SYMPATHY IN SPACE(S)
Adam Smith on Proximity

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In this essay the author explores the relation between sympathy and proximity in Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments. The essay proceeds in two parts. First, the author demonstrates that Smith’s description of our various attachments and affections, and the inevitable conflicts among them, draws us into the rich spatial texture of sympathetic response and stimulates further inquiry into a variety of spaces in which sympathetic activity takes place. In the second part, the author explores three such spaces—the physical, the affective, and the historical/cultural—to critique the way that some contemporary moral and political theorists have appropriated Smith’s account of sympathy as a tool for cosmopolitan aspirations. To what extent can Smith’s sympathy model detach us from and get us beyond the partiality and particularity generated by our physical, affective, and cultural entanglements?

Keywords: Adam Smith; sympathy; proximity; space; cosmopolitanism

Adam Smith’s account of sympathy in Theory of Moral Sentiments surely ranks among the subtlest accounts we have of the nature of sympathetic activity and of its prominence in human life.1 It is certainly the best known dimension of his moral thought among students and casual consumers of Smith. And yet, in a time when so many of us are thinking about globalization and various cosmopolitical conundrums, there has been virtually no exploration of Smith’s thoughts on sympathy and proximity.2 David Hume is regularly noted for his thoughts in Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals about the influence of proximity on our sympathetic responsiveness to others; but little has been said, even among Smith scholars, about Smith’s thoughts on the spatial limitations of sympathy, which are in many ways

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more interesting and complex than Hume’s. Hume observed that “sympathy . . . with persons remote from us [is] much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous” and that this effect on our sentiments necessitated a more impartial foundation for our moral judgements, which Hume located in general standards that are drawn from “social intercourse” and “general usefulness.”

In this essay I demonstrate that Adam Smith absorbed much of Hume’s basic orientation to the relation between sympathy and space, and that he too sought to discover an enlarged method of judging distant others, untainted by the natural partiality of our passive feelings. This attempt was embodied, of course, in Smith’s well-known account of the “Impartial Spectator.” Much has been done on the relation between Hume’s and Smith’s general accounts of sympathy, notably their divergence over Hume’s association of sympathy with considerations of utility. I do not intend to rehearse all that here. I invoke Hume for the simple reason that Smith generally adopted his orientation to the effects of proximity on sentiment, that our sympathy tends to fade as the object becomes further removed. But we shall discover that Smith’s Humean claim is rooted in a genealogical observation drawn substantially from Stoic moral psychology that physical proximity begets familiarity, which in turn makes affection stronger, understanding more accurate, sympathy likelier, and other-concern more natural and appropriate. This trajectory in Smith’s thought (notably the segment that runs proximity-familiarity-affection-sympathy) has not been widely appreciated or discussed. Indeed, people continue to cite Hume, never Smith, on the relation between sympathy and distance. But I demonstrate in this essay that Smith’s description of sympathy and its spatial limits was not only more extensive and explicit than was Hume’s but also more subtle and textured, more complex and psychological, and ultimately more compelling for contemporary moral and political theory. One primary reason is that Smith’s perceptive description of our various attachments and affections, and the inevitable conflicts among them, draws us into the rich spatial texture of sympathetic response and stimulates further inquiry into a variety of spaces in which sympathetic activity takes place.

This essay proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I offer an interpretation of sympathy in Adam Smith’s thought that opens itself to questions about sympathy and space in a global context. In brief, I maintain that Smithian sympathy is best understood as a social practice through which morality is intersubjectively produced in shared physical spaces. Challenging a frequent assumption that sympathy is an emotion for Smith, or a virtue, I emphasize the dramatic activities of surveillance and discipline, concluding that Smith’s description of sympathetic activity entails a rich moral psychology of culture
formation. Understanding sympathy in this very practical and sociological way in the first half of the essay will help in the second half when we inquire into the spatial texture of sympathetic activity. In the second half of the essay, I productively complicate the notion of proximity in Smith’s thought by identifying and differentiating three spaces in which sympathy seems to move—which I call the physical, the affective, and the historical (or cultural). Ultimately, I want to demonstrate that a rich and complicated understanding of proximity exposes the difficulties (though not necessarily the impossibility) of maneuvering sympathy beyond the spaces it naturally inhabits. Embedded within my interpretation of Smith lies a critique of the way contemporary moral and political theory have often (mis)appropriated his descriptive account of sympathy as a tool for cosmopolitan aspirations. Can sympathy transcend its own genealogy and be shifted about? And to what extent does Smith’s “Impartial Spectator” model succeed in correcting this sentimental nearsightedness, in detaching us from and getting us beyond the partiality and particularity generated by our physical, affective, and cultural entanglements? The Moral Sentiments helps us to appreciate the gravity and complexity of these very timely questions.

I begin now with Smith’s idea of sympathetic engagement, and I turn later to the spaces in which it moves.

I. SYMPATHY AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY

People often mistake the Moral Sentiments as a normative treatise about morality, but Smith rarely spoke in what we would refer to today as a “normative” voice. He tended to reject traditional moral philosophy for neglecting or distorting the psychological and sociological phenomena of ordinary life in its drive to promote abstract (Smith would say “abstruse”)\(^6\) views of how the world should be.\(^7\) In the tradition of his teachers Frances Hutcheson and David Hume, Smith was engaged in a far more descriptive activity.\(^8\) At one point he bluntly asserted “that the present inquiry is not concerning a matter of right . . . but concerning a matter of fact.”\(^9\) Undoubtedly, there are moments in the text when he came rather close to offering a theory of moral justification, struggling with the erratic or unfortunate moral consequences of sympathy in certain contexts.\(^10\) I say more about this later. But I argue that Smith in the Moral Sentiments primarily attempted to convey as earnestly as possible the phenomena he observed in the social world around him. As such, he approached the subject of morality with the empirical eye of a moral psychologist, describing in rich detail the actual causal mechanisms through which sympathy generated moral sentiment, given people as they are and the world
as it is. On Smith’s account, sympathy was not an innate human disposition that discharges mindlessly and spontaneously like Grotius’s *appetitus societatus* or Rousseau’s *pitie*, and it was not a rational telos toward which all healthy people strive, like Stoic *apatheia* or Lockean natural law. Though Smith was keen to challenge the egoistic assumptions of Thomas Hobbes and his disciples (notably Pufendorf and Mandeville), he did not employ the idea of sympathy as a sappy signifier of human benevolence. Sympathy for Smith was an ordinary social practice through which people in shared spaces produce morality together without the artifice of coercion, philosophy, religion, or formal education.

I present Smith’s account of sympathy as a dramatic activity that unfolds in two general “stages.” The first, which I like to call *surveillance*, is that in which a “spectator,” any ordinary person, observes and judges the behavior of an “agent” and through some means communicates this judgement. The second stage, which I call *discipline*, refers to the impact that the spectator’s surveillance and judgement have on the agent, the extent to which they motivate her to modify her conduct, and, ultimately, through repetition, to become a member of a culture.

One prefatory comment before pursuing each “stage” further: It is potentially misleading to refer to the engagements in Smith’s description as “stages” since they often fire quite rapidly, often simultaneously, and tend to live on in the mind long after they take place. Mindful not to lock the sympathy dynamic into a mechanical sequence, I use “stage” since it conveys distinct social moments within Smith’s description. I use “stage” to emphasize the intersubjectivity of Smith’s account—that sympathy for him was not a moral disposition or a telos but a dynamic that刺激ulated agents (and the future agents of agents) to accommodate themselves to the demands of social life.

*Surveillance and Fellow Feeling*

The first “stage” of sympathy is that in which a spectator—any ordinary, richly constituted, inescapably partial individual—observes the behavior of an agent, arrives at a judgement, and somehow (verbally or otherwise) communicates her judgement to the agent. In this act of judging, Smith noted, the spectator is unable to experience the agent’s joys and griefs in a primary and immediate way since she is quite literally a different being, incapable of going beyond her own flesh and mind, “beyond her own person.” The only way a spectator can generate fellow feeling for the agent, according to Smith, is imaginatively to project herself into the agent’s world and to ask herself whether, were she the agent, she would be motivated by his circumstances to feel and act as he does. “We can form no idea of the manner in which he is
affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.”14

Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. . . . By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves endur- ing all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. 15

Only through her attempt to get as close to the agent as possible, to “enter as it were into his body and become in some measure the same person with him,”16 to “bring home to [herself] every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer,”17 can the spectator come to understand why the agent acts and feels as he does. In other words, imaginary closeness produces understanding. But for Smith, the sympathy model is effective for producing impartial moral judgements because the spectator is at once both involved and detached. Once “changing places in fancy” the spectator is said to understand the agent and his conditions well enough to “form some idea of his sensations,” to feel with him and achieve a sufficient “correspondence” or “concord.” And yet, she is coolly removed from his distress or pleasure; her change of position is only “imaginary” and “momentary.” Since she remains safe while the agent suffers, since she remains poor while he prospers, lonely while he loves, the sentiment she generates is necessarily “lower” in degree and it “varies in kind” from the agent’s primary sentiments.18

Our imagination not having run in the same channel with that of the lover, we cannot enter into the eagerness of his emotions. 19

Surely Smith did not make Rousseau’s more radical claim about the man whose reason “isolates him and moves him to say in secret at the sight of a suffering man, ‘Perish if you will; I am safe and sound,’ “20 but he did assert that even the most refined imagination must fall short of primary experience, that a complete “unison” of sentiment between different people differently situated is impossible. 21 (We see later that this gap widens as the spectator becomes spatially removed in various ways from the agent.) Nevertheless, this unbreachable distance was the very thing that enabled a spectator to be a sufficiently “fair,” “indifferent,” and “impartial” judge, or at least better positioned than the agent is to judge whether his behavior is “proper.”22

Now, think of propriety as a kind of “suitability.” Smith rejected a tendency among philosophers in his day to reduce moral judgement to a consid-
eration of consequences alone, what he called the “tendency of affections.” ²³

For him, “propriety” meant that the spectator found the action or feeling “suitable to its object,” ²⁴ appropriate to the particular cause that excited it—not merely that its consequences merited praise, though clearly they might. But how does a spectator decide whether an action or feeling is suitable to its cause and therefore proper? On what criteria—or to use Smith’s language—on what “measure” ²⁵ does she base her judgement? A Smithian spectator does not judge others with an abstract measure, with a “view from nowhere,” ²⁶ as if she has come upon the scene disembedded and stripped down. Smith maintained that spectators employ what we today might call a self-referential standpoint, which means that we judge the actions and opinions of others “as right, as accurate, as agreeable to truth and reality . . . for no other reason but because we find that it agrees with our own.” ²⁷ In short, a Smithian spectator has no resource but her own lights:

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.²⁸

And again:

When we judge . . . of any affection . . . it is scarce possible that we should make use of any other rule or cannon but the correspondent affection in ourselves.²⁹

Of course, to describe the spectator’s perspective as self-referential is not to say that spectators are egoists on Smith’s account, and it is perfectly compatible with an observation that the spectator’s perspective is cultivated in the spaces in which the spectator moves, the fruits of social discipline. A spectator’s perspective will obviously reflect her experiences as a social being. Smith described it as self-referential since the spectator makes judgements with her own faculties and without absolute algorithms to guide her. But she comes to know who she is and what she believes through a lifetime of gazing into the “mirror of society,” participating in sympathetic exchange. In a well-known passage Smith speculated that a person who grew up in solitude “could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind that of the beauty or deformity of his own face.” ³⁰ Society provides the mirror of self-knowledge and engenders the criteria by which the self will come to mirror and judge others.

I leave aside until my exploration of the spaces the question of whether this account of sympathy can yield the impartial judgement that Smith was
seeking, particularly in contexts that are unfamiliar and foreign to the spectator. Relatedly, we shall return to Smith’s discussion of the “impartial spectator,” a consciencelike faculty that he introduced to help spectators in such contexts to overcome bias, partiality, and other irregularities in judgement.

**Discipline**

So far we have examined Smith’s thoughts on sympathetic judgement and have briefly considered the self-referential nature of the criteria spectators use when they judge. But no account of Smithian sympathy is adequate if it neglects the disciplinary impact that the spectator’s surveillance has on the agent, the extent to which it motivates her to modify herself, to act in a “proper” way, in a way that the spectator can indulge, in what Smith often referred to as a “moral” way. Sympathy serves in Smith’s theory as an act of surveillance in a closed physical space that exerts a certain kind of disciplinary power over those being watched. When compounded over time, these disciplinary engagements progressively constrain the agent’s understanding of herself, of others, and of the world, and serve to condition the moral criteria (“my ear,” “my reason,” “my resentment,” and so on) that she will deploy when she inevitably finds herself in the position of spectator.

How is an agent disciplined on Smith’s account? What motivates her to adjust her conduct, to violate her “natural,” “untaught,” and “undisciplined feelings”? In Smith’s words, the very “presence” of others “composes” us because we desire to be loved and approved of. Smith emphasized the “cool” rationality of “proper” behavior. Agents are regularly confronted with a choice—to indulge in present, undisciplined gratification or to calmly pursue a duller but more mature enjoyment of love, approval, and congenial relations with peers. An agent must negotiate these ends, calculating how best to bring her emotions into “harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about [her].” Experience is surely her best guide. Since she was a small child, startled to discover that her playfellows refused to indulge the selfishness and moodiness once tolerated by her parents, the agent has learned the rules of obtaining love and approval. She has learned through surveillance and discipline to exercise a Stoic-like self-command, to become “master of [her]self” and to adjust her passions (or at least the appearance of them) to a “tone” or “pitch” or “degree” that spectators can “enter into.” This most often means silencing herself, “lowering” her passion, “bringing it down,” since, as we have seen, spectators “though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned.”
But sometimes propriety requires an agent to "raise" her passion, to "bring it up"—a dimension of Smith's theory that seems to diverge from the theme of Stoic self-command that runs through much of the Moral Sentiments, and to adopt more of an Aristotelian mediocrity that, Smith acknowledged, "lies in a kind of middle between two opposite vices."38 Smith proceeded throughout the treatise to offer a treasure trove of perceptive illustrations of the "proper" exercise of passion, which required raising and which required lowering—from cold parents to bratty children, from scholars too bookish to enjoy the diversions of youth to cowards without proper indignation, from the womanish man who cries in pain to the savage who endures pain in the name of honor. Smith's point in all of these (incidentally, rather male) vignettes, and in dozens of others, is that the agent who adjusts his behavior does so coolly under the watchful and critical eye of spectators. The anticipation of judgement inclines the agent to soften his temper, to restrain his resentment, more Stoically to endure physical discomfort, to elevate other-concern, to augment proper indignation, and so on. In all of these examples, discipline takes place under surveillance and chisels the social beings we become.

**II. SYMPATHY IN SPACE**

In a well-known passage in An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, David Hume observed that proximity tends to stimulate sympathy, and that distance tends to diminish it:

> Sympathy, we shall allow, is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us, much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous.39

Hume's spatial concepts in this passage—remoteness, nearness, and contiguity—all seem to have a physical implication: that we sympathize more vibrantly with people who are literally close by and less so with those who are not. And yet, they seem to signify something other or more than shared physical space. For example, Hume noted that our relationships and associations will affect the scope of our sentiments. To cite another famous passage, he observed that an account of a generous action reported in an "old history or remote gazette" is "so infinitely removed, as to affect the senses with light nor heat"—but, that if the virtue is brought "nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons" involved, then "our hearts are immediately caught" and "our sympathy [is] enlivened."40 Likewise,
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; where the good, resulting from his generous humanity, being less connected with us, seems more obscure, and affects us with less lively sympathy.\textsuperscript{41}

Related to this, Hume noted that our \emph{interests} tend to influence the scope of our sentiments. He maintained that since our real and present interests are always “in view,” it is unlikely that an “imaginary interest” in “distant ages and countries” will incite “real sentiments,” particularly if these interests happen to draw in different directions.\textsuperscript{42}

What all this suggests is that there are other ways than \emph{physically} that a person can be “near” or “remote.” Hume points us in the right direction: we need to complicate the notion of proximity to signify other sorts of space than physical space. I might be revolted by my neighbor, familiarity breeding proverbial contempt, yet feel \emph{affectively} connected with an old schoolmate or lover who lives in another country. I might sympathize with a person thousands of miles away upon hearing a narrative that she, like me, has a special fondness for doing tai chi or for the paintings of Mark Rothko, or that, unlike me, lives next to a radioactive waste dump. What is more, I might be sitting just across a table from someone but find myself entirely incapable of understanding or sympathizing with her world of meanings. I might be more familiar in a \emph{cultural} sense with the religious or dietary practices of a person living in Yemen than with the practices of my dinner companion, yielding in such a case a more refined sympathetic judgement of the physically remote and a relative insensibility toward the near. Grown-ups simply could not grasp that Saint-Exupéry’s Little Prince had drawn not a hat but an elephant inside a boa constrictor.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the issue of physical proximity seems to rouse more questions than it resolves, for it seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for sympathetic response. The question of proximity seems to demand cultural and affective considerations.

Adam Smith’s rich moral psychology in the \emph{Moral Sentiments} helps us to appreciate the spatial complexities of sympathetic activity. In the balance of this essay, I consider three spaces (there might be others) in which sympathy seems to operate on Smith’s account: the physical, the affective, and the historical. I do no more in this section than identify and differentiate these three spaces, pointing occasionally to overlaps, glaring tensions, and conflicts among them. Space forbids a rigorous analysis of their relationships. For our purposes, each of these spaces can be conceptualized as a continua along which any act of sympathy can be situated (i.e., physically proximate or remote, affectively connected or not, historically familiar or unfamiliar). In other words, any act of sympathy can be situated somewhere along each of
these three continua, with the result that any act of sympathy will be a particular confluence of the three. I now examine each of these spaces in further detail.

Physical Immediacy

We will discover in the next three sections that Adam Smith was less concerned in the Moral Sentiments with examining how physical proximity and distance influence our sympathetic responses and judgements than he was with describing the ways that affective “connections” and shared experiences and interests do. Nevertheless, it is inaccurate to say that physical space was unimportant in Smith’s moral psychology since his account of the mechanics of sympathy assumes that the spectator is positioned near enough to “see,” to “gaze at,” and to “look upon” the agent before him, as well as to appreciate the particular circumstances that motivated the agent to feel and act as he does.44 Throughout the first section of the treatise, Smith spoke regularly about the ways that we “view” others, of the “very appearances” that their emotions convey to us, that we rejoice in “observing” fellow feeling in them, that people tend to “parade” certain parts of themselves, “conceal” others, and so on. Indeed, Smith describes sympathy as an activity that takes place in physical space, upon a sort of dramatic stage.45 As Knud Haakonssen notes,

Smith always takes as a matter of course that man is social, that he is bound to be together with his fellows. This means that he will always literally have to look upon them; he is forced to watch them and see what they are like.46

The spectator thus is an audience to her fellows, or in Smith’s words, a “by-stander”47 who watches and is affected by the spectacle of suffering or joy before her, in all its colorful and compelling detail. And, as we have seen, the agents who perform before her will respond to being seen, like Sartre’s man in the park whose physical space is violently penetrated the moment he is seen by another.48 To take a couple of Smith’s illustrations of the influence of physical space on sympathetic discipline, small children learn by observing the responses of those physically closest to them (notably their “play-fellows”) what it means, quite literally, to act appropriately.49 That I feel “offense” when a spectator “seems not to be affected by my misery” or when she refuses to “wear a serious countenance” is a function of the physical proximity between me and her.50 I see her insensibility, and the effects are “instantaneous.”51 As Luc Boltanski describes it, we “regulate our reciprocal expectations by interpreting external signs accessible to sight.”52 In short, Smith assumes a basic physical proximity, a face-to-face transaction, between
spectator and agent in his description of both “stages” of sympathetic interaction—although, as we shall see, physical proximity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for sympathetic response.

For the moment, the relevant insight is that physical proximity will improve the preciseness with which the spectator—by-stander can understand the circumstances of the agent when she “enters into” his reality, and that distance will diminish it. She cannot physically experience the agent’s sensations or feel his emotions, but she sees his blood and tears, hears his cries and laughter, and she finds herself drawn into the circumstances that gave rise to them. Physical proximity will help her to better understand why the agent responded to particular causes the way he did and to evaluate more accurately whether the agent’s response was “proper” or “suitable.” For example, a spectator might believe she sees an act of harm when from afar she observes an agent strike another, but a more refined understanding of the circumstances, seeing more, can reveal that the “bully” was merely fending off an attack or maybe helping his friend by crushing a mosquito on its bite or helping to dislodge a piece of meat from his throat, and so on. Distance (physically, temporally) distorts what we can see, obscures the whole story, and leads the spectator to evaluate the agent’s behavior as “improper.” Bring the scene nearer to the eye, and the spectator will likely adjust her judgement to accommodate the incidents that motivated the agent’s behavior—the prior attack, the mosquito biting, the choking.

Nevertheless, while physical proximity assists the spectator in acquiring a more precise and accurate understanding of an event, we should not assume that it is either necessary or sufficient for sympathetic response on Smith’s account. Regarding necessity, I might hear about or read in graphic detail (as Smith must have) an account of the public execution of Damiens the regicide, and without seeing the events—the “red-hot pincers,” the “boiling potion,” the “tugging horses,” the prisoner’s cries for his Lord’s pardon—experience some dimension of sympathy for him. Although Smith’s primary description of sympathetic activity rested on the faculty of sight, he acknowledged that a spectator might be moved by literature (he frequently draws on tragedy for his examples) or a vivid narrative of distant joy or suffering. The vividness of the description replicates physical proximity; imagination carries the distant back to us and ultimately elicits the very sentiments that physical proximity would have produced (confirming that proximity served as a sort of baseline in Smith’s account of how we come to sympathize):

We can sympathize with the distress which excessive hunger occasions when we read the descriptions of it in the journal of a siege, or of a sea voyage. We imagine ourselves in the
situation of the sufferers, and thence readily conceive the grief, the fear and consterna-
tion, which must necessarily distract them.\textsuperscript{54}

These insights seem particularly relevant today, when the idea of physical
proximity is complicated by information, mobility, and speed and when
images and narratives of distant suffering are transported digitally into the
living rooms and computer screens of remote spectators.\textsuperscript{55} Smith would have
had much to say were he reflecting today on the impact of graphic images of
starving infants or grinning soldiers torturing naked prisoners, or of vivid
narratives of ethnic cleansing.

As physical proximity appears not to be necessary for sympathy, it also
does not seem to be sufficient. Smith offered a fine illustration in his \textit{Lectures on Jurisprudence}
of the insufficiency of physical proximity to explain symp-
athy. He observed that a nobleman “who is far removed from the conditions
of his servant” has a less refined ability to “feel with” him than do ordinary
farmers who work side by side in the fields and eat with their servants.
Despite the nobleman’s physical proximity to a servant who might be shav-
ing his face in the morning or clipping his toenails, only the farmer “consid-
ers his servant as almost an equal with himself, and is therefore more capable
of \textit{feeling with him}.”\textsuperscript{56} In this example, the nobleman’s sense of superiority
(we might call it “distance in status”) dulls the sympathetic imagination,
regardless of his physical proximity to his servant. A sense of helplessness
might produce a similar numbing effect, as when one visits an impoverished
city and comes upon throngs of homeless children begging for money or
when one is besieged by television images of starving infants.

\textit{Affective Partiality: On “Feeling Too Strongly”}

We come now to a second, somewhat overlapping, space within which
Smith considered the possibility of sympathy: that of affective space. Affect
for Smith is the emotional outcome of “association” and “connexion” with
others over time, which commonly evolve through our physical proximity
and shared experiences with them.\textsuperscript{57} Smith’s thoughts on human affection are
decisively Stoic in origin.\textsuperscript{58} Here I am most interested in Smith’s thoughts on
the Stoic idea of \textit{oikeiōsis} initiated by Hierocles and developed by Cicero.\textsuperscript{59}
The word \textit{oikeiōsis} derives from the Greek root \textit{oikos}, which referred in
ancient democratic life to the private realm of the household as opposed to the
public realm of the \textit{polis}. \textit{Oikeiōsis} was a Stoic extrapolation from the familiar-
ity one develops over time with those who inhabit the \textit{oikos}, with those
who share one’s physical space. When offered as a more general account of
the nature of human affection, *oikeiōsis* described a phenomenon of fading or weakening sentiment that corresponds to an increase in physical distance and a corresponding lack of familiarity. Thus, the Stoics mapped our affections concentrically, claiming that the circles of affection weaken as our object radiates further from the self.

Smith embraced Stoic *oikeiōsis* as an empirical fact about human "affection." He agreed that we tend to feel affection for those with whom we share physical space and are most familiar, and likewise that "spatial distance operates to intensify psychological distance," as Jacob Viner put it.60 This Stoic way of understanding human connectedness is captured nicely in Smith's claim that "affection" was quite simply the offspring of "habitual sympathy":

> What is called affection, is in reality nothing but habitual sympathy. Our concern in the happiness or misery of those who are the objects of what we call our affections; our desire to promote the one, and to prevent the other; are either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy, or the necessary consequences of that feeling. Relations being usually placed in situations which naturally create this habitual sympathy, it is expected that a suitable degree of affection should take place among them. We generally find that it actually does take place; we therefore naturally expect that it should.61

For Smith, affection evolves through our experiences living in close proximity with others over time. It does not originate in blood, a fallacy that holds force for Smith "no-where but in tragedies and romances."62 And it is not an abstract entity such as benevolence or compassion, which moralists traditionally attempted to teach and to shift about from object to object. For Smith, the relation between physical and affective proximity meant that the Stoic circles were firmly entrenched in human experience and were therefore resistant to philosophical or religious manipulation. As such, while he was greatly impressed with and indebted to Stoic moral psychology, Smith rejected the Stoic's "absurd and unreasonable" cosmopolitan assertion that we should aspire to collapse the natural concentric structure of human relationships through the proper use of reason.63 He simply could not accept that our highest human aspiration is to nourish apathy toward the near and to become "citizens of the world."64 He refused to make the leap "from primary impulse to virtue," to borrow A. A. Long's description of the Stoic imperative.65 Smith wrote,

> By the perfect apathy which [the "stoical philosophy"] prescribes to us, by endeavoring, not merely to moderate, but to eradicate all our private, partial, and selfish affections, by suffering us to feel for whatever can befall ourselves, our friends, our country . . . [it] endeavors to render us altogether indifferent and unconsidered in the success or miscar-
riage of every thing which Nature has prescribed to us as the proper business and occupation of our lives.  

With regard to our duties, therefore, Smith concluded,

All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety upon that account, seems to be no part of our duty.

This apparently callous disregard for the condition of distant strangers might seem odd coming from a moral philosopher so often championed as a prophet of human sympathy. But our judgement should be tempered somewhat by noting that “ought,” for Smith always implied “can,” and that he found it absurd and cynical to extend duty to actions that were better suited to saints and beyond the capacities of ordinary eighteenth-century people, who were driven primarily by their personal interests and affective attachments. Smith might have underestimated the humanitarian interests and capacities of his own century, let alone those of centuries to come, but he firmly believed that we are best positioned to assist those for whom we have affection, understanding, and direct contact—and he insisted that humanity profited, borough by borough, through a sort of divine œconomy, from this natural arrangement.

In sum, familiarity and affection assume a central role in Smith’s account of why we tend to sympathize more vibrantly with some people than others. And yet Smith recognized that familiarity and affection, which are the natural consequences of living together in close physical proximity over time, threaten to distort our perceptions and judgements, to bias the sympathy dynamic, ultimately to divide and factionalize humankind. As Smith put it, “feeling too strongly” tends to delude us into fantastic overevaluations of ourselves and our loved ones, of our own pains and joys, and of the importance of our place in the world relative to others. We can find ourselves caught up in what Smith called a “paroxysm of emotion” or “distress”—a “particular situation” of “heat” or “keenness” or “eagerness of passion” that will “discolour our view of things” and lead us to elevate our own immediate ends above all else. He observed,

In the same manner, to the selfish and original passions of human nature, the loss or gain of a very small interest of our own, appears to be of vastly more importance, excites a much more passionate joy or sorrow, a much more ardent desire or aversion, than the greatest concern of another with whom we have no particular connexion. His interests, as long as they are surveyed from this station, can never be out into the balance with our own.
Smith famously postulated that most of us would be far more distraught by the loss of our pinky finger than by the sudden death of millions of distant strangers swallowed up in a massive earthquake.

He seems to have fastened onto Locke’s observation in the *Second Treatise* that self-love makes men “partial to themselves and their Friends”—that we are “biased” when we are “judges in our own case.”72 Hume too was instructive when he observed in the *Enquiry* that we passively tend to prefer ourselves and those “contiguous” and “intimately connected” with us.73 Like Locke and Hume, Smith suggested taking a cool, affective distance from the heat of our self-love. While Locke turned to the umpire of civil government “to restrain the partiality and Violence of men,”74 and Hume counseled common sense and “calm judgement,” encouraging us to “render our sentiments more public and social” by employing “general and unalterable standards” drawn from “the intercourse of sentiments . . . in society and conversation,”75 Smith introduced us to the “Impartial Spectator,” a consciencelike faculty that serves to temper our natural inclinations and to ensure that the heat of our passive sentiments will not give way to radically partial judgements and actions.76 This “inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct” succeeds in cooling us off, “astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions”77 and protecting the weak and innocent, Smith maintained, because it forces us to imagine how we would appear to an impartial observer, a “third person who has no particular connexion” with us, if we were to lose control and surrender to our passive sentiments.78

And yet, once “we can enter more coolly into the sentiments of the indifferent spectator,” we often fall victim to “self-deceit” and “delusion,” which prevent us from seeing ourselves in too humiliating a light (today we might call it denial or sublimation or “sweeping it under the carpet”) and ultimately deliver us into “like errors in time to come.”79

It is so disagreeable to think ill of ourselves, that we often purposely turn away our view from those circumstances which might render that judgement unfavorable. He is a bold surgeon, they say, whose hand does not tremble when he performs an operation upon his own person; and he is often equally bold who does not hesitate to pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion, which covers from his view the deformities of his own conduct.80

According to Smith, this phenomenon of delusion, of “feeling too strongly” and committing “like errors in time to come” is particularly acute when we live too solitary a life, isolated from the reality check of society.81 Smith encouraged the deluded to look outside themselves, to surround themselves with umpires who are unlikely to be caught up in the same web of self-inflation and delusion, which meant avoiding solitude and seeking the company of friends and, better yet, strangers. Indeed, strangers who care little for us
are better spectators, more “impartial” than our friends or neighbors. Smith extended this insight about self-preference and distortion to nations as well, which is why he was wary of isolationism in international affairs where the “partial spectator is at hand: the impartial one at a great distance.”

This discussion of the problems of affective partiality brings out an apparent tension in Smith’s thought about the relation between physical space and affective space. On one hand, as I discussed earlier, Smith speaks regularly about the importance of physical proximity for well-informed judgements—that a spectator be near enough to a situation to “enter into” its “minutest incidents.” And yet, we learn now that spectators must be affectively removed from a situation to evaluate it impartially. Apparently, understanding requires proximity, and impartiality requires a sort of cool distance.

If an agent is my friend, and I care for her well-being, my partiality toward her makes me likelier to accommodate her self-indulgence, to brush it aside. I already want to understand her, I want her to succeed, I have memories of her behaving better and of her similarly indulging me, and so on, so I forgive her lapse and judge her gently. In Smith’s words, “We expect less sympathy from a common acquaintance than a friend . . . [and] still less sympathy from an assembly of strangers.” And yet, despite the affective partiality that softens my judgement, I am nearer to my friend in a physical sense than a stranger is and am therefore far likelier to “see” and understand the “minutest incidents,” the “little circumstances” surrounding my friend’s behavior. In other words, though my judgement is partial, my understanding is rich.

An impartial stranger, on the other hand, does not have the same affective pull. His distance becomes a remedy for partiality—but of course not without adverse side effects. Distant strangers, though impartial, will have a less refined and precise understanding of the circumstances they are being asked to evaluate. They will not have an intimate or complex appreciation of why an agent behaves as she does. But in extreme situations, they are an effective disciplinary force, Smith decided, in shaking extreme prejudice out of partiality. In the end, it seems that an ideal Smithian perspective will be that of a spectator who is essentially Janus-faced: near enough to access the meanings and vicissitudes of a particular situation but distant enough not to be entangled within them—both hot and cool. This tension is not entirely resolvable, but Smith seemed to think that reflective moral agents could navigate it more or less successfully.

**Historical Familiarity**

And yet, this tenuous balance between physical and affective space is profoundly unsettled by a third space, likely the most relevant and complicated
space in which sympathetic judgement moves in Smith’s thought: that of history, or culture. By designating this last space “historical,” I am referring to the constructed, historical nature of the criteria spectators deploy when they judge—or, to use Smith’s language, the “standards and measures” against which they discern “propriety” in other people.87 We saw in the previous two sections that Smith’s spectator was able, with varying degrees of success, to transcend the barriers of both physical and affective space. In both cases, sympathy was naturally biased toward the near but was ultimately enlarged in various ways. In the case of physical space, for example, we saw that a vivid narrative or image could serve to bring the distant near and thus arouse our sympathy. In the case of affective space, we saw that Smith’s turn toward the impartial spectator helped us to transcend our affective biases. I argue here that this enlargement that helped disentangle the spectator from her physical and affective constraints is substantially more complex and difficult to realize in the case of historical space and that Smith’s theory ultimately lacks the resources necessary for doing so.

In the first part of this essay, I sought to demonstrate that for Smith, our criteria are disciplined over time through our experiences participating in sympathetic exchange, primarily with those around us. Given this, does it not seem that the criteria we deploy in moral judgement will be more appropriate when we evaluate others who share our historical space, and less appropriate with those who are not—that we might be woefully imprecise when judging a person just before our eyes or on our television screens, clearly as our eyes might receive the “facts”? In the case of physical and affective spaces, we saw that Smith invoked the impartial spectator to assist us in enlarging our perspective and refining our judgements, but I argue that this transitory sort of enlargement that Smith worked out (with much success, I believe) is not the sort of enlargement that is required to facilitate impartial judgement beyond one’s historical space.

Smith acknowledged clearly that a spectator will tend to sympathize more “precisely” with members of his family than with his neighbors and with his neighbors than with his fellow citizens:

He is more habituated to sympathize with them. He knows better how everything is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. It approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself.88

Because we share a history, and have cultivated shared sources of meaning through habitual intercourse over time, I am likelier than a stranger is to make “precise and determinate” judgements about my family, friends, coworkers,
and fellow citizens (in this concentric order). I already understand their worlds of meaning and “how everything is likely to affect” them.89 Note that historical familiarity works independently of affect. The subjects of affective and historical proximity will often overlap (I usually understand better those whom I care for), but they need not. Opposites sometimes attract, and sometimes people feel contempt for their own precisely because they understand them so well.

That Smith invokes the faculty of “imagination” as the vehicle by which spectators “enter into” the motivations of others does not entail that imagination is boundless, or even that all people (such as the well-groomed nobleman vis-à-vis his servant) wish to exercise their imaginations. For Smith, moral imagination seems to be bounded by familiarity; in other words, we are biased in historical space (as we are in both physical and affective space) toward the proximate. This seems to entail that when the moral imagination is thrust beyond the sphere of the spectator’s experience and understanding, it can misfire and yield judgements that are at best “imprecise” and “indeterminate” (to invert Smith’s language in the passage cited previously) and at worst based on narrow criteria foisted onto a reified other.

Still, some have suggested that Smith’s spectator model affords a sufficiently detached and impartial perspective for the objective judgement of others, distant or close, beloved or not, culturally familiar or not. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, draws parallels between Smith’s spectator model and John Rawls’s device of the original position.90 She observed that the spectator’s position in Smith’s theory “is designed to model the rational moral point of view by ensuring that he will have those, and only those, thoughts, sentiments, and fantasies that are part of a rational outlook on the world.”91 No doubt Smith would have balked at Rawls’s proposition of a stripped-down spectator, but he might have granted an observation that his own spectator model, in the words of F. L. von Holthoon, “put reason on the throne again as the arbiter of moral sentiments,” or, as Knud Haakonsen put it, showed that “moral ideals can detach themselves from social morality.”92 Similarly, Charles Griswold argued that Smith’s theory succeeds in producing objective moral judgements because sympathy is “spectator-centered” rather than “agent-centered” and because this “asymmetrical relation of actor and spectator becomes lexical insofar as judgements of value and truth are concerned.”93 But we need to ask Smith (and those convinced of the transcultural significance of his theory) how, on Smith’s account, spectators do this, how they detach themselves from their own experiences as agents disciplined in a world of values—how, within the terms of Smith’s thick description of the disciplinary process through which spectators in historical space
come to be proper members and gatekeepers of social morality, they can now transcend historical space when they imaginatively enter into the conditions and motivations of others with potentially very different histories.  

This brings us again to Smith’s idea of the “impartial spectator,” a faculty he invoked at various points throughout the Moral Sentiments to overcome the nearsightedness of our passive sentiments. Most claims about Smith’s transcultural significance focus on the impartial spectator, for obvious reasons. Smith maintained that this ideal “third person” (whom he sometimes called “reason,” “principle,” “conscience,” or “the man within”) helps us to become impartial judges, to rise above the natural consequences of having private interests, of living in families and communities and thus feeling affection and concern for some people more than others. As such, the impartial spectator seems to be the perfect cosmopolitan device for getting us beyond ourselves.

But I argue that different sorts of impartiality are required for different sorts of judgement, and that the sort of impartiality achieved by Smith’s impartial spectator might be effective for correcting for physical and affective shortsightedness but is not the sort required to render unbiased cross-cultural judgements. His spectator model surely generates a transitory sort of coolness—for example, restraining someone who in the heat of passion is tempted to act aggressively toward a stranger. On its own terms, Smith’s model is efficient in mediating our self-regarding and other-regarding tendencies, disciplining propriety, and ensuring relatively stable and sociable communities. But rendering a cross-cultural judgement that does not simply reduce the other to oneself requires something much different: that a spectator be able not merely to transcend his affective attachments to self and specific others but, more fundamentally, to question and sometimes subvert the very measure by which he has become accustomed to judging himself and the world. In other words, while Smith is primarily concerned with social coordination, the problem of historical self-consciousness and transcendence is an epistemic one and in many respects beyond the scope of his theory.

As such, to say that sympathetic judgement is “an ongoing process of adjustment, a continual search for equilibrium,” as Griswold, Haakonssen, Hope, and others have (correctly I believe), is nevertheless insufficient for explaining how we might transcend historical space. On Smith’s account it seems that making better judgements involves becoming better and better interpreters of our own cultural signals and becoming more disciplined, in “command” of ourselves, proper, sociable, and polite. Haakonssen is helpful when he observes that the “process” of refining our judgements “is a continual weeding out of behaviour which is incompatible with social life.” But
how does this process help me increasingly understand someone who has learned (through the same process as I have, for the sympathy dynamic is a universal process) what it means in her cultural vernacular to be “in command” of herself, proper, sociable, polite, and so on? In fact, it seems that as my sympathetic judgement progresses, enhancing my propriety and sociability through a developed capacity for self-command, I may become more deeply entrenched in my historical context, progressively less capable of understanding myself and others.

At various points, no doubt, Smith argued that the mature spectator will have learned to differentiate what is inherently praiseworthy from that which is conventional, merely praised, and therefore less worthy,99 which seems to provide the spectator with some measure of distance from her own history and with a capacity for cultivating a more impartial, less insular view of the world. But Smith’s foray into “is” and “ought” never explains how the spectator does this or where this new knowledge about the world might come from. Smith all but bypassed the question by stating simply that the moral rules we create for ourselves are “endowed by Nature” and to be “regarded as the commands and laws of the Deity.”100 This unsatisfying assertion—which seems to have suspended the thick empiricism that produced Smith’s account sympathy—has led some observers to conclude that Smith’s impartial spectator is merely an artifact of human experience. Like sympathy, conscience is cultivated in physical space, subject to the ebb and flow of human intercourse, and ultimately little more than the voice of conventional morality. In fact, Smithian conscience seems to be an internalization of sympathetic discipline, what Sheldon Wolin might have called a “socialized conscience,”101 a social censor constructed in the mind over time that has strong affinities with the Freudian superego.102 An agent internalizes her experiences with actual spectators, so that at a certain point in time, she can turn her eyes inward and away from their gaze when evaluating herself and her world.

Given the likely complicity of the impartial spectator in reinforcing conventional orientations, how do we “enter into” contexts and worlds of meaning that are unfamiliar to us without speculating about the other and forcing their practices into our own frames of reference, demanding that they conform to “my sight,” “my ear,” “my reason,” and so on?103 To cultivate cross-cultural understanding and a modicum of impartiality, anthropologists and sociologists have traditionally sent us into the field. They have told us to go to unfamiliar places, come to know who inhabits them by observing them, talking with them, being among them. But it seems even physical proximity cannot easily overcome historical and cultural barriers to understanding. One recalls the old Hasidic tale attributed to the Baal Shem Tov that tells of a man standing before a window through which he sees a group of Hasidim dancing
in circles, sweaty and red-faced, extremities and talit flailing fast, furious, and in every direction, and he assumes he has come upon a den of madmen. That I have difficulties understanding the sense of liberation that some Muslim women report living life with their faces covered has much to do with the particular Western understanding of freedom that I have been disciplined to value. When we encounter the unfamiliar, especially when it rubs hard against deeply entrenched beliefs, “something will have to stay behind the lens.” Engaging in a dialogue with my shrouded sister I might acquire a new respect for her resolve and the worldview that sustains it. But physical proximity might actually serve to reinforce my biases and presuppositions, substantiating my sense of the sheer discomfort and humiliation of wearing a hijab, confirming what I already knew about the woman who does.

I submit that Smith’s theory of moral judgement fails to supply what is necessary for enlarging the perspective of a spectator entangled within historical space. And it does not help that he offered a remarkably insular account of education in the Moral Sentiments. He was suspicious about sending children to foreign schools or supplementing university education with foreign travel, since these practices tended to “hurt most essentially the domestic morals.” Surely, a cosmopolitan education might help a spectator contextualize a curious spectacle before him and anchor his judgement more firmly (in Smith’s words) on “the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents.” But, again, Smith was primarily concerned with social coordination and stability and with maintaining “domestic morals”; in this light, he believed that the best education is the one we receive from the physically near and familiar. Only when you “educate them in your own house” and “let their dwelling be at home,” Smith warns, will you have children who are “dutiful, kind and affectionate.” It is therefore not insignificant or surprising that Smith threw around classic Enlightenment binaries such as “barbarian” and “civilized” rather freely, and it is not merely anachronistic: the coalition of parochialism and rigid binaries was hardly unique to the eighteenth century.

III. RESISTING CONVENTIONALISM

Just after the first edition of the Moral Sentiments appeared in 1759, Smith received a letter in which his old friend Sir Gilbert Elliot critiqued his sympathy model for seeming to promote a troubling conventionalism. How, he wondered, might our judgements transcend conventional opinion? Smith apparently took Sir Gilbert’s challenge to heart, for a careful reading of the Moral Sentiments reveals that he spent the next thirty years, from the second
edition of the *Moral Sentiments* through the last in 1790, tinkering with his
theory to find a way to give moral judgement some critical distance from
popular opinion.

In addressing the problem, Smith put his finger on questions that would
remain central in moral and political philosophy until the present day: What
grounds moral judgement? Is morality more than a cultural artifact? Can it
transcend the particular world of meanings from which it emerges?

Surely Smith was not interested (neither was Sir Gilbert) in universalizing
moral judgement, the way we might conceive of such an activity today. He
also did not care much about refining his understanding of foreigners. Smith
wanted to stabilize moral judgement because he was revolted by the vulgar
displays of wealth and power that were parading themselves as virtue in eigh-
teenth-century European life. In this, Smith shared something important with
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Michael Ignatieff offers a compelling argument that
Rousseau and Smith had revived a Stoic argument that moral corruption was
a product of belief and convention and, in so doing, had advanced the first
“specifically modern theory of false consciousness.”¹¹¹ Like Rousseau,
Smith argued that social experience accustoms the mind to accepting as true
those symbols of value that convention happens to offer up—what Rousseau
referred to as “points d’honneur” or “objets . . . de estime.”¹¹² In the first edi-
tion of the *Moral Sentiments*, Smith warned modern men to avoid “emulat-
ing” those who “make parade” of their “riches”—those who “in those delu-
sive colors in which the imagination is apt to paint them” seem to personify
“almost the exact idea of a perfect and happy state.”¹¹³ He warned,

Never enter the place from whence so few have been able to return; never come within the
circle of ambition; nor ever bring yourself into comparison with those masters of the earth
who have already engrossed the attention of half mankind before you.¹¹⁴

By the last edition of the *Moral Sentiments* in 1790, Smith’s tone had intensi-
fied. Now he addressed the manifold dangers associated with a “mob” in hot
pursuit of “fashion” set by “the rich and great”—those “fashionable proflig-
gates” whose “gaudy and glittering” behavior forced itself “upon the notice
of every wandering eye.”¹¹⁵ “Even their vices and follies are fashionable; and
the greater part of men are proud to imitate and resemble them.”¹¹⁶ Ulti-
mately, Smith discovered that a morality grounded in ordinary experience
tends to slip into a precarious moral free-for-all dictated by the whimsy of the
rich and powerful, whom Smith tellingly referred to as the “masters of the
earth.”¹¹⁷ The great disciplinarians of the earth.

In the years between 1759 and 1790, Smith attempted in various ways to
stabilize moral judgement, to identify standards that would transcend fashion
and variation, timeless criteria that would enable spectators to know right from wrong—inverting those who are skeptical about such binaries to dismiss him out-of-hand as a paragon of Enlightenment arrogance! But I suggest we sublimate Smith’s reasons for the moment to appreciate what he had stumbled on. Smith had discovered that sympathy tends to produce inherently particularistic moralities that will vary from one forum of ordinary experience to another. To an eighteenth-century mind, one more than slightly obsessed with order, anxious about uncertainty and instability, such a discovery was bound to be deeply disturbing.

There is no space in a short essay to elaborate Smith’s many attempts to stabilize moral judgement. Some of the more substantial ones are as follows: his further conceptualization and refinement of his impartial spectator theory, amplification of Stoic themes of self-command and moral maturity, a rather anxious discussion about fortifying judgement with “moral rules” that reflect the “Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Power!” of God’s will, an argument that “particular usages” in different times and places can “warp” human sentiments but cannot “entirely pervert them,” a theory of commercialism that produces good effects without good intentions, a theory of justice conceived negatively as the avoidance of human pain, and so on.

I do not think Smith felt he ever really succeeded. In his “Advertisement” to the final edition of the Moral Sentiments, he apologized for defaulting on a thirty-year-old promise made in the closing paragraph of the first edition: to offer a normative “theory of jurisprudence” that would elaborate “the natural rules of justice independent of all positive institution,” to elucidate “the general principles which ought to run through and be the foundation of the laws of all nations.” Whether he might have succeeded is anyone’s guess, but that is really beside the point. I have attempted in my discussion of historical space to demonstrate that Smith’s contribution to contemporary moral and political theory rests in the way he struggled with the problem of impartial judgement in light of what his moral psychology revealed to him about the historicity of our moral criteria.

CONCLUSION

Evaluating whether and how Smithian sympathy might suit a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan agenda ultimately requires a deeper analysis of the tensions and compatibilities among physical space, affect, and culture than I have provided in a “limited space” such as this. But even in this preliminary task of identification and differentiation, I hope to have affirmed that the spaces productively complicate the idea of proximity in Smith’s thought, car-
rying him decisively into very timely debates in contemporary moral and political theory.

NOTES


2. One notable exception is Luc Boltanski, Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). However, Smith is somewhat incidental to Boltanski’s larger project, and his thoughts on distance are not fully investigated.


4. For a classic statement, see D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie’s “Introduction” to TMS, pp. 10-15. Useful accounts can be found in Knud Haakonssen, The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Vincent Hope, Virtue by Consensus: The Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Glenn R. Morrow, “The Significance of the Doctrine of Sympathy in Hume and Adam Smith,” Philosophical Review 32, no. 1 (1923): 60-78; David Raynor, “Hume’s Abstract of Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments,” Journal of the History of Philosophy 22 (1984): 52-79; and F. L. von Holtoon, “Adam Smith and David Hume: With Sympathy,” Utilitas 5, no. 1 (1993): 36-48. We might summarize the relation as follows: that while Smith adopted and integrated Hume’s description of sympathy in A Treatise of Human Nature as the “communication” of sentiments along with Hume’s subsequent shift in the Enquiry, in which sympathy was associated more conventionally with benevolence, Smith ultimately rejected Hume’s claim in the Enquiry that sympathy was grounded in utility. At TMS IV.2.5 (p. 188), Smith considered Hume “the same ingenious and agreeable author who first explained why utility pleases, has been so struck with this view of things, as to resolve our whole approbation of virtue into a perception of this species of beauty which results from the appearance of utility. . . . But I still affirm that it is not the view of this utility or hurtfulness which is either the first principle or source of our approbation or disapprobation.”


6. See, for example, TMS III.3.21 (p. 145).


9. TMS II.i.5.10 (p. 77).

10. For an excellent discussion of the descriptive and normative dimensions of Smith’s morality, see James R. Otteson, Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199-257.

11. TMS I.i.1.1 (p. 9); VII.ii.4 (pp. 306-14); VII.iii.1 (pp. 315-17).

12. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s account of a modern turn in Western societies toward bloodless methods for achieving social order in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977-1995). I have appropriated Foucault’s two well-
known descriptions of modern life—"surveillance" and "discipline"—because they help to convey the power relations that govern sympathetic activity and the moral culture that it produces. Surely, the Foucauldian or Benthamite architect is absent in Smith’s account (indeed, we all seem to be unwitting architects in Smith’s description) but the psychological methods for ensuring conformity are remarkably similar. What gave sympathy ethical point for Smith was its power to discipline modern individuals, to socialize them into the group and perpetuate cultural norms without traditional forms of coercion. Smith used the word discipline over and again to describe the socializing work that sympathy performed in moral education: TMS III.3.20 (p. 145); III.3.22 (p. 145); III.3.24 (p. 146); III.3.45 (p. 156); III.5.1 (p. 163). He also often referred to our “undi- ciplined passions” and our “natural” and “untaught feelings”: TMS I.iii.3.1 (p. 34); III.3.28 (p. 148); VI.iii.18 (p. 245).

13. TMS I.i.1.2 (p. 9).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. TMS I.i.4.7 (pp. 21-22).
19. TMS I.ii.2.1 (p. 31).
21. TMS I.i.4.7 (p. 22).
22. TMS I.i.1.2-3 (pp. 9-10).
23. TMS I.i.3.5-8 (p. 18) (emphasis mine).
24. TMS I.i.3.1 (p. 16).
25. TMS I.i.3.10 (p. 19).
27. TMS I.i.4.4 (p. 20), (emphasis mine).
28. TMS I.i.3.10 (p. 19), (emphasis mine).
29. TMS I.i.3.9 (p. 18).
30. TMS III.1.3 (p. 110).
31. TMS I.ii.3.1 (p. 34); III.3.28 (p. 148); VI.iii.18 (p. 245).
32. TMS I.i.4.7-10 (pp. 22-23).
33. Smith’s frequent use of the term “coolness” might have been borrowed from Bishop Joseph Butler. See his discussion in Sermons, xi, 20-21, of “coolness” and “reasonable self-love,” which Smith’s references throughout the Moral Sentiments indicate he had read; TMS I.iii.1.1 (p. 43); III.5.5 (pp. 164-65). Joseph Butler, Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel, vol. I of The Works of Bishop Butler, 2 vols., ed. J. H. Bernard (1726; London: Macmiillan, 1900).
34. TMS I.i.4.7 (p. 22).
35. TMS III.3.22 (p. 145).
36. TMS I.i.4.7 (p. 22); I.ii.intro.1 (p. 27); VI.iii.14 (pp. 242-43).
37. TMS I.i.4.7 (p. 21).
38. TMS VII.ii.1.12 (pp. 270-71).
40. Ibid., 50.
41. Ibid., 48 (emphasis mine).
42. Ibid., 41.
44. *TMS* I.i.1-2 (pp. 9-16), throughout.
47. *TMS* I.i.1.3 (p. 10).
49. *TMS* III.3.22 (p. 145).
50. *TMS* I.i.2.4 (p. 15).
51. For example, at *TMS* I.i.4.9 (p. 23).
53. I am referring of course to Foucault’s memorable overture in *Discipline and Punish*, 3-6.
54. *TMS* I.i.1.1 (p. 28). Note also “Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere as our grief for their distress”; *TMS* I.i.1.4 (p. 10).
57. Although Smith acknowledges that we can feel affection, regardless of such connection, for a person who has demonstrated exceptional “personal qualities,” for someone exceptionally needy, or for someone from whom we have experienced “past services”; *TMS* VI.i.1.15-20 (pp. 223-26).
62. *TMS* VI.i.1.11 (p. 222).
63. *TMS* III.3.9 (p. 140).
64. TMS III.3.11 (p. 140).
66. TMS VII.ii.1.46 (pp. 292-93).
67. TMS III.3.9 (p. 140).
68. See TMS VII.ii.1.44 (p. 292): “By nature the events which immediately affect that little department in which we ourselves have some management and direction, which immediately affect ourselves, our friends, our country, are the events which interest us the most, and which chiefly excite our desires and aversions, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows.”
69. As Viner described it, “The sentiments weaken progressively as one moves from one’s immediate family to one’s intimate friends, to one’s neighbors in a small community, to fellow-citizens in a great city, to members in general of one’s own country, to foreigners, to mankind taken in the large, to the inhabitants, if any, of distant planets”; Providence, 80-81.
70. TMS III.3.38 (pp. 153-54).
71. TMS III.3.2-3 (pp. 134-35) (emphasis mine).
73. Hume, Enquiry, 49.
74. Locke, Second Treatise, 275-76.
75. Hume, Enquiry, 49.
77. TMS III.3.4 (p. 137).
78. TMS III.3.3 (p. 135).
80. Ibid.
81. TMS III.3.38 (pp. 153-54).
82. Ibid. (emphasis mine).
83. TMS III.3.41 (p. 154). For further discussion of Smith’s thoughts on impartiality in international relations, see my “Adam Smith,” 406-11.
84. TMS I.i.4.10 (p. 23).
85. TMS I.i.4.6, 10 (pp. 21, 23).
86. My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.
87. TMS I.i.3 (pp. 16-19).
88. TMS VI.ii.1.2 (p. 219) (emphasis mine).
89. Ibid.
90. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 134, n. 23. But surely there is a crucial difference. Impartial judgement for Smith entailed not a “standing back,” a “veiling” of self but the imaginative insertion of a fully developed self into the circumstances of another. Rawls noted the crucial “contrast”: for Smith, he wrote, spectators “possess all the requisite information” and “relevant knowledge” of their “natural assets or social situation,” while in the original position, parties are “subject to a veil of ignorance”; John Rawls, Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 183-87. See also T. D. Campbell, Adam Smith’s Science of Morals (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 127-41; Raphael, “Impartial Specta-

91. Nussbaum, Poetic Justice, 73.
93. Griswold, Adam Smith, 92, 96-99.
95. Note, I am not denying the general theoretical possibility of unbiased cross-cultural judgements. As a political theorist committed to liberal-democratic principles, I resist assertions about the absolute impenetrability of otherness and am ultimately committed to the enterprise of articulating and defending such a perspective. But I am less convinced than others that Adam Smith’s theory of conscience is the most plausible or compelling way to do this. I argue that Smith’s idea of negative justice does more work in this regard. See Knud Haakonssen’s brief comments about negative justice and universality in his “Introduction” to Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii-xxiv, at viii-x.
96. Fleischacker recognized that Smith was concerned more with moral action than with moral epistemology in “Philosophy in Moral Practice: Kant and Adam Smith,” Kant-Studien 82 (1991): 249-69, at 255-56.
99. TMS III.2.7 (p. 117); 2.32 (pp. 130-31).
100. TMS III.2.7 (p. 117); and III.5.6 (p. 165), respectively.
103. A reference again to Smith’s description of the “measure” spectators use when they determine the propriety of others; TMS I.1.3.10 (p. 19).
104. The phrase I borrow from Nagel, View from Nowhere, 86.
105. TMS VI.1.1.10 (p. 222).
106. Ibid.
107. TMS I.1.4.6 (p. 21).
108. TMS VI.1.1.10 (p. 222).
109. Surely some of Smith’s distinctions ring true, as when he discusses various practices in honor societies that would have struck his European readers (as they do this reader) as cruel and inhumane. See, for example, TMS V.2.8-11 (pp. 204-209) and Lectures on Jurisprudence (B) 346-47 (pp. 548-49).
110. On the circumstances surrounding Elliot’s 1759 letter to Smith, see D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie’s editorial “Introduction” to Moral Sentiments, 16-17; and Raphael, “Impartial Spectator,” 90-93. Biographical information about Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto and his relations with Smith can be found in Ian Simpson Ross, The Life of Adam Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 113, 153, 157, 183. For insightful discussion, see also Vincent Hope, “Smith’s Demigod,”


112. For example, in Michel Launay, ed., *Lettre à M. D’Alembert sur son Article Genève* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), 141-56; and *Du Contrat Social; ou, principes de droit politique*, in *Œuvres complètes* III, pp. 347-470, at IV.vii (p. 458). This way of thinking pervaded such political works later in Rousseau’s as *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée and Projet de constitution pour la Corse*.

113. *TMS* I.iii.2.1-2 (pp. 50-52).

114. *TMS* I.iii.2.7 (p. 57).


116. *TMS* I.iii.3.7 (p. 64).

117. *TMS* I.iii.2.7 (p. 57).

118. For further discussion, see my book review of Griswold, pp. 124-30.


120. I provide such an account in my forthcoming book *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*.

121. Notably, *TMS* III.3.21-44 (pp. 145-56); VI.iii (pp. 237-62); and VII ii.1.21 (pp. 24-47).

122. *TMS* III.4-5 (pp. 156-70).

123. *TMS* V.2 (pp. 200-11).

124. See particularly *TMS* VII.ii.2-6 (pp. 227-30). In “Adam Smith,” I argue that Smith saw commercial intercourse among self-interested nations as a way to emulate sympathy on a global scale.


126. *TMS* (p. 3). The initial promise was made at *TMS* VII.vi.37 (p. 341).

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