and (2) the sentiment of the spectator that emerges as she observes a correspondence between the passions of the actor and what would be her own passions were she in the situation. Part of Hume's confusion likely arose because Smith refers to both 1 and 2 at different points as "sympathy."[20]

But Smith clarifies that it is the second moment of sympathy that is always agreeable when likeness or concord is found, irrespective of the agreeableness of the original passion of the actor. "This last emotion, in which the sentiment of approbation properly consists, is always agreeable and delightful. The other may either be agreeable or disagreeable, according to the nature of the original passion, whose features it must always, in some measure, retain."[21] Speaking of his response to Hume in a letter to Gilbert Elliot, Smith says, "I think I have entirely discomfited him."[22] Recently, after reconsidering the Hume-Smith exchange, Samuel Fleischacker writes that Smith's "response seems to me an effective one."[23] Indeed, Hume himself was likely satisfied with the response; we may understand the whole exchange as a matter of clarifying what had not been sufficiently explicit.

In the same letter to Elliot, Smith responds to Elliot's own criticism, more penetrating than Hume's, and which weighed on Smith throughout his career. Elliot's original letter to Smith was lost. But Smith's response draws out Elliot's main point. Elliot worries about the social construction of virtue in Smith's system. If our ideas about right conduct and the good are inculcated through social processes—if, as Smith says, our judgment "must always bear some secret reference" to the judgment of others[24]—is virtue merely a crowd-dependent phenomenon?

Smith directs Elliot's attention to new material in part 3: "I will begg of you to read over the first paragraphs of the second Section of the third part, then pass over the next three paragraphs, and read the sixth and seventh till you come to the paragraph at the bottom of page 260 which begins with the word, *Unfortunately*."[25] The added material in part 3 to which Smith draws Elliot's attention treats our natural desire of both praise and praiseworthiness. We naturally desire, Smith says, to receive praise and to be worthy of receiving praise. Both desires are essential for our peaceful coexistence in society. Smith tells Elliot that the edited and added material, along with his treatment of Mandeville in part 7, should "confirm my Doctrine that our judgments concerning our own conduct always have a reference to the sentiments of some other being" and show that "notwithstanding this, real magnanimity and conscious virtue can support itself under the disapprobation of all mankind."[26] In subsequent editions of the book Smith continues to dwell on Elliot's point. His mature sensibilities on the matter involve a theological dimension, elaborated below.

Also spurred in part by Elliot's comments, perhaps, Smith added a new chapter to the second edition: "Of the Influence and Authority of Conscience."[27] It includes Smith's famous earthquake passage in which he personifies conscience as "the inhabitant of the breast" who speaks in "a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions," teaching us "that we are but one of

the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it."[28] The chapter is greatly expanded in the sixth edition.

The changes in the third, fourth, and fifth editions are for the most part minor and not flagged much in secondary literature. But a few are notable. To the third edition, published in 1767 after he left Glasgow in 1764, Smith appended his "Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages." Originally published in 1761 in an Edinburgh journal called *The Philological Miscellany*, "Languages" treats the natural or conjectural history of language. "Languages" is unfortunately and mistakenly not included in the Glasgow variorum edition of *TMS*. One of the editors of that edition, D. D. Raphael, elsewhere claims that "Languages" is "quite independent of the thought of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*."[29] But there is reason to think otherwise. Indeed, why would Smith bother appending the essay to *TMS* if the two works were "quite independent"?

Among other things, "Languages" clarifies the model of human development underlying the analysis of *TMS*. It illustrates the path from simplicity to refinement through social interaction. It emphasizes the moral and cognitive dynamism of open societies and the stagnation of closed societies. For Smith, "closed societies [have] a tendency to stagnate linguistically, socially, economically."[30] Briefly consider Smith's treatment of nouns. In "Languages" Smith tells us that all nouns were originally proper—"tree" designated "that particular tree by the stream." But an "expanding range of experience," coupled with a natural desire to make our needs and thoughts mutually intelligible, "triggered" "unconscious mental processes" that served to gradually transform proper nouns to common ones.[31] As it underlies the formation of language, so the desire to communicate, cooperate, and persuade underlies the formation of moral standards and the progress of economic growth; all three come about "insensibly, and by slow degrees."[32] The upshot is that "Languages" serves to broaden the conceptual framework of *TMS* into a more encompassing account of human nature.

One theme often emphasized in treatments of the changes between editions is theology. Gavin Kennedy argues that Smith's "circumspection in religious matters" was caused by "his deep love for his mother, Margaret Douglas Smith" out of "respect for her religious beliefs,"[33] but that he was in the end quite irreligious, perhaps even an atheist. Kennedy observes Smith's increasing ambivalence towards Christian theological orthodoxy across the editions of *TMS*, and especially in the sixth. The matter is more complex than Kennedy makes out,[34] but Smith certainly does seem in some instances to "indicate less confidence in revealed doctrine."[35] That indication takes off beginning with the third edition. Some signal passages involve the issue of justice. At *TMS* II.ii.3.12, for example, Smith replaces the phrase "religion authorises" with the phrase "religion, we suppose,

authorises"; at *TMS* V.2.5 two occurrences of "is" are changed to "seems to be" and "is supposed to be."[36] The changes could be said to reflect equivocation in Smith's personal assurance that justice will be carried out in the life to come, despite the fact that he sees the belief in the divine enforcement of justice as a universal aspect of human nature that plays an important role in social affairs.[37]

Among some minor edits, the fourth edition of 1774 features one significant change: a change to the title of *TMS* itself. The title of the fourth edition is: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments, or An Essay towards an Analysis of the Principles by which Men naturally judge concerning the Conduct and Character, first of their Neighbours, and afterwards of themselves*. Here the editors of the variorum edition made a second mistake. They chose to use the shorter title from the first three editions of the work, rather than including the full title from the final three editions. The change in title highlights Smith's understanding of the overt focus of the work: an analysis of moral processes in the neighborly context of jural equals or equal citizens. The moral processes he elaborates, as he teaches especially in the final edition of the work, do not translate so well into the realm of politics and are readily disrupted by desires for wealth and power.

The fifth addition of 1781 makes no changes of note. Either Smith or his publisher made a handful of revisions to punctuation and phrasing. "Edition 5 … contains a fair number of revisions of accidentals, chiefly in punctuation, but occasionally spelling."[38] The substantive changes were "minor."[39]

God and the Impartial Spectator

The sixth and final edition of *TMS* underwent significant changes. Smith first wrote of his design to write a final edition to his London publisher Thomas Cadell in 1788. Smith took a four month leave of absence from his duties at the Custom House in Edinburgh to start in on revisions. Speaking of his leave, he tells Cadell that his subject "is *the theory of moral Sentiments* to all parts of which I am making many additions and corrections. The chief and the most important additions will be to the third part, that concerning *the sense of Duty* and to the last part concerning *the History of moral Philosophy*."[40]

In 1789 Smith wrote again to Cadell, reiterating that he has "been labouring very hard in preparing the proposed new edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*."[41] He announced yet more ambitious revisions to the work than he anticipated: "Besides the Addition and improvements I mentioned to you; I have inserted, immediately after the fifth part, a compleat new sixth part containing a practical system of Morality, under the title of the Character of Virtue."[42] He

tells Cadell in the same letter that "the subject [of practical morality] has grown on me."[43]

When the final edition appeared in print in May 1790, it included an "Advertisement" written by Smith describing some of the changes to the work:

> SINCE the first publication of the THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS, which was so long ago as the beginning of the year 1759, several corrections, and a good many illustrations of the doctrines contained in it, have occurred to me. But the various occupations in which the different accidents of my life necessarily involved me, have till now prevented me from revising this work with the care and attention which I always intended. The reader will find the principal alterations which I have made in this New Edition, in the last Chapter of the third Section of Part First; and in the four first Chapters of Part Third. Part Sixth, as it stands in this New Edition, is altogether new. In Part Seventh, I have brought together the great part of the different passages concerning the Stoical Philosophy, which, in the former Editions, had been scattered about in different parts of the work. I have likewise endeavoured to explain more fully, and examine more distinctly, some of the doctrines of that famous sect. In the fourth and last Section of the same Part, I have thrown together a few additional observations concerning the duty and principle of veracity. There are, besides, in other parts of the work, a few other alterations and corrections of no great moment.[44]

Among the alterations and corrections "of no great moment" are several conspicuous alterations of orthodox theological language and ideas. Those alterations dovetail with some of the shifts in the third edition. That Smith makes no mention of these alterations is not particularly surprising given the religious climate of his day. But the changes did not go unnoticed by his contemporary readers, nor have they been neglected by scholars since.[45]

The most conspicuous change is Smith's removal of a long passage on the doctrine of atonement. That passage was perhaps the only passage in the book touching on doctrines of revealed as opposed to natural religion. The long original passage ends with a declaration: "the doctrines of revelation coincide, in every respect with those original anticipations of nature; … they show us … that the most powerful intercession has been made, and that the most dreadful atonement has been paid for our manifold transgressions and iniquities."[46] In the sixth edition Smith replaces that sentence and the long preceding paragraphs with one short sentence: "In every religion, and in every superstition that the world has ever beheld, accordingly, there has been a Tartus as well as an Elysium; a place provided for the punishment of the wicked, as well as one for the reward of the just."[47]

Ryan Hanley argues that this new sentence is richer than it initially appears, given that it speaks to the universality of the human belief in the divine enforcement of justice.[48] Rather than displaying Smith's skepticism, the replacement of the atonement passage elaborates our natural belief in the divine enforcement of justice in a life to come. Whether or not justice will be enforced in the life to come cannot, on this perspective, be proved through the faculty of reason, just as the existence of causal relations or an independently existing world cannot be proved. But as the belief in causal relations structures our understanding of experience, so too does the natural belief in the divine enforcement of justice frame our internal moral life. There is much to be said for Hanley's interpretation. Yet the removal of the atonement passage was still perceived as corrosive by orthodox members of the clergy in Smith's own day. The Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee, for example, perceived Hume's influence. He wrote of Smith's removal of the atonement passage as "one proof more … of the danger, even to the most enlightened, from the familiar contact with infidelity."[49]

Engaging with a sermon preached by the Bishop of Massillon, Smith also adds to the sixth edition a takedown of what Hume, in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*,[50] called the "monkish virtues," notably the Christian virtues of humility and self-mortification. Affirming the beauty of the doctrine of a world to come, Smith rejects the notion that that doctrine ought to lead us to withdraw from the present world. He rejects the idea that withdrawal and contemplation ought to be considered virtuous. He ridicules the thought that a day in the life of a monk is of greater spiritual worth than a life of military service:[51]

> To compare … the futile mortifications of a monastery, to the ennobling hardships and hazards of war; to suppose that one day, or one hour, employed in the former should, in the eye of the great Judge of the world, have more merit than a whole life spent honourably in the latter, is surely contrary to all our moral sentiments; to all the principles by which nature has taught us to regulate our contempt or admiration."[52]

Although this passage is not necessarily irreligious, and would seem to be in keeping with the trend begun by Luther to downgrade the virtues of monastic practice, the clear connection to Hume has been read by some as evidence of religious skepticism.[53]

The wider religious and theological contexts of Smith's work have been retrieved in recent decades, indicating the importance of ideas from British natural theology, moderate Presbyterianism, Christian Stoicism (in the vein of Francis Hutcheson), and Protestant natural law, among other things, for properly understanding his thought.[54] The changes to the editions of *TMS* should be

considered through these various lenses and contexts before conclusions about the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Smith's ideas are drawn. Setting this important work on the context of Smith's ideas to one side, I wish here to draw attention to several ways in which the final edition of *TMS* takes on a more theistic cast, despite his alterations of some apparently orthodox passages. The first of these pertains to Smith's formulations about conscience and the impartial spectator.

A number of scholars affirm the presence of a godlike impartial spectator in *TMS* with superhuman knowledge and benevolent judgments. Jerry Evensky sees the highest impartial spectator as a facet of judgment that enables us to appreciate the Deity's design; the impartial spectator serves "as a perfect arbiter among the sentiments."[55] Vivienne Brown interprets the highest impartial spectator as parallel to the Stoic divine being.[56] Jeffrey Young likewise affirms a transcendent spectator that differs from the man within the breast or the conscience.[57] Knud Haakonssen says that the impartial spectator is "an ideal whom both agents and actual spectators can approach."[58] Curiously, given the other changes in theological language, it is in the sixth edition of *TMS* that the impartial spectator most notably takes on aspects of the divine or ideal.

Changes in Smith's ideas about the impartial spectator may be seen as a continuation of his engagement with Gilbert Elliot's criticism.[59] He strives to retain his social account of moral formation without sacrificing a conception of virtue that can transcend any particular social influence. To maintain both he introduces, albeit implicitly, a spectrum of impartial spectators with different degrees of wisdom and virtue. There is a kind of spectator that is "impartial" because he is not materially involved in the situation at hand. He is a seemingly well-intended stranger watching a fight break out at a sporting event, a neighbor watching you bicker with your spouse on an evening walk. This kind of impartial spectator can be understood simply as a representative member of our population. Of course, a representative of our population will have his biases. He will not have the acumen to usefully spectate and judge a situation on the other side of the world in a foreign country. But we naturally imagine higher sorts of impartial spectators who are wiser and more virtuous with respect to larger social wholes. Within the moral imagination we naturally conceive of a highest impartial spectator, a godlike figure with superhuman knowledge and benevolence toward the whole of humankind. The idea is theistic or at least shows the definite influence of theistic conceptions, even if one argues that Smith's theory does not itself rely on the existence of a divine judge.

Smith implicitly draws out the point about different sorts of impartial spectators in a set of passages new to the sixth edition. He begins by noting, "man has … been rendered the immediate judge of mankind."[60] This is the lowest kind

of impartial spectator, a representative community member. But "an appeal lies from [the sentence of man] to a much higher tribunal, to the tribunal of their own consciences, to that of the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of the man within the breast."[61] This supposed impartial spectator is "partly immortal, yet partly too of mortal extraction."[62] The conscience is our internal impartial spectator, so to speak; he is an imagined figure with whom we consult in our self-assessments and the assessments of others. The conscience is, however, a "supposed impartial and well-informed spectator" only. The adjective "supposed" here serves a skeptical function.[63] Our conscience, as it is an extension of our own imagination, can never actually be fully impartial. But in its striving towards impartiality, our conscience itself appeals to a *higher* tribunal, to "the all-seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived, and whose judgment can never be perverted."[64] Elsewhere in the sixth edition Smith writes that "religion alone … can tell them [people misjudged by their peers], that it is of little importance what man may think of their conduct, while the all-seeing Judge approves of it."[65] Our final tribunal is God, or perhaps, on a metaphorical reading, an imaginary being with the knowledge, wisdom, and benevolence of God. Smith draws out the representative relation between conscience and the highest impartial spectator clearly at another point in the new part 6, speaking of "the entire approbation of the impartial spectator, and of the representative of the impartial spectator, the man within the breast [i.e., conscience]."[66, 67]

Thus, although he pares away much of the traditional theological allusion and language in his account in the sixth edition, and even potentially offers us reason to question the nature and extent of his own faith in the divine administration of justice in a life to come, aspects of Smith's thought take on a more theological cast. By fusing "traditions of Protestant theology and eighteenth-century sociability—let's call them 'God within' and 'society without'—[Smith advanced] a theory of conscience useful to free men in modern societies."[68] The spark of the divine, the desire for the eternal within us is what causes us to desire to be worthy of praise; our communion with God—or the idea of communing with a godlike being—can sustain us over the clamor of the crowd. This is part of Smith's final answer to Gilbert Elliot's criticism.[69] In attempting to liberate virtue from the approval of the crowd, Smith, whatever his skepticisms about religion might be, inevitably lets some theistic theological conceptions into his philosophy through a back door. Even if we find evidence of increased skepticism in the later editions of *TMS*, we might still follow Laurence Dickey in reading, at the very least, a "coy theology" back into the sixth edition of *TMS*.[70]

Commerce and the Divine Economy

Many of the additions to the sixth edition treat potential downfalls of commercial society, which mostly pertain to moral corruption, self-deception, inauthenticity, and potential isolation from those around us.[71] The sixth edition features, for instance, a new chapter in part 1, "Of the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by this disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect persons of poor and mean condition." The theme of the chapter is that there are two different roads to the respect and recognition that we naturally desire. One is the road taken by those "of proud ambition and ostentatious avidity; the other, of humble modesty and equitable justice."[72] The latter is a lonely road. Many of us choose the former, attempting to earn power, riches, and fame. The tragedy is that changes in status and fortune do not really contribute to our well-being, at least not in any enduring way. In taking the first road of proud ambition, we may, therefore, inadvertently pursue our own unhappiness, especially since that road very often involves moral corruption and an accompanying sense of self-disapprobation.[73]

The reason for Smith's emphasis on such topics in the sixth edition was probably in part a reaction to social and economic trends of the time. The late eighteenth century saw spikes in economic growth that led to expanding urbanization and luxury consumption. In England, wages of laborers increased throughout the eighteenth century, especially in its last decades.[74] Higher wages afforded comforts and embellishments—coffee, tobacco, and quality linen garments. Indeed, by the end of Smith's career, Scotland had experienced its first consumer revolution.[75] In the latter decades of the eighteenth century in Scotland, "poor people were attaining comfort, and many getting wealth; weavers who began life without a penny ended it with a fortune, and, born in a hovel, died in a mansion."[76] Perhaps his observation of the consumer dimension of commercialization spurred Smith to attempt to counter what he saw as the corrupting effects of acquisitiveness, effects he had in fact observed from the first edition of *TMS*.

But in addition to diagnosing some negative aspects and corrupting tendencies of commercial life, Smith also presents, in the new material added to the sixth edition, a compelling case for honest commerce as a means of participating in the divine economy—a means of cooperating with God in serving the happiness of the whole of humankind.

The case begins from the outset of part 6 with his treatment of the virtue of prudence. Operating "within a discursive space mapped out by Stoic philosophy,"[77] Smith presents self-love as a natural and important principle of action that serves to ensure the good of the individual and that of the human species.[78] From self-

love, he moves to the virtue of prudence, which involves appropriately governing the expression of our self-love so that our pursuits in fact contribute to our well-being, the object of our self-love. The virtue of prudence on Smith's telling has primary reference to economic phenomena.[79] The objects of prudence are health, fortune, rank, and reputation—"the objects upon which [an individual's] comfort and happiness in this life are supposed to principally depend."[80] Beyond recommending to us a certain set of pursuits, prudence speaks to the manner in which we ought to carry out those pursuits. The prudent man "studies seriously and earnestly"; "his talents may not always be very brilliant, [but] they are always perfectly genuine"; "his conversation is simple and modest"; "he is averse to the quackish arts by which other people so frequently thrust themselves into public notice and reputation."[81] The prudent man does not desire great material acquisitions but prefers "the undisturbed enjoyment of secure tranquility."[82] Prudence helps one undertake to better one's condition without succumbing to the deceptions of power and riches; it is a key to virtuous living and private happiness.[83]

After discussing prudence and reinforcing his observations from earlier in part 2 about commutative justice—namely that it is the pillar of extended society, special among the virtues in its accuracy and precision, and may be extorted by force among equals—Smith moves to consider the virtue of beneficence. Smith sees that serving the good of others is, in fact, an important part of our own well-being. As Hanley says, for Smith, "love and gratitude are perhaps the preeminent sentiments that are at once good for others and good for ourselves."[84] But how do we make our love for others effective in practice? What habits and rules conduce to the good?

In answering these questions Smith again reiterates the importance of prudent self-love: we ought to care for ourselves, first and foremost, because we have the most intimate knowledge of our circumstances and needs, knowledge unlike that which any other person possesses: "Every man is fitter abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Everyman feels his own pains and pleasures more sensibly than those of other people."[85] He extends the logic of this principle, arguing that we ought to proportion our beneficent efforts on the basis of our knowledge.[86] After our own person, we ought to tend to the members of our family because we are "more habituated to sympathize with them," and we know "better how every thing is likely to affect them"[87]

This line of thinking comes to head in the chapter "Of Universal Benevolence." Smith says that the idea of increasing the happiness of humanity is "sublime," something which ought to motivate the person of virtue.[88] But our ability to serve the happiness of others is limited by our knowledge and familiarity with their circumstances—"ought" implies "can."[89] We ought to confine our beneficent

efforts to the "humbler departments" of our own happiness, and that of our family, friends, and community, with diminishing moral obligation as the objects of our beneficence become less familiar.[90] The important point that is easily missed, however, is that in confining our efforts to our humbler departments, we actually make a becoming use of our energies and resources (given our limited knowledge and abilities) and, Smith says, cooperate with God in effectively serving the happiness of humankind: "The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted [by God] a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension."[91]

What does this have to do with Smith's views on commerce? In conjunction with his analysis in *The Wealth of Nations*, the moral justification of self-love and the illustration of the limited effectiveness of beneficence beyond our spheres of familiarity in *TMS* VI implicitly present a view of honest commerce as a kind of "co-operat[ion] with the Deity,"[92] by which we may prudently provide for ourselves and our relations and, at the same time, metaphorically cooperate with and come to the assistance of the "great multitudes" by participating in the market process.[93] It is commerce and the drive to better our conditions that leads us to "invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life," enabling increasing populations and higher standards of living.[94] Commerce is perhaps in Smith's mind among the principal ways in which God draws together our individual efforts to serve the good of humankind. This, again, was the common interpretation of Smith in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[95] Thus, perhaps we may again follow Dickey and perceive "evidence of [the] theological tradition [of the divine economy] in the new additions to the 1790 edition of *TMS*."[96]

Concluding Remarks

Smith's intellectual progression across the editions of *TMS* is less clear, at least with respect to matters of theology, than it is sometimes taken to be. Smith does pare away some theological language and allusions, and in some respects appears, at first glance, to hold less orthodox opinions about religious and theological matters in the sixth edition than in the first. But aspects of his thought take on a more theistic dimension, especially his formulation of conscience and the impartial spectator and his intimations about commerce as providentially serving the good of the whole of humankind. These observations serve to highlight Smith's efforts throughout his career, and across the editions of *TMS*, to

pull together his theological bearings, ethics, and political economy into a more comprehensive body of social thought, a body of thought that he sought to use for "the happiness and improvement of society."[97]

Notes

* An earlier version of this essay was published in two parts at adamsmithworks.org in November 2020. The first part is available here, https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/a-brief-history-of-the-editions-of-*TMS*. The second part here, https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/erik-matson-brief-history-of-the-editions-of-*TMS*-part-2. I thank Dan Klein and two anonymous referees for valuable feedback.

1. References to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* are to Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), hereafter abbreviated as *TMS*, followed by part, section (where one exists), chapter, and paragraph. References to *The Wealth of Nations* are to Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), hereafter abbreviated as *WN*, followed by book, chapter, part (where one exists), and paragraph. References to *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987) are abbreviated as "Corr." and followed by letter and page number.

2. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, "Introduction," in *TMS*.

3. See, for example, D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 94–104; Gavin Kennedy, "The Hidden Adam Smith in His Alleged Theology," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 33, no. 3 (2011): 385–402; Gavin Kennedy, "Adam Smith on Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, ed. C.J. Berry, M.P. Paganelli, and C. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 464–84; Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship That Shaped Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

4. *TMS* II.ii.3.12.

5. For an important reinterpretation of the removal of the atonement passage, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Scepticism and Naturalism in Smith," *The Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 199–212. In removing the atonement passage, Smith puts in its place a statement on the universality of the "natural belief"—in the Humean sense of that concept—in the divine punishment of injustice. Rather than evincing skepticism in religion, Hanley argues, Smith may be seen as illustrating the provenance of our desire for justice in providential design.

6. *TMS* VI.ii.3.
7. *TMS* III.5.7; note that the phrase "co-operate with the Deity" is original to the first edition.
8. *TMS* VI.ii.3.6.
9. *TMS* VI.ii.2.4.
10. On Smith and Stoicism, see Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce, and Conscience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Gloria Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics: The Classical Heritage in Adam Smith's Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Leonidas Montes, "Adam Smith as an Eclectic Stoic," *The Adam Smith Review* 4 (2008): 30–56; Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
11. On British natural theology in Smith, see Paul Oslington, "God and Market: Adam Smith's Invisible Hand," *Journal of Business Ethics* 108, no. 4 (2012): 429–38.
12. I explore this theme further in Erik W. Matson, "The Edifying Discourse of Adam Smith: Focalism, Commerce, and Serving the Common Good," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (forthcoming). Preprint at *SocArXiv*, https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv.
13. Paul Oslington, "The 'New View' of Adam Smith in Context," *History of Economics Review* 71, no. 1 (2018): 119–20.
14. This paragraph and the next borrow from Raphael, "The Virtues of *TMS* 1759," *The Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 15–24.
15. *TMS* IV.2.7.
16. Corr. 38:46–47.
17. Corr. 31:45.
18. Corr. 36:43.
19. *TMS* I.ii.1.9n*.
20. For a useful discussion of the multiple senses in which Smith uses the word *sympathy*, see Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 51.
21. *TMS* I.ii.1.9n*.
22. Corr. 40:49.
23. Samuel Fleischacker, *Being Me Being You: Adam Smith and Empathy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 27.

24. *TMS* III.i.2.
25. Corr. 40:49, italics original.
26. Corr. 40:49.
27. *TMS* III.3.
28. *TMS* III.3.4.
29. D. D. Raphael, "Adam Smith 1790: The Man Recalled; the Philosopher Revived," in *Adam Smith Reviewed*, ed. Peter Jones and Andrew S. Skinner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 103.
30. Nicholas Phillipson, "Language, Sociability, and History: Some Reflections on the Foundations of Adam Smith's Science of Man," in *Economy, Polity, and Society: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950*, ed. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79.
31. James Otteson, "Adam Smith's First Market: The Development of Language," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (2002): 69.
32. Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 211.
33. Kennedy, "The Hidden Adam Smith in His Alleged Theology," 388.
34. Cf. Lisa Hill, "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith," *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 8, no. 1 (2001): 1–29; James E. Alvey, "The Secret, Natural Theological Foundation of Adam Smith's Work," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 7, no. 2 (2004): 335–61; Paul Oslington, ed., *Adam Smith as Theologian* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
35. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 98.
36. Raphael and Macfie, "Introduction," 39.
37. Hanley, "Scepticism and Naturalism in Smith." See also Michelle A. Schwarze and John B. Scott, "Spontaneous Disorder in Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments: Resentment, Injustice, and the Appeal to Providence," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 463–76.
38. Raphael and Macfie, "Introduction," 40.
39. Raphael and Macfie, "Introduction," 40.
40. Corr. 276:310–11, italics original.
41. Corr. 287:319.
42. Corr. 287:320.

43. Corr. 287:320. On the emphasis of practical morality in the sixth edition, especially in the new part 6, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 82–99.

44. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 3. The changes to the sixth edition could perhaps be usefully grouped into five interrelating categories: (1) conscience and the impartial spectator; (2) theology; (3) moral corruption; (4) part 6, "Of the Character of Virtue"; and (5) self-command. Cf. Raphael, "Adam Smith 1790," 103.

45. See, e.g., Peter Minowitz, *Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 94–104; Kennedy, "The Hidden Adam Smith in His Alleged Theology"; Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship That Shaped Modern Thought*.

46. *TMS* II.ii.3.12.

47. *TMS* II.ii.3.12.

48. Hanley, "Scepticism and Naturalism in Smith," 203–4.

49. Quoted in Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor*, 234. See also Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 100.

50. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

51. For discussion, see Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 99.

52. *TMS* III.2.35.

53. Dennis Rasmussen writes of this passage as "surely an allusion to Hume." Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor*, 234. Raphael considers it "a libation to Hume's ghost." Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 100.

54. For a helpful introduction to this literature, see Oslington, "The 'New View' of Adam Smith in Context." Significant contributions to the literature include: Richard Kleer, "The Role of Teleology in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations," *History of Economics Review* 31, no. 1 (2000): 14–29; Hill, "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith"; Anthony Waterman, "Economics as Theology: Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Southern Economic Journal* 68, no. 4 (2002): 907–21; Peter Harrison, "Adam Smith and the History of the Invisible Hand," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (2011): 29–49; Oslington, "God and Market: Adam Smith's Invisible Hand." On the general religious and theological context of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

55. Jerry Evensky, “The Two Voices of Adam Smith: Moral Philosopher and Social Critic,” *History of Political Economy* 19, no. 3 (1987): 452.

56. Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse*, 74.

57. Jeffrey T. Young, “Natural Morality and the Ideal Impartial Spectator in Adam Smith,” *International Journal of Social Economics* 19, no. 10–12 (1992).

58. Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator*, 56.

59. This paragraph draws from Daniel B. Klein, Erik W. Matson, and Colin Doran, “The Man Within the Breast, the Supreme Impartial Spectator, and Other Impartial Spectators in Adam Smith’s ‘Theory of Moral Sentiments,’” *History of European Ideas* 44, no. 8 (2018): 1156–60.

60. *TMS* III.2.32.

61. *TMS* III.2.32.

62. *TMS* III.2.32.

63. There are fourteen occurrences of the adjective “supposed” in the final edition of *TMS*; twelve are new to the sixth edition; seven are used to describe the conscience or the man within the breast, all playing a similarly skeptical function. See Klein, Matson, and Doran, “The Man within the Breast,” 1164.

64. *TMS* III.2.33.

65. *TMS* III.2.12.

66. *TMS* VI.i.11. This passage seems to be largely ignored by Smith scholars, most of whom interpret “conscience” and “the impartial spectator” as always synonymous, e.g., Jack Russell Weinstein, “My Understanding of Adam Smith’s Impartial Spectator,” *Econ Journal Watch* 13, no. 2 (2016): 274; Craig Smith, “Peer Review and the Development of the Impartial Spectator,” *Econ Journal Watch* 13, no. 2 (2016): 328; James Otteson, “How High Does the Impartial Spectator Go?” in *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Routledge, 2011), 96; T. D. Campbell, *Adam Smith’s Science of Morals* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 137. Scholars who distinguish between “conscience” and the highest concept of the impartial spectator include Den Uyl, “Impartial Spectating and the Price Analogy,” *Econ Journal Watch* 13, no. 2 (2016): 264–72; Charles Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91; Young, “Natural Morality,” 74; and Klein, Matson, and Doran, “The Man Within the Breast,” 1162–64.

67. Raphael acknowledges the increase in theological language surrounding the impartial spectator in the sixth edition but argues that the increase simply serves the rhetorical purpose of emphasizing the superior judgment of conscience. He deals with the

changes in Smith's account across the editions by proposing that Smith emphasizes the imagination over the influence of one's peers more in later editions. See Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator*, 37–42, 44–45.

68. Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 93.

69. Yet another—and not unrelated—part of Smith's answer to Elliot comes across in the following claim, also new to the sixth edition: "To a real wise man the judicious and well-weighed approbation of a single wise man, gives more heartfelt satisfaction than all the noisy applauses of ten thousand ignorant though enthusiastic admirers. He may say with Parmenides … that Plato alone was audience sufficient for him." *TMS* VI.iii.3.1. In other words, although our sense of virtue is dependent on social influences, we may select among various available social influences, contemporary or historical, and may thus transcend the norms of our immediate social context. For treatment of these issues see Dylan Dellisanti, "Moral Innovation and the Man within the Breast," *The Adam Smith Review* (forthcoming). Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3569231.

70. Laurence Dickey, "Historicizing the 'Adam Smith Problem': Conceptual, Historiographical, and Textual Issues," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 3 (1986): 605.

71. Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue*, 52.

72. *TMS* I.iii.3.2.

73. For discussion, see Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Does 'Bettering Our Condition' Really Make Us Better Off? Adam Smith on Progress and Happiness," *The American Political Science Review* 100, no. 3 (2006): 308–18; Erik W. Matson, "A Dialectical Reading of Adam Smith on Wealth and Happiness," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 184 (2021): 826–36.

74. Lorenzo Garbo, "Adam Smith's Last Teachings: Dialectical Wisdom," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 38, no. 1 (2016): 47.

75. Garbo, "Adam Smith's Last Teachings," 42.

76. Henry Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Black, 1906), 535.

77. Brown, *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce, and Conscience*, 84.

78. See Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87.

79. Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics*, 54–56. For a discussion of Smith's transformation of prudence from the classical conception, see Joseph Cropsey, *Polity and Economy: Further Thoughts on the Principles of Adam Smith* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2001), 12.

80. *TMS* VI.i.5.

81. *TMS* VI.i.7.

82. *TMS* VI.i.13.

83. Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue*, 100–132; Matson, "A Dialectical Reading of Adam Smith on Wealth and Happiness," 834–35.

84. Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Our Great Purpose: Adam Smith on Living a Better Life* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 57.

85. *TMS* VI.ii.1.1.

86. For discussion, see Matson, "The Edifying Discourse of Adam Smith," 16–22; James Otteson, *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 170–98.

87. *TMS* VI.ii.1.2.

88. *TMS* VI.ii.3.1.

89. For a treatment of this principle in Smith, see Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 116.

90. *TMS* VI.ii.3.6.

91. *TMS* VI.ii.3.6.

92. *TMS* III.5.7; "co-operate with the Deity" was original to the first edition. The idea of diligent commerce as a kind of cooperation with God also comes across in the teachings of Bishop Joseph Butler, although in a somewhat different manner. As we make good use of our riches, we "co-operate with [God] in promoting the happiness of the world." Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel: To Which Is Added Six Sermons Preached on Publick Occasions* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1749), 420. The editors of *TMS* note the resemblance between Smith's and Butler's ideas around *TMS* III.5.

93. *WN* I.ii.2.

94. *TMS* IV.i.10.

95. Oslington, "The 'New View' of Adam Smith in Context."

96. Dickey, "Historicizing the 'Adam Smith Problem,'" 607.

97. Smith's "ruling passion" was a desire to contribute "to the happiness and improvement of society," according to Dugald Stewart, "Account of Adam Smith," in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 271.