https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

HUME AND SMITH ON SYMPATHY, APPROBATION, AND MORAL JUDGMENT*

By Geoffrey Sayre-McCord

I. Introduction

David Hume and Adam Smith are usually, and understandably, seen as developing very similar sentimentalist accounts of moral thought and practice.[1] Hume's views are better known, not least because Smith's work on moral sentiments fell in the shadow of his tremendously influential *Wealth of Nations.*[2] This shadowing is unfortunate, both because Smith's work on moral sentiments is deeply insightful and because it provides a crucial moral context for understanding his economic theory.

As similar as Hume's and Smith's accounts of moral thought are, they differ in telling ways. This essay is an attempt primarily to get clear on the important differences. They are worth identifying and exploring, in part, because of the great extent to which Hume and Smith share not just an overall approach to moral theory but also a conception of the key components of an adequate account of moral thought. In the process, I hope to bring out the extent to which they both worked to make sense of the fact that we do not merely have affective *reactions* but also, importantly, make moral *judgments.*

II. The Common Framework

As a first step, it is worth taking stock of just how similar Hume's and Smith's views are. To start where they do, Hume and Smith both take sentiments to be fundamental to moral thought and practice. They hold that whatever role reason and the understanding might have in explain-

* This essay has benefited considerably from discussion at the Sympathy Workshop organized by Eric Schliesser at the University of Richmond, and at the Adam Smith Society session at the Central Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association Meeting in New Orleans. I am especially grateful for detailed comments from Houston Smit, John McHugh, and helpful conversations with Remy Debes and Michael Gill.

[1] In what follows, in-text citations are to Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature,* ed., L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (1739–40; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), referenced as *Treatise;* Hume's *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Morals,* ed., L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (1751; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), referenced as *Enquiry;* and Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed., D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (1759: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), referenced as *TMS.*

[2] *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* ed., R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, (1776; Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1981).

doi:10.1017/S0265052513000101

© 2013 Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ing moral thought, an appeal to reason alone, unaided by sentiment, is insufficient. Absent sentiment, they hold, the deliverances of reason concerning, for instance, what causes and what frustrates human happiness, what generates gratitude or resentment, and what conforms to, and what violates, certain principles, will leave undiscovered a distinction favoring any of these facts over the others.[3] And they hold that, in particular, our capacity to sympathize with the sentiments of others is crucial. If that capacity for sympathy were entirely absent, they hold, so too would be moral thought and practice.

It is worth noting that, on their shared view, sympathy plays two different roles. First, sympathy with the plight of others engages our concern and prompts our actions in ways that are, they hold, morally important, crucial for constituting and sustaining a community, and more generally mutually advantageous. Second, sympathy is essential, as they see it, to our capacity to *approve* (or disapprove) of actions, motives, and characters as moral or not and, because of that, to our capacity to *judge* actions, motives, and characters as moral or not.

Thus, without sympathy we would not have a morally decent community, if we had a community at all (that is sympathy's first role), nor would we be able to judge communities (or anything else) as morally decent or not (that is sympathy's second role). Presumably, even with sympathy, we might enjoy a decent community without also making moral judgments. Yet, as Hume and Smith see things, our capacity to make moral judgments plays a vital role in strengthening and supporting the bonds of community that sympathy makes possible.[4]

Moreover, they both are careful to distinguish between what, as it happens, garners moral approval or disapproval, on the one hand, and what merits approval and disapproval, on the other. That is, they distinguish being approved (or disapproved) from being approvable (or disapprovable). In funding this distinction, they move from an account of moral approbation to an account of moral judgment, an account that makes sense of the difference between someone thinking that something is moral and that person being right in her judgment. Finally, in developing their accounts of moral judgment they both appeal to a privileged point of view that sets the standard for our judgments. According to both of them, what would be approved of, from the appropriate point of view, is what is approvable. And to judge, for instance, that some trait is a virtue is to make a judgment that is correct if, but only if, the trait would secure approval from the appropriate point of view.

[3] Hume argues extensively for the importance of sentiment in understanding moral thought; Smith does so much more briefly, but on the basis of the same general considerations. See *Treatise*, 456–76 and *TMS*, 318–21.

[4] They were also aware of the many ways that moral judgment can reify differences, generate conflicts, and often wreck havoc, though they were generally optimistic, it seems, concerning the contributions of moral thought.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To share this much is, clearly, to share a great deal. So it is not surprising that Hume and Smith are regularly grouped together as advancing very similar accounts of moral thought. Their allegiance to sentimentalism, their focus on sympathy, their emphasis on sympathetically engendered approbation, and their reliance on a privileged point of view as setting the standard for moral judgment, are distinctive and striking features of their shared view that rightly attract attention and comment.

Yet, as similar as their views are, there are a number of interesting and, I think, instructive, differences, especially in their accounts of sympathy's role in producing approbation and in their understanding of approbation. These differences have reverberations in their understandings of which sentiments matter and why, of how sympathy needs to work, and of the substance of the moral judgments that end up being vindicated by their proposed privileged points of view. In what follows, I will concentrate first on the different accounts of sympathy's role in producing approbation and of the nature of approbation, and then from there turn briefly to the reverberations of these differences.

III. Sympathy

In identifying sympathy, Hume notes that "A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me" (*Treatise,* 317). Smith takes up the same examples, writing "A smiling face is, to everybody who sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one" (*TMS,* 11).

They make a point of allowing all cases of fellow-feeling, whether the feelings shared are positive or negative. Sympathy operates, they both hold, not only when the person with whom one is sympathizing is suffering or in some other way badly off.[5] Drawing a contrast with pity and compassion, which are "appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others" Smith suggests that "sympathy," "though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever."[6] In adopting this broad use Smith was simply doing as Hume had done before him. For both of them, the idea that sympathy engages us with the positive, no less than the negative, feelings of others is important to its role in explaining the nature of moral judgment.

In general, Hume and Smith treat as standard cases of sympathy any occasion when one person feels *as* another does, *because* the other feels

[5] "Neither is it those circumstances only, which create pain or sorrow, that call forth our fellow-feeling. Whatever is the passion that arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator" (*TMS,* 10).

[6] *TMS,* 10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that way. Sympathy is, in these cases, fellow-feeling with a specific etiology. Yet in talking about sympathy, Hume and Smith sometimes have in mind just the *process* by which we, in the standard cases, come to feel as others do and sometimes have in mind just the *product,* the fellow-feeling, without regard to how it came about. So they each end up allowing that we might sympathize with another despite not actually feeling as the other person does (as when we imagine her feeling a certain way, though she does not) and that we might be in sympathy with others, that is, feel as they do, though not as a result of having been engaged by (the normal process of) sympathy. For Hume and Smith alike, both the sympathetic process and its usual product, fellow-feeling, are important to their accounts of approbation and moral judgment.

A. Hume

When it comes to approbation and moral judgment, the key element of Hume's account of sympathy is the idea that, when sympathy is in play, our *idea* of another person's pain or pleasure results in our having a painful or pleasant feeling. Yet it is worth noting, if only in passing, that Hume offers a detailed and elaborate account of how and why our ideas of other's feelings have this effect. On this account, the effect is achieved because the idea (of another's feeling) is itself transformed into the corresponding feeling.

> When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection. (*Treatise,* 317)

Hume explains this transformation by appeal to two distinctive aspects of his general theory of mind. The first is the (implausible) view that the difference between the idea of an experience and the experience of which it is an idea is simply one of relative vivacity, with the idea being, in effect, just a less vivid version of the experience. The second is that, under certain circumstances, ideas can be revivified to a point that they become the experiences (or at least the kinds of experiences) of which they are ideas, thanks to certain associations. With these two views in place, Hume suggests that in sympathizing with another we are imagining ourselves in that person's situation, or seeing ourselves as in some other way related to that person, and argues that the vivacity of our ever-present impression of our self (which is brought to the fore in sympathizing with others)

is transferred to the idea of the feeling and thus transforms it into the feeling.[7]

> The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object [including other people and their feelings], the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person. (*Treatise*, 318)

Hume uses this general account of sympathy to explain some intriguing vagaries in our patterns of sympathy. To take one example, he notes that competing with pressures to identify with others (which are in play when we sympathize) there are also pressures to compare ourselves with others (which pull in the opposite direction). Indeed,

> We judge more of objects by comparison, than by their intrinsic worth and value; and regard everything as mean, when set in opposition to what is superior of the same kind. But no comparison is more obvious than that with ourselves; and hence it is that on all occasions it takes place, and mixes with most of our passions. This kind of comparison is directly contrary to sympathy in its operation . . . (*Treatise*, 593)

This explains why, on noticing that someone is happy, our first and natural sympathetic reaction may be to feel pleasure. Yet if we notice as well that we are sad, that comparison will work to increase our sadness:

> *The direct survey of another's pleasure naturally gives us pleasure; and therefore produces pain, when compar'd with our own [assuming we are not as pleased]. His pain, consider'd in itself, is painful; but augments the idea of our own happiness [assuming we are not in as much pain], and gives us pleasure.* (*Treatise*, 594, [italics in original])

Whether sympathy or comparison wins out, Hume holds, depends on how vivid our idea is of the other person's pleasure or pain. The more vivid the idea, the more likely, Hume thinks, we will sympathize with, rather than compare ourselves to, the other person. While our character and temper will influence the vividness of our ideas of others' pleasures and pains, Hume emphasizes specifically the extent to which the vividness of our ideas will depend on how close the relation is, in our thought,

[7] There is an important difference between sympathy—which transforms an idea into an impression—and merely being caused, by an idea, to have an impression. No sympathy is at work when the thought that someone is angry leads to the thought that he will be difficult to deal with and then in turn to a headache or anxiety; yet the idea of someone's anger is causing a pain. No part of that effect involves putting oneself in another's place.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between ourselves and the other (*Treatise,* 594). The closer the relation, the stronger the sympathy; the further the relation, the weaker the sympathy. (The relations Hume has in mind are resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. So the more we see ourselves as resembling, or being near, or being causally connected to, the other person, the stronger will be the effects of sympathy.)[8]

Hume offers a thought experiment as some confirmation of his view. He has us consider first that we are safely on land and would welcome taking some pleasure from this fact. We would succeed, he suggests, if we just imagine the plight of those at sea in a storm. Comparing our situation to theirs, he thinks, will heighten the pleasure we take in being safe on land. Up to a point, he suggests, our pleasure would increase as the idea of the alternative becomes more vivid, say if we actually "saw a ship at a distance, tost by a tempest, and in danger every moment of perishing on a rock or sand-bank." But only up to a point. If the ship is brought near enough that we can "perceive distinctly the horror, painted on the countenance of the seamen and passengers, hear their lamentable cries, see the dearest friends give their last adieu, or embrace with a resolution to perish in each other's arms. No man has so savage a heart as to reap any pleasure from such a spectacle, or withstand the motions of the tenderest compassion and sympathy" (*Treatise,* 594). The lesson Hume draws is that "if the idea be too faint, it has no influence by comparison; and on the other hand, if it be too strong, it operates on us entirely by sympathy, which is the contrary to comparison" (*Treatise,* 289).

The forces of sympathy and comparison explain as well, Hume holds, the causes of respect, humility, pride, envy, and hatred. All of these, he maintains, are dependent on how we are affected by thoughts of others, and specifically by the degrees to which we either sympathize with, or compare ourselves to, them.

But, to the extent that our interest is in understanding Hume's account of approbation, these are details we can set to one side. All we need is the idea that when sympathy (as opposed to comparison) is in play, it works to transform the idea of an impression (of, say, a pleasure or a pain) into a corresponding impression.

Incidentally, Hume is not committed to holding that the transformation will, or even can, be effected with any and all ideas of feelings (let alone impressions more generally). For all he argues, there may be some feelings the idea of which cannot be turned into the feelings themselves. (It might be, for instance, that the idea of feeling rough sandpaper can never be changed into the feeling itself, nor the idea of someone being jealous into jealousy.) What is crucial, for his theories of approbation and moral

[8] "Resemblance and contiguity are relations not to be neglected . . . For besides the relation of cause and effect, by which we are convinc'd of the reality of the passion, with which we sympathize; beside this, I say, we must be assisted by the relations of resemblance and contiguity, in order to feel the sympathy in its full perfection" (*Treatise,* 320).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

judgment, is just that regularly the transformation does happen and, specifically, that ideas of pleasant and painful feelings can be transformed into pleasures and pains. Moreover, Hume does not need to hold that, when sympathy is at work, each idea of a specific kind of pleasure or pain is transformed into the very same kind of pleasure or pain; it is enough if the idea of a specific kind of pleasure is converted into a pleasant feeling and the idea of a specific kind of pain into a painful feeling.[9] Still, it is striking the extent to which sympathy does effectively turn the idea of someone's grief or fear into grief or fear and the idea of someone's cheerfulness or excitement into cheerfulness or excitement.[10]

B. Smith

Smith, as I have said, shares Hume's view that sympathy, in the standard cases, involves feeling *as* another does, *because* she feels that way. At work in these standard cases, Smith holds, is our capacity to imagine ourselves (more or less successfully) in the other's place.

Of course, there are importantly different ways one might be imagining oneself in another's place. In particular, exactly how much of oneself and one's character is carried over might completely shift how one feels as a result.

In some cases, in order to sympathize with another, Smith notes that we do not simply imagine ourselves in that person's situation, we take up (in our imagination) that person's character and commitments:

> 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 profession, should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son were unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer, if I was really you, and I do not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters. (*TMS,* 323)

In other cases, though, we are sympathizing not with how people actually feel, nor even with how we imagine they feel, but with how we would feel, with certain of our capacities in place, were we (perhaps *per impossible*) in their place. For example, considering someone who has lost all reason and so is incapable of appreciating his own miserable condition, Smith notes that

[9] Hume does sometimes write as if the effect of sympathy is the creation of "the very passion itself" of which one has formed the idea (*Treatise,* 317). Yet no part of his accounts of approbation and moral judgment depend on this.

[10] Movies seem especially effective in inducing sympathetic feeling and they seem to do so, often at least, by managing to make vivid our ideas of the experiences of others.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> The anguish which humanity feels . . . at the sight of such an object, cannot be the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer. The compassions of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he were reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment. (*TMS*, 262)

Breaking significantly from Hume, Smith ends up holding that our conception of the circumstances matters significantly more than our idea of the passion itself. Sympathy "does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites 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 reality" (*TMS*, 12). This carries us so far as even to sympathize with the dead, though we know that they feel nothing (*TMS*, 12–13).[11]

Smith notes that some passions immediately engage sympathy. "Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion" (*TMS*, 11). Yet other passions elicit sympathetic responses, if at all, only when the circumstances in which they are being felt are considered. "There are some passions," Smith observes, "of which the expressions excite no sort of sympathy, but before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them, serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them. The furious behavior of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against himself than against his enemies" (*TMS*, 11). That is, unless and until we learn what "gave occasion to" the furious behavior, in which case we might come to sympathize with the man's anger.

Smith explains the different sympathetic effects of these different passions by appeal to what their appearances bring naturally to the mind of a spectator. "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*, 11). Whereas in the case of anger, "we plainly see what is the situation of those with whom he is angry, and to what violence they may be exposed from so enraged an adversary. We readily, therefore, sympathize with their fear or resentment, and are immediately disposed to take part against the man from whom they appear to be in so much danger" (*TMS*, 11).

In order to sympathize with someone's anger, rather than with the fear or resentment of those at whom he is angry, we need to become aware of,

[11] Needless to say, these examples of sympathy differ significantly from the standard cases of feeling *as* someone else does *because* she feels that way, since, in the examples, the person sympathized with most decidedly does not feel the same way.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and focus on, the grounds for his anger. If we find that we too would be angry in his place, sympathy with him can take hold and weigh against the sympathy we naturally would have with the targets of his anger. If, however, we find we would not be angry in his place, we will not sympathize with his anger.[12]

Smith ends up offering a wonderfully subtle catalogue of the strange dynamics of our capacity for sympathy. But he does not develop a general theory of sympathy on the scale offered by Hume. For his purposes, Smith is content to register the existence of sympathy (along with its intriguing complexities) and to use it to explain the nature of approbation and moral judgment.

An interesting question, though, is whether, or to what extent, Hume's theory might fit with, and explain, Smith's observations. This would require that the affective effects of imagining ourselves in another's place, which Smith highlights, are mediated by *thoughts* of the pleasures or pains we would be feeling under those circumstances. Smith clearly holds that we do often have such thoughts, and that they make a difference to whether we can sympathize with someone else. Yet it seems as if vividly imagining ourselves in the other person's circumstances might cause the feelings straight away, unmediated by thoughts of the feelings, just as actually being in the circumstances would. And it looks too as if sometimes, not having to imagine ourselves in different circumstances, we find ourselves sympathizing, as if by contagion, with the feelings of others.

Indeed, Hume and Smith both remark on how being in the company of those who are cheerful can lift one's mood and they both treat this as an example of sympathy at work. Hume offers an analogy: "As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections pass readily from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature" (*Treatise,* 575). Is this always thanks to our *thinking* of their cheerfulness, or of the cheerfulness we would feel if we were they? Hume could claim that the communication of affections is always via ideas of the affections, but he does not. And insisting that it is seems to press his theory substantially beyond the evidence.

So it is worth noting that Hume can allow that fellow-feeling might well be engendered in ways not covered by his theory. At least when it comes to approbation and moral judgment, Hume's account requires only the claim that our ideas of another's pleasures and pains can cause cor-

[12] One of the real pleasures of Smith's discussion of sympathy is his perceptive description of the peculiarities of sympathy. He notes, for instance, the asymmetric impact of positive and negative feelings and the ways in which we are able to sympathize more readily with emotional pains (which are more accessible to the imagination) than with physical pains. He appeals to the latter to explain why tragedies consistently revolve around emotional, rather than physical loss (*TMS,* 29).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

responding pleasures and pains. His account does not even require the claim that the effect is achieved via a transformation of the idea into an impression.

IV. Approbation

Hume and Smith see the workings of sympathy as crucial to understanding the nature of moral approbation, though their views of approbation differ dramatically. Just how different their views are will take a little time to bring out, not least because Hume's theory of approbation is quite complex (and largely ignored, perhaps for that reason).

A. Hume

According to Hume, approbation and disapprobation are "nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred" (*Treatise,* 624). So the place to look for his theory of approbation and disapprobation is his discussion of love and hatred, which are given extensive attention at the beginning of Book II of the *Treatise.* There Hume distinguishes impressions that are *original* from those that are *secondary* (or reflective), where the original impressions are those that arise "without any antecedent perception" while the secondary or reflective impressions "proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea" (*Treatise,* 275). Thus, when someone feels a pain, on barking her shin, she experiences an original impression (of pain), while the regret she later feels will be a secondary impression that arises thanks to the interposition of the idea of her earlier pain.

Hume goes on quickly to add two further distinctions among the secondary impressions, between those that are *calm* and those that are *violent,* and between those that are *direct* and those that are *indirect.* Hume grants right away that the distinction between the calm and the violent impressions is "far from exact" and notes that many impressions that are usually quite calm (his example is aesthetic appreciation) might "rise to the greatest heights," and that normally violent impressions "may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible" (*Treatise,* 276). The sorting is at best rough and ready. But it is what Hume has in mind in saying approbation and disapprobation are simply "a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred." He thinks approbation and disapprobation, like aesthetic appreciation, are usually relatively calm, whereas love and hatred are usually quite violent.

Yet approbation and disapprobation are, crucially, exactly like love and hatred (and pride and humility) in being *indirect.* Hume's initial description of what being indirect involves is fairly opaque. He mentions "desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair, and security" as examples of direct secondary impressions and "pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

envy, pity, malice, generosity, with their dependents" as examples of indirect secondary impressions (*Treatise,* 276–77). Both arise, according to Hume, thanks to the presence of some other pleasant or painful feeling, but indirect secondary impressions depend as well on the presence of "the conjunction of other qualities" (*Treatise,* 276). Figuring out what those "other qualities" are is central to understanding Hume's account of approbation. Fortunately, it becomes clear as Hume's discussion of pride and humility and love and hate develops.

In setting out his theory of indirect passions, it is useful to follow Hume in considering the four passions of pride, humility, love, and hatred together (keeping in mind that love and hatred are the models for approbation and disapprobation, respectively). Having the four together is helpful because they admit of two relevant pairings. First, pride and humility are paired together because they are both attitudes we have toward ourselves, whereas (as Hume is using the terms) love and hatred are attitudes directed at others. Hume describes this difference by saying that the *object* of pride and humility is ourselves, while the *object* of love and hatred is someone other than ourselves. Second, pride and love are paired together because they are both pleasant, whereas humility and hatred are paired together because they are both painful. Hume describes this difference by saying that the *sensation* of pride and love is pleasant, while the *sensation* of humility and hatred is unpleasant.

What explains when and why we feel attitudes directed at ourselves, rather than others, and when and why we feel the pleasant attitudes, rather than the painful ones? To provide an answer, Hume turns to what *causes* these attitudes and distinguishes, in the cause, between the *subject* and its *qualities.* He then argues that which indirect passion we feel, if any, depends on whether and how the subject, and its qualities, are related to the object and the sensation of the passion in question.

As an example, consider a person who is proud of his house (or a house he has built or designed). The pride is a pleasant feeling directed at himself. What in the cause explains this pride? Two aspects of it, Hume thinks. First, that the subject of the pride, the house, is *his* (or in some other way related to him); recognizing that fact naturally turns his attention to himself. Second, that the quality of the house, its beauty, is such that the idea of it gives him *pleasure;* feeling this naturally turns his attitudes positive. It is by this double relation—to the object of pride and to pride's pleasant feeling—that the cause prompts the pride.

According to Hume, if either relation were lacking—if the house were not his (or in some other salient way related to him), or were not a source of pleasure—it would prompt no pride. And if either relation (to the object or to the sensation of the passion) were changed appropriately, one of the other indirect passions would take pride's place. So, for instance, if the house was his, but it was a source of pain, the thought of it would cause humility; if, instead, the house was a source of pleasure, but belonged

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to another, the thought of it would cause love; or if it was another's and was a source of pain, the thought of it would cause hatred. The crucial relations, importantly, are among the person's thoughts and feelings. What matters for pride, in the case of the house, is that the person thinks of it as her own, or in some other way as related to her, not that it actually is. Similarly, if she thinks that the house is a source of pleasure, as long as that thought then causes her pleasure, enough will be in place for pride, even if, as a matter of fact, the house itself gives no one else pleasure.

Hume concludes that a double relation must be present for any of the indirect passions to arise, and, when present, the nature of each of the relations determines which of the passions will arise. The relations in play are (i) between the *idea* of the cause of the passion (in this case, of the beautiful house) and the *idea* of the object of the passion (self or others) and (ii) between the *feeling* (of pleasure or pain) produced by the cause of the passion and the *sensation* of the passion.[13]

As Hume recognizes, not just any relation between a possible cause and oneself, or another, will be sufficient to produce pride or love, no matter how great the pleasure produced. At the same time, it is amazing just how tenuous a connection sometimes proves sufficient. (Simply having been in the room with someone famous can, it seems, generate pride.) Similarly, not just any pleasure caused by something to which one is related need cause pride, no matter how close the relation.

Moreover, what might originally be a source of pride can easily lose its power when, for instance, the effects of comparison come into play. Thus, one might be proud of some accomplishment until one discovers how easily others manage to do so much better; at this point one's pride might well give way either to admiration and love—to the extent that one's attention is shifted to the more accomplished—or to humility—to the extent that one continues to consider what one has done, but now in a context where a comparison with others brings a painful realization of one's inadequacy. Or, of course, one's attention might well just shift away leaving all four of the passions unengaged.

In thinking about things with an approving (or disapproving) eye, just which qualities, and whose pleasures (or pains), will be taken into account, turns on a number of factors, not least the person's conception of the nature and point of what she is considering. So, for instance, in considering a home as a place for one to live, attention is naturally turned to its comfort, function, and affordability; when one is considering it more as a work of art or an investment than a place for one to live, however, different aspects come into view and are given more significance. More generally, just what we end up approving or disapproving of is influ-

[13] "That cause, which excites the passion, is related to the object, which nature has attributed to the passion; the sensation, which the cause separately produces, is related to the sensation of the passion: From this double relation of ideas and impressions, the passion is deriv'd" (*Treatise,* 286).

enced by whatever factors make certain features of the object of our attention salient, including cultural practices and individual personalities. Significantly, these things too may come in for attention, with, say, cultural practices and particular personalities themselves becoming objects of disapproval.

It is important to keep in mind, especially when we turn to *moral* approbation, that the crucial feeling of pleasure produced by the cause, which then bears a relation to the feeling of the indirect passion (approbation, love, or pride), may be itself immediate or not. Thus, the pleasure caused by the beautiful house may result immediately on seeing it or it may arise, thanks to sympathy, on considering the pleasure others take in seeing the house, or a combination of the two.[14] This matters, in the case of moral approbation, because, on Hume's account, all moral approbation arises from a pleasure that is itself the result (thanks to sympathy) of considering, "in general, without reference to our particular interest," the pleasures a person's character brings to the person herself or to others (*Treatise,* 472). Moral approval is the approval prompted by the more or less durable traits of mind and character that are "*useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to others" (*Enquiry,* 268).[15] And these traits secure moral approval because the idea of the pleasure caused by what is useful or agreeable is transformed, thanks to sympathy, into a pleasant feeling, which then gives rise to the pleasant feeling of approval. (A similar story goes for moral disapproval, where ideas of painful feelings give rise, thanks to sympathy, to a painful feeling, which then, through the workings of the double relation, prompts the painful feeling of disapproval of the person for his character.)[16]

The indirect passions may themselves generate higher order attitudes of approval or disapproval, to the extent that one turns one's attention to them. So a person might disapprove of her own pride, or approve of the disapproval of others. What is important, in order to kick in the indirect passions, is the presence of both a suitable relation between the cause of the passion and the passion's object and a resemblance in sensation between the independent pleasure or pain that results from the cause (specifically, the qualities of the subject) and the sensation of the passion.

On Hume's account, moral approbation is distinctive because of two aspects of its cause: (i) the relevant pleasures are restricted to those that

[14] Comparison too might come into play, so that even a home that is not beautiful and would not give rise to pleasure in others, might nonetheless be a source of pleasure, and so pride, when the owner realizes it is not nearly so bad as others.

[15] Hume's focus on traits of character, in his account of *moral* approbation, plays a role in his accommodating the difference between the various effects a person might have which are properly seen as that person's doing, and for which the person is properly seen as responsible, and other effects that the person might have but that are not properly seen as being that person's doing.

[16] For moral approval and disapproval alike, what is in play is an attitude directed at a person (the object), for his or her character (the subject), because of its impact (the subject's qualities).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

result from sympathy (you might approve of someone in light of his good services to you, but that approval, if it depends on a pleasure that comes not from sympathy but from a concern for yourself, will not be moral approval) and (ii) the subject of moral approval is always ultimately a trait of character. To the extent that we restrict ourselves to sympathetic pleasures and we are focusing on a person's character traits, our approval (if we feel it) will count as moral approbation. Plenty can of course get in the way; we might be constantly focused on our own interests and the impact of someone's character on us, or we might, even when sympathetically engaged, be thinking not of the person's durable traits of mind and character but of his looks, or his wealth, or some other aspect of him that is not the subject of moral approval even if it is useful or agreeable to the person or others.

Hume's theory of the indirect passions, and so of moral approbation, is admittedly complex, to the point of striking many as implausibly baroque. So it is worth pausing to highlight an important virtue of Hume's view, a virtue that seems to call for just the sort of complexity Hume puts into play. Specifically, Hume is well placed to account for the idea that some of our attitudes (though certainly not all of them) are such that we can reasonably ask "what considerations underwrite the attitude?" or "what reasons do we have for them?" Certain attitudes are such that if you have them, there must be considerations that, from your point of view, make sense of, or serve as reasons for, your attitude. While the idea of free-floating pleasure makes sense, taking pride in nothing in particular and for no reason does not; nor, it seems, does feeling hate toward no one in particular, or toward someone but for no reason. Hume's theory of the indirect passions allows him to explain why certain feelings—including approbation, moral and otherwise—are such that we only have them when we see considerations as (so to speak) counting in their favor. If I approve of someone, Hume holds, it must be because I see her as related to something with features that I see in a favorable light. Similarly, if I disapprove of her, it must be because I see her as related to something with features that I see in an unfavorable light.

In the case of distinctively moral approbation, Hume holds that my approval must be of the person, for her character, in light of what I see, without regard to my own interests, as its positive impact on her or relevant others (that is, those I see as being, in Hume's terms, in her "narrow circle"). When it comes to our approval of benevolent people, for instance, Hume sees us as approving of a benevolent person, for her benevolence, because of (what we see as) the benefits her benevolence brings to others (with whom we are sympathetically engaged). Obviously, this proposal is compatible with noting that different people may take different groups to be relevant, may differ in what they see as the impact of her character on her and on others, and may differ in what engages their sympathy and so what they see in a favorable

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

light.[17] Still, whenever we are morally approving of someone, Hume claims, it will be because we approve of that person, for her character, because of her character's effects on her and others, considered without regard to our personal interest.

Significantly, any account of reason-related attitudes that have intentional objects and are felt only when the person takes there to be considerations in light of which they make sense, will end up with as many moving parts as Hume introduces, and for the same sort of reasons that motivate Hume's introduction of them. So while Hume's account of the indirect passions may be baroque, its complexities are unavoidable if we are to do justice to the phenomena.

Perhaps it is worth noting that Hume's particular views (i) that we succeed in considering something without regard to our own interests, yet in ways that engage our interest, only thanks to sympathy, and (ii) that sympathy works by transforming the idea of someone's pleasures or pains into pleasures or pains, end up giving such feelings, and our ideas of them, an especially prominent role in his theory of moral approbation. But one could work with the general outline of his theory, while holding (for instance) that we can be impersonally engaged independently of the workings of sympathy or that when sympathy works it is not always via having an idea of the pleasures or pains of others.[18]

As Hume is well aware, our distinctively moral approvals, despite being restricted to the effects of sympathy and focused exclusively on durable traits of mind and character, will vary dramatically according to whom we consider in thinking of the effects of the person's character and how vividly we consider their pleasures and pains, which will in turn be heavily influenced by resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. The upshot is that we will find people's *feelings* of moral approval shifting in ways that reflect these influences, even when they are genuinely relying on sympathy and putting to one side considerations that do not relate to people's characters. At the same time, as Hume notes, people's moral *judgments* do not exhibit the same variability. So it becomes an important part of Hume's overall theory to make sense of the difference between *feeling* moral approval and *judging* that something is morally approvable. But before we turn to that part of his theory, we should look at Smith's account of moral approval.

B. Smith

Smith's conception of approval is much simpler than Hume's, while giving an even more central place to sympathy. In developing his account

[17] It may well be, for instance, that some people do not approve of benevolence because, for instance, they think its effects, contrary to popular opinion, are not beneficial.

[18] Smith's account of sympathy may well be one according to which we might sympathize with others without having an idea of their pleasures and pains, simply by successfully putting ourselves in their situation and finding ourselves feeling a certain way.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of moral approval Smith turns his attention first to our approval of another person's *opinions:*

> To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them. If the same arguments which convince you convince me likewise, I necessarily approve of your conviction; and if they do not, I necessarily disapprove of it: neither can I possibly conceive that I should do the one without the other. To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinions of others is acknowledged, by every body, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own.

And then he extends the idea: ". . . this is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of the others" (*TMS,* 17).

Pressing the same line, Smith argues that

> Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. 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. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them. (*TMS,* 19)

According to Smith, then, we approve of someone's sentiments when we recognize that we sympathize with their sentiments, that is, that we share their sentiment (perhaps, though not necessarily, as a result of putting ourselves in their place). What matters to approval is the recognition of fellow-feeling, not the process by which we come to share the same feeling:

> To approve of the passions of another . . . 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,* 17)

It is important to Smith's view that the approval consists not in sharing passions but comes with noticing or observing or thinking that one does. As Smith points out,

> . . . in the sentiment of approbation there are two things to be taken notice of; first, the sympathetic passion of the spectator; and, secondly, 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. This last emotion, in

> which the sentiment of approbation properly consists, is always agreeable and delightful. The other may be agreeable or disagreeable, according to the nature of the original passion, whose features it must always, in some measure, retain.[19]

As Smith recognizes, this view needs some adjustment to take account of the ways in which we might approve of someone's sentiments even when we do not happen, actually, to sympathize with them. To take just one example, "We may often approve of a jest," he notes, "and think the laughter of the company quite just and proper, though we ourselves do not laugh, because, perhaps, we are in a grave humour, or happen to have our attention engaged with other objects" (*TMS,* 17).

Smith handles these cases by introducing the idea of a conditional sympathy, of the sympathy we would feel if we were to consider the "situation, fully and in all its parts," which we often do not do (*TMS,* 18). We approve of others' sentiments, Smith then holds, if we observe that we would, if we were fully considering their circumstances, be in sympathy with them.

On Smith's view, distinctively moral approval has as its focus the "sentiment or affection of the heart" from which actions proceed, when these sentiments and affections are "considered under two different aspects, or in two different relations; first, in relation to the cause which excites it, or the motive which gives occasion to it; and secondly, in relation to the end which it proposed, or the effect which it tends to produce" (*TMS,* 18). Reflection on the first—the cause of sentiments—shapes whether we approve of some action as *proper.* We do so, Smith thinks, as long as we (think that we) would, under the agent's circumstances, share the agent's "sentiment or affection of the heart." When we find that we do (or would) sympathize with the agent's sentiment or affection, we approve of the agent as acting properly. Alternatively, though, if we find that we do not (or would not) sympathize with the agent's sentiment or affection, we disapprove of the agent for acting improperly.

Reflection on the second relation—on what the intended end is or its usual effects are—shapes whether we approve of person as acting *meritoriously.* We do so when we (think that we) would feel gratitude if we were in the circumstances of those who are or would be subject to the effects of the action. When we find that we do (or would) sympathize with their gratitude we approve of the agent as having acting meritoriously. Alternatively, though, if we find that we do (or would) sympathize

[19] *TMS,* 46. This is in response to a worry pressed by Hume that Smith could not hold both that sympathy is always agreeable and yet that we can sympathize with unpleasant sentiments. Hume's concern was that sympathizing with unpleasant sentiments must be unpleasant. Smith's reasonable response is to distinguish the unpleasant sympathetic feelings from the pleasant feeling of observing the agreement in feeling.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with the resentment of those who are (or would be) subject to the effects of the action, we disapprove of the agent as acting blamably.[20]

The pleasure we take in being in sympathy with others—the pleasure of approving of others—works also, Smith thinks, to shape our own sentiments (or at least our willingness to show them) so as to make them more likely to be sympathized with by others.

> Our first moral criticisms are exercised upon the characters and conduct of other people; and we are all very forward to observe how each of these affects us. But we soon learn, that other people are equally frank with regard to our own. We become anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause, and whether to them we must necessarily appear those agreeable or disagreeable creatures which they represent us. We begin, upon this account, to examine our own passions and conduct, and to consider how these must appear to them, by considering how they would appear to us if in their situation. (*TMS,* 112)

As a result, he notes, we tend to temper our expressions of sadness to bring them to a level with which others can sympathize and we work to bring our attitudes into line with what others will find they can sympathize with. "It is indecent," he observes, "to express any strong degree of those passions which arise from a certain situation or disposition of the body; because the company, not being in the same disposition, cannot be expected to sympathize with them" (*TMS,* 27). More generally, he claims, "... if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent, or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them" (*TMS,* 27).[21]

Importantly, as Smith notes, man "desires, not only praise, but praise-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of praise. He dreads, not only blame, but blame-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be blamed by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of blame" (*TMS,* 114). This poses the challenge of figuring out what it

[20] As Smith emphasizes, whether we will sympathize with someone's gratitude or resentment is sensitive to whether we see the actions of those to whom they are grateful or resentful as proper (*TMS,* 71–73).

[21] Smith uses this phenomenon to explain an important difference between the unsocial passions ("hatred and resentment and all their modifications" [*TMS,* 34]) and the social passions ("Generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship and esteem, all the social and benevolent affections"). The former, he argues, "must always be brought down to a pitch much lower than that to which undisciplined nature would raise them" in order to secure the sympathy of others, while the latter are such that we "have always ... the strongest disposition to sympathize with the benevolent affections" (*TMS,* 39).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

takes to be praiseworthy (or blameworthy). And this leads Smith to distinguish *judging* that someone has acted properly or meritoriously (or improperly or blamably) from *feelings* of approval (and disapproval) we might have towards them.

V. Moral Judgment

Hume and Smith both recognize that there is an important difference between something securing approval and it being approvable. And they recognize the need for an account of moral thought and talk to accommodate the distinction and explain what it is for something to be approvable, and not merely approved. In broad outlines, as I have said, they adopt the same general view. They both work to identify conditions in which approval (which they have already explained) is veridical. Their shared idea is that for something to be approvable is for it to be such that it would garner approval under the appropriate conditions.

The model for this approach is familiar from accounts of what it is for something to be, say, blue, that appeal to it looking a certain way, under normal light, to a person with a normal visual system, under normal circumstances. These accounts start with the fact that we have certain reactions to the world (color perceptions, in this case) and then mark the difference between something merely seeming or looking blue and it actually being blue by appeal to how it would look under privileged circumstances. The idea, it is worth emphasizing, is not that the privileged ("normal") conditions are those in which we happen to be able to see a thing's true color, where we have some independent way of identifying its true color, and so a way of confirming the conduciveness of the circumstances to seeing it. Rather, the idea is that being blue just is being such as to look a certain way under the specified conditions. There is no independent standard; the standard is set by how things appear when the privileged conditions are met.[22]

Importantly, since the privileged conditions are not privileged because they are those under which we get things right, some other argument must be offered for thinking they are the conditions that set the standard. While Hume and Smith offer quite different arguments for the standard they defend, they are sensitive to many of the same features of moral judgment—especially its demand for impartiality, but also its independence from the vagaries that, both acknowledge, influence individual patterns of approval.

[22] Hume is explicit about the model for judgments of color and about extending it to his account of moral judgment. He makes clear as well that he thinks the general model extends to a range of other judgments that have their origin in our perceptions, including judgments concerning not merely "secondary" but also "primary" qualities. See, for instance, *Enquiry*, 227–28.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A. Hume

Hume's approach to identifying the standard of moral judgment (which is set by what he calls the "General Point of View") involves starting with what he takes to be the pattern of our moral judgments, and our judgments (as correct or not) of other people's moral judgments. Then, in light of that pattern, he extrapolates a standard that makes sense of, and explains, why the judgments exhibit the pattern they do.

In the process, Hume marks the ways in which our judgments often break free from our approvals. For instance, our approvals, thanks in part to their dependence on the workings of sympathy, vary significantly, making them parochial and variable in ways that our moral judgments are not. He notes, for instance, that in thinking about a person's character and its effects, we are influenced by our relation to him (including resemblance and contiguity) as well as by the vividness with which those effects are presented. As a result, our approvals are influenced "by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case" (*Enquiry,* 230). In our moral judgments, however, though the differential effects of sympathy are *felt,* and our actual approvals are influenced accordingly, we *judge* people of the same character as morally the same. With this in mind, Hume points out that "A statesman or patriot, who serves our own country in our own time has always a more passionate regard paid to him, than one whose beneficial influence operated on distant ages or remote nations" because the latter "affects us with a less lively sympathy." But he notes that "[w]e may own the merit to be equally great, though our sentiments are not raised to an equal height, in both cases" (*Enquiry,* 227). In the same way, "[o]ur servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter" (*Treatise,* 582).

From this Hume infers that we are relying on a standard for our judgments that, in some way, abstracts from, or controls for, the variable influences of sympathy caused by our connection with those we judge and by differences in how vivid the case is to us. He thinks this is accomplished by turning our attention from our own actual feelings of approbation to the approbation we would feel if we were to take up a privileged point of view—a point of view from which we are considering, not a particular person and the actual effects of her character, but instead the usual effects of the kind of character she has. So while we judge her for her character, our judgments turn not on the actual effects of her particular character, nor on her relation to us, but on a more general view of the effects of the kind of character she has.

This aspect of our privileged point of view has another advantage, as an explanation of our judgments, in that it makes sense of why "Virtue in

rags is still virtue; and the love, which it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desart, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world" (*Treatise,* 584). So, for instance, we judge benevolence to be a virtue, even where it happens not to find expression in benefits to others, despite our sympathy being less engaged, and our feelings of approval less strong, than they would have been had there been actual benefits. Benevolence's standing as a virtue depends on how we are engaged not by reflection on the effects of a specific person's benevolence, as they turn out to be, but by reflection on the usual or expected effects of benevolence.

> [T]he tendencies of actions and characters, not their real accidental consequences, are alone regarded in our moral determinations or general judgments; though in our real feeling or sentiment, we cannot help paying greater regard to one whose station, joined to virtue, renders him really useful to society, than to one, who exerts the social virtues only in good intentions and benevolent affections. (*Enquiry,* 228)

Hume makes the same point in the *Treatise:* "Where a person is possess'd of a character, that in its natural tendency is beneficial to society, we esteem him virtuous, . . . even tho' particular accidents prevent its operation and incapacitate him from being serviceable to his friends and country." We praise equally, for instance, the character of people equally honest, despite knowing that the honesty of one actually benefits people while the honesty of the other does not. "'Tis true," Hume acknowledges, "when the cause is compleat, and a good disposition is attended with good fortune . . . , which renders it really beneficial to society, it gives a stronger pleasure to the spectator, and is attended with a more lively sympathy. We are more affected by it; and yet," he recognizes, "we do not say that it is more virtuous, or that we esteem it more" (*Treatise,* 585).

Moreover, Hume recognizes, our moral judgments suppose a common standard, one sharable (and often shared) with others we recognize as being of the same mind with us about virtue and vice, and such that it delivers the same verdict for us all. This introduces the idea that the relevant point of view must both be accessible to us all and be, in its deliverances, insensitive to our individual differences. As a result, he argues that the general point of view, properly understood, not only restricts the relevant reactions of approval and disapproval to those prompted by sympathy (which leaves to one side the influence of individual differences), and limits attention to the usual effects of the character type in question, but also introduces a common focus for that attention, fixing "our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character" (*Treatise,*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

602).[23] Who exactly counts varies according to which kind of character is under consideration. So, for example, the virtues of a parent are measured mostly by a character's effects on those in his or her family, while those of a statesmen are answerable to the effects on a much broader audience (albeit not always the effects on everyone).[24]

Hume, as I have said, extrapolates the standard for our moral judgments (as set by the General Point of View) from what he sees as the pattern of those judgments, and the pattern of our judgments of other peoples' moral judgments, arguing that the standard he identifies explains those patterns. He sees the resulting *standard* as being insensitive to the influences of self-interest, special relations, and actual sympathetic engagement. Yet he recognizes that our actual *judgments* (as well as our judgments of other people's judgments) can be, and often are, influenced by these factors. Still, on his account, and—if he is right, by our own lights—our moral judgments go wrong when this happens. This is because the *standard* for the correctness of our judgments, even if not our judgments, is insensitive to these influences, and rightly so.[25] That the standard is *rightly* insensitive to such influence is, I will argue at the end of the paper, important to the plausibility of Hume's view. First, however, we should look at Smith's account of moral judgment.

B. Smith

Once the distinction between someone being approved and that person being approvable is recognized, Smith faces the challenge of explaining what marks the difference. With Hume, he sees the challenge as one of identifying the standard that governs our judgments of approvability. The standard in question is a standard we use in judging how things—people, actions, institutions—*ought* to be, not how they happen to be.

Smith's approach to identifying the standard of moral judgment (which is set by what he calls the "impartial spectator") involves starting with the observation that we desire "not only praise, but praise-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of praise" (*TMS,* 114). Then, keeping that

[23] In other places, thinking of the same restriction, Hume talks of those who have "a connexion" with the person judged (*Treatise,* 591 and 602) rather than of those in the "narrow circle."

[24] So, for instance, "When the interests of one country interfere with those of another, we estimate the merits of a statesman by the good or ill, which results to his own country from his measures and councils, without regard to the prejudice which he brings on its enemies and rivals" (*Enquiry,* 225). Keeping this in mind is important for seeing how and why Hume does not evaluate character traits by appeal to their contribution to overall utility, taking everyone into account.

[25] For a more detailed discussion of Hume's account of moral judgment and the "General Point of View," see my "On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal—and Shouldn't Be," in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11, no. 1 (1994): 202–228.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

desire in mind, he identifies a standard for what counts as praiseworthy (or approvable) by looking at what satisfies that desire. He argues that the desire finds satisfaction when, but only when, we would secure the approval of an impartial spectator who is fully informed about our actions, motives, and circumstances.

Smith points out that the desire to be praiseworthy is not satisfied when we secure the praise of those who are not appropriately informed impartial spectators:

> It is by no means sufficient that, from ignorance or mistake, esteem and admiration should, in some way or other, be bestowed upon us . . . The man who applauds us either for actions which we did not perform, or for motives which had no sort of influence upon our conduct, applauds not us, but another person. We can derive no sort of satisfaction from his praises. (*TMS*, 115–16)

The approval of those who are not appropriately informed does not satisfy the desire for praiseworthiness.

Nor is it sufficient, Smith notes, for us to secure the admiration and approval of those influenced by self-interest or bias. So, for instance, Smith argues that in weighing someone else's interests against our own, "[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*, 135). The approval of those who are not impartial also does not satisfy the desire for praiseworthiness.

What does satisfy the desire for praiseworthiness is knowing that one *would* secure the approval of an appropriately informed spectator, whether or not one actually enjoys such approval.[26] In using this standard people are appealing not to what garners approval but 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, the great judge and arbiter of their conduct" (*TMS*, 130).

Once we have on board the standard set by the impartial spectator, we are in a position to consider our own patterns of approval to determine which ones meet that standard and which ones do not. And we are able to distinguish between what we happen to approve of and what is genuinely approvable, allowing our judgments to be governed by the latter,

[26] "We are pleased to think that we have rendered ourselves the natural objects of approbation," Smith observes, "though no approbation should ever actually be bestowed upon us: and we are mortified to reflect that we have justly merited the blame of those we live with, though that sentiment should never actually be exerted against us" (*TMS*, 115–16).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rather than the former.[27] Like Hume, Smith recognizes that it is important to the standard we rely on in drawing the distinction itself that it emerges as, in the appropriate sense, approvable.[28]

VI. Ratifying the Standard of Moral Judgment

Hume and Smith share the idea that we should understand thinking of something as approvable in terms of the thing being such that it would secure approval—not approval from just anyone under any circumstances, but approval from someone appropriate under suitable circumstances. And they share a view, at least in general outline, about what someone has to be like, and what her circumstances need to be, in order for her approval to matter. She must be informed, for instance, and impartial, and engaged by the welfare of others. These are features of someone taking up the general point of view, or serving as the impartial spectator, that are crucial to her role in setting a standard for our moral judgments.

Importantly, Hume and Smith both suggest a further, explicitly normative, condition on an appropriately specified standard for moral judgment. According to them both we neither can nor should rest content finding that we happen to rely on some standard in making our moral judgments; the standard must be morally good, appropriate, or justified. This means that the standard we rely on (whether set by the general point of view or by the impartial spectator) must itself meet the standard it sets. Were we to discover that the standard we rely on is (by our own lights) morally defective, we would, they think, have grounds for rejecting the standard.[29]

So, for instance, at the end of the *Treatise,* Hume claims (without elaboration) that "not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles from whence it is derived" (*Treatise,* 619). Smith, in turn, criticizes Francis Hutcheson's account of moral judgment on the grounds that he treats as irrelevant—even absurd—the question of whether the standard on which we rely is,

[27] In turning our attention to the reactions of an impartial spectator, when we make judgment concerning what is approvable, "habit and experience have taught us to do this so easily and so readily, that we are scarce sensible that we do it; and it requires, on this case too, some degree of reflection, and even of philosophy, to convince us . . ." (*TMS,* 135–36).

[28] For a more detailed discussion of Smith's account of moral judgment and the impartial spectator, see my "Sentiments and Spectators: Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Judgment," in *The Philosophy of Adam Smith,* ed., Vivienne Brown and Samuel Fleischacker (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010), 124–44.

[29] This marks an important difference between the standard of moral judgment and the standards for other judgments, say of color or size. In the case of the latter, the standards themselves, and the judgments we make using them, are not within the scope of those standards (such standards and judgments have no color or size) nor need the standards be morally good, appropriate, or justified in order to be the right standards for these nonmoral judgments.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

itself, morally evaluable as proper or appropriate.[30] He goes on to argue not only that we can and do make such evaluations, but claims that a mark of correct moral sentiments is that they "naturally appear in some degree laudable and morally good" (*TMS,* 323). Exactly what is required for a standard to meet this requirement is left unexplored by both Hume and Smith.

In Hume's case, it seems that he is sensitive to the worry that, when it comes to determining virtue, it is not enough to show that a character trait garners the approval of those taking the general point of view, it must also merit the approval it garners. And, on Hume's account, it will count as meriting that approval if, but only if, the fact that the trait garners the approval it does (from the general point of view), itself garners approval from the general point of view. That it will garner such approval is not trivial. Given Hume's account of approbation, when we take up a particular general point of view, from which we feel approval of various traits, we might find that, as our attention is shifted to the pattern of our resulting approvals, we feel disapproval. In such a case, though the putative virtue is "approv'd of," *the sense of virtue,* and "the principles from whence it is derived," are not. If this were to happen, we would be in the position of thinking, of what meets the standard (by garnering approval from the general point of view) that it does not merit that approval—not because we have wheeled in some new standard, but because our own standard does not count the approval approv*able.* In such cases, the standard on offer will fail to meet the requirement Hume has introduced.

Clearly, in cases in which the sense of virtue, and the principles from which it derives, are approved of, from the general point of view, we might wonder whether *that* approval is merited. So a potential regress looms. Hume is explicit that making the first step is mandatory—to insure that what is approved by our standard merits, by that standard, the approval it receives. Yet he says nothing about successive steps. Hume can, I think, reasonably treat each successive step as optional, though he should hold that an acceptable standard must pass at each level, however far back one goes. So the requirement is not that we must take an infinite number of steps, but that for each one taken we do not find that the approval in question is not merited.

Smith, as I have indicated, imposed a very similar normative condition on the adequacy of the standard we rely on in making our moral judgments (whether it is set by the impartial spectator or not). It is unclear,

[30] Stressing the analogy between moral judgments and judgments of taste or size, Hutcheson's view is that a person cannot "apply *moral Attributes* to the very *Faculty* of perceiving *moral Qualities;* or call his *moral Sense morally Good* or *Evil,* any more than he calls the *Power of Tasting, sweet,* or *bitter;* or of *Seeing, strait* or *crooked, white* or *black.*" *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense,* by Francis Hutcheson, ed., Aaron Garrett (1742; Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), 149.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

however, how this condition should be seen as applying to his account of the impartial spectator. What did he think that standard needed to do in order to count as appropriately ratified?

One possibility might be that Smith thought a particular conception of the impartial spectator meets the normative condition as long as we find that the impartial spectator approves of her own (pattern of) approvals. This would fit nicely with what seems to be Hume's view. Yet Smith's account of approbation, which is significantly different from Hume's, makes *this test* trivially satisfied (in a way it is not, on Hume's account). After all, for Smith, to approve of something, say some (pattern of) approval, is just to recognize that one would, under the same circumstances, feel the same approval. But of course, an impartial spectator, reflecting on her own (pattern of) approval, will inevitably discover that she would feel exactly the same as she in fact does feel. If this is all it took for the standard to count as "laudable and morally good," one might well worry about the significance of the requirement. So it is worth noting that, even if Smith's account of the standard of moral judgment meets the test easily, if other accounts—say Hutcheson's or Hume's—end up failing the test, that would be important.

Alternatively, though, Smith might hold that an impartial spectator's approvals are successfully defended only when they would secure the approval of some other spectator, different in some relevant respect from ours. This would make the test nontrivial. However, it would raise significant worries about how we should understand the relation between the two standards that would then be in play, such that one is an appropriate standard for our moral judgments but another one is the appropriate standard not for such judgments but for the standard for such judgments. If the latter standard is the appropriate one for determining the standard for our moral judgments, why is it not itself an appropriate standard for our moral judgments? What qualifies the second spectator's approvals for one role but not the other?

The challenge here is analogous to the challenge facing indirect rule utilitarians who hold that overall utility is the right standard for judging among rules, but not among actions, which should be judged by appeal to the rules sanctioned by over all utility. In fact, one might think that Smith actually embraces the standard of overall utility as the appropriate standard for impartial spectators. On such an interpretation, when it comes to the question of whether the standard set by the impartial spectator can be defended as proper or appropriate, the answer is found by appeal to the consequences of using that standard. And, in places, Smith clearly registers the advantages of regulating our moral judgments by appeal to the impartial spectator. Yet there are two strong reasons for thinking that this interpretation gets Smith wrong. First, if Smith were to appeal to overall utility in defense of the impartial spectator, he would be relying on just the sort of independent standard of moral judgment that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he rejects in giving his account of our reliance on the impartial spectator. Second, if Smith were relying on such a standard, he would need to count as valuable certain states of affairs, or actions, or feelings, independent of whether they would secure the approval of an impartial spectator. Yet Smith is clear that the value of, say, pleasure is crucially conditioned by whether it is proper or merited. On his view, not all pleasure is equally valuable; whether some pleasure is valuable, and how valuable it is (when it is valuable), depends on whether it would be approved of by the impartial spectator. Absent an appeal to the impartial spectator, there is, according to Smith, no criterion for distinguishing between what is, and what is not, a valuable consequence.[31] Needless to say, once the standard of value set by the impartial spectator is in place, there is no obstacle to Smith offering utilitarian arguments in favor of various practices and institutions, as he often does. But these appeals to utility will play out against the standard set by the impartial spectator, they will not provide an independent standard for judging the impartial spectator.[32]

Yet Smith does not need to appeal to some other, independent, standard (set either by another impartial spectator or considerations of overall utility) in order to raise and address the question of whether the impartial spectator sets a proper or appropriate standard in a way that is nontrivial. He can, and should, rely on the impartial spectator, but see the question not as whether the impartial spectator approves of her own (pattern of) approval, which she inevitably will, but whether the impartial spectator approves of our relying on the deliverances of the impartial spectator in making our moral judgments. Once the candidate object of approbation is not the impartial spectator's (pattern of) approval, but our using that approval as the standard for our moral judgments, we have a nontrivial test that might be failed. Nothing in Smith's account of approbation or in his characterization of approbation or of the impartial spectator ensures, ex ante, that such a spectator will approve of us using the spectator's reactions as a standard for judgment.

At the same time, the results of such a test are important. If we were to discover that, by our own standard, our relying on that standard is improper or inappropriate, we would have reason to revise our standard. After all, we would be thinking that there is something improper in

[31] Smith draws a sharp distinction between his view and one that gives priority to utility. Both views, he supposes, offer a measure of when various sentiments and affections are felt to the appropriate degree. The difference is that the one he rejects "makes utility, and not sympathy, or the correspondent affection of the spectator, the natural and original measure of this proper degree" (*TMS,* 306). And an appeal to our judgments of when sentiments and affections are proper or not, Smith holds, reveals that utility is not the natural and original measure, while "the correspondent affection of the [impartial] spectator" is.

[32] See, for instance, his famous discussion of how a well structured economy will promote the public interest even though those within in it are acting only with the intention of promoting their own interests. See Smith's *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* Vol. I, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, vol. II of the Glasgow Edition of the *Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (1776; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), p. 456.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

judging ourselves, and others, as proper and meritorious in the way we have been. If, however, we were to discover that, by our own standard, relying on that standard is proper or appropriate, we would be in a position to ask and answer, with some significance, the question that Hutcheson mistakenly thought was irrelevant.

If we do interpret Smith's normative condition this way, two things are worth noting. The first is that Hume could make sense of, and embrace, the condition understood in this way. Whether relying on the general point of view will satisfy this condition is not a foregone conclusion; but it may well satisfy it, and if it does, that looks to be significant. The second thing worth noting is that if it is our reliance on the standard that is up for evaluation, we will not be concerned with showing that what garners approval merits that approval. Instead, we will be concerned with showing that it is morally good (or appropriate, or justified) to use the fact that something garners approval (or disapproval) from a privileged point of view as the standard for our judgments. Perhaps both concerns are important to address.

However that works out, finding that the standard we are using is, by our own lights, defensible as morally good, or appropriate, or justified is not to find independent grounds for the standard. Yet it is to show that the standard does not suffer a serious defect—of being such that, even by our own lights, it is not an appropriate standard for our judgments.

VII. Conclusion

My concern in this essay has been to sort out three distinct elements of the theories offered by David Hume and Adam Smith—their theories of sympathy, of approbation, and of moral judgment. Too often the differences between these three elements are simply confounded and too often, also, the differences between Hume's and Smith's theories of these elements are missed altogether. At the same time, many have read the sentimentalists (including Hume and Smith) as if they had no account of moral *judgment* at all, or as if, whatever account they had, was simply a nonstarter. Neither view does justice to the aims, subtlety, or plausibility of the theories Hume and Smith developed.

I have stressed in particular that Hume and Smith have accounts of the difference between *feeling* approval and *judging* that something is approvable, proper, or meritorious. This is, I think, crucial to the plausibility of their sentimentalist approach to moral theory. To lose the contrast between having a moral feeling and making a moral judgment is to lose something essential to understanding moral practice, even if (as the sentimentalists hold) there is a deep connection between feeling and judging. Fortunately, Hume and Smith do not lose the contrast. Which of their accounts is right, if either, of course matters greatly, and I have not here taken a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press

position on the adequacy of either. Yet, with them, and for the reasons highlighted in the last section, I think that neither Hume's account nor Smith's will be adequate unless the standard of judgment it offers can itself be defended as morally approvable (in light of the standard itself). At the same time, though, I suspect they might each have the resources to show that their standards meet this normative requirement—or, at least, that suitable variations of their standards will. So with that in mind, let me reiterate that, while having these resources is (I think) a necessary condition for an account of moral judgment to be plausible, meeting this condition is not sufficient for success.

Philosophy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000101 Published online by Cambridge University Press