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A Smithian Perspective on Aristotle's Virtuous Friend

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Bridgewater State University

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A Smithian Perspective on Aristotle's Virtuous Friend

Live as Nature's son, not as her bastard. – Deirdre McCloskey

In this paper my main project is to magnify one aspect of Aristotelian virtue ethics through Adam Smith's theory of sentiment in order to make the claim that virtue is achieved most strongly through relationships with virtuous friends. As a follower of Aristotle's virtue ethics, I actually didn't know much about how he regarded the importance of friendship. Reading his essays on friendship was a task that seemed separate from any kind of ethical framework and instead seemed like yet another recommendation on how to live a good and full life. Indeed, a human being must be social and have friends of all sorts, but the real philosophical work was located in Aristotle's discussion of virtues and means and habituation. It took Adam Smith to connect the dots that were actually there all along. The friend for Aristotle was always important, and my hope is that through the study of Adam Smith and Aristotle *together* that the virtuous friend becomes more popular in the discourse around neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

In this paper I will begin by introducing Adam Smith's moral theory based in sentiment. Smith, despite being thought of as the father of capitalism, also outlined a detailed explanation of how human beings exist in social communities in which their nature is hardwired to feel sympathy for one another. This kind of understanding of human emotion, connection, and a harmonious social life is the required foundation for any kind of ethical framework that will prescribe effective social recommendation, which Smith later does, both in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as well as in *The Wealth of Nations*. However, it is of most importance for my claim in this paper to understand how Smith's overall moral theory informs his thought experiment of the impartial spectator, otherwise any kind of useful insight into how to use empirical sentiment and objective reason will fall apart.

If understanding Smith provides a reader with a more nuanced understanding of the empirical, then Aristotle must also be understood in order to translate the empirical into the normative in the form of the mean. By detailing the scaffolding of Aristotle's virtue ethics after Smith's more loose virtue ethics I aim to refine what it is that is meant by "virtue." Virtues are the means between excess and deficiency according to Aristotle. The original location of a person's disposition on this Aristotelian sliding scale can be understood as the original empirical location that can be affected through the normative, e.g. knowing that one *should* react less aggressively. This point is integral to my thesis in order to make the move that there are multiple ways in which to inform the movement towards the mean, whether it be the impartial spectator or the virtuous friend, or a little bit of both. I will also look at neo-Aristotelians and Smith scholars whom I believe have gotten something distinctly right in ways that help further my thesis. If this paper, while paying homage to my own philosophical heroes, is successful, its own importance will dissipate by the last sentence. Instead, what becomes important, as Smith and Aristotle would agree, becomes the actualized living of such principles both in action, and in relationships.

I. Smith's Moral Theory

Despite being known as the father of capitalism, Adam Smith was actually a moral philosophy professor at the University of Glasgow. Before he published *The Wealth of Nations* and concerned himself with economics, he published his work on moral philosophy called *The Theory of Moral Sentiments (TMS)*. The work was first published in 1759 and was popular amongst Smith's peers, like David Hume, but has never really been regarded as Smith's defining work. While Smith provided incredible insight to the study of economics and jurisprudence, *TMS* is a hidden gem that deserves the comeback it very well may be on the path of achieving. Deirdre

McCloskey has called upon Smith's moral work as well as his economics in her recent work, *The Bourgeois Virtues*, in order to prove morality is just as commonplace and important in society as the market system. But perhaps McCloskey's book serves as an important piece of persuasion for those who, unlike an aspiring philosopher, don't already regard morality as something of the utmost importance.

Smith is working during what is now called the Scottish Enlightenment, which is marked by a clear movement towards human benevolence in regards to any kind of moral structure thanks to philosophers like Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. While influenced by these two, Smith's moral theory manages to be distinct in so far as at the center of it all is sympathy. Smith defines sympathy as that which "denote[s] our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever (I.i.I.3.5). This definition is clearly very broad in nature, but this kind of "fellow-feeling" is explained further.

Upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned" (I.i.I.6).

There is a kinship between human beings by nature, according to Smith's theory. All persons experience emotions and passions that are unique and varied, yet there is a shared sympathy between persons when they share in that passion, whether pleasant or painful.

Adam Smith is often regarded as an economist first and a philosopher as a close second. When discussing things like the free market, capitalism, and trading relationships, it is easy to be thinking in an individualistic, or borderline selfish way. But Adam Smith did not believe humans, by nature, to be as selfish as the market system might have you believe. Instead, he has

a deep and nuanced understanding of the ways in which human beings relate to one another. Smith's theory is a great example of a feedback loop in which our actions and feelings in regards to others cause certain reactions from others that come back around to affect our own behaviors and sentiments once again. When I am about to act, I have a certain amount of regard for the thoughts and feelings of other people innate within my nature. That is just how human beings are, according to Smith. We care about how other people view us, for when we break things down, the ways in which people regard us and our behavior has a great effect on how they will treat us, and the opportunities we will be allotted in life.

According to Smith, when thinking about a potential action, the following questions should come to mind and inform how we decide to act. How I anticipate others will feel about that action, how people actually feel about that actualized action, how I anticipate others will judge my action, and how people *actually* judge that actualized action. We then collect the data of reactions and adjust our impartial spectator to reflect a subsequent change for improvement (or no change if reaction was positive). And we do the same in regards to other's behavior as well.

Even if one accepts Smith's observation about human sympathy as correct, it still remains unclear what exactly this has to do with ethics or morality? Humans have feelings and emotions and passions, they have the ability to share sympathy with other's experiences, but so what? This seems like an abnormally descriptive claim lacking in any kind of normativity. But after Smith introduces the idea of sympathy, it is necessary to also introduce propriety and human judgment. Propriety, or prudence in regards to the passions is necessary in order to regulate emotional responses. And judgment from others, or the imagined judgment of others, would serve as some

kind of barometer to measure the appropriateness of an emotional response and measure the level of prudence or propriety required.

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and on the contrary, when upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them (I.i.3.I).

While human beings might not be able to control their emotions completely, there is a normative expectation, for Smith, to regulate those emotions in regards to proper behavior. For example, screaming out in a furious rage after a waitress delivers you a sandwich with tomatoes after requesting none would not be an appropriate response.

Odds are that if you begin screaming and crying about the appearance of tomatoes, the people around you will pass serious judgment on your behavior. This judgment, as Smith explained above, does not fit in accordance with what they, and most rational and regulated people, believe to be justified. But this is not just speculative. Smith goes on to explain that there are actual evaluative criteria by which to follow in judging these passions, a notion that should sound familiar to those who have studied Aristotle. “The sentiment or affection of the heart from which any action proceeds...may be considered under two different aspects; 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 proposes, or the effect which it tends to produce” (I.i.3.5). Therefore, we may wish to ask ourselves two questions. One: was the presence of tomatoes on my sandwich something done with malicious intent that justifies extreme anger, and two: what would my

angry outburst result in? The contemplation of questions like this is how we determine whether or not these emotions and sentiments are virtuous.

In order to determine the *virtuousness* of emotion, it is important to first define virtue. Smith defines virtue as “proper government and direction of all our affections,” and a more current Smith scholar, Charles L. Griswold, Jr., actually notes that there is a correct “pitch” to emotions that can make them virtuous or not virtuous. In his *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, Griswold writes of Smith as “adapting the Aristotelian terminology that he thinks fairly close to his own and invokes in various places, virtue is the ‘habit of mediocrity according to right reason.’ An emotion hits the mean when it lies in the ‘middle’ between excess and defect, this being pretty much Smith’s notion ‘concerning the propriety and impropriety of conduct (Griswold 182). When determining the virtuous nature of an action or an emotion, one is required, according to Smith, to look towards propriety and measure the amount of prudence used. Smith famously provides a thought experiment to ensure an objective evaluation of such things.

The only difference between Aristotle and Smith, as noted by Griswold, is that how one would determine the propriety of the emotion. Aristotle suggests the answer lies behind practical reason, and Smith suggests the answer lies with the impartial spectator. The main reason the impartial spectator becomes such an appealing line for reason is because it is a bit more clear and descriptive, and could actually fall within Aristotle’s practical wisdom in which the imagination can help inform future decision making. How an impartial spectator might pass judgment on the “fittingness” or “appropriateness” of an emotion could govern whether or not a person needs to work towards finding a more virtuous, or mean-like response. The impartial spectator in this

situation has the ability to judge based on the understanding that people have sympathy and benevolence with which they should be engaging.

Smith's impartial spectator is the personified version of trying to walk in another person's shoes. But for Smith, this other person is an almost impossibly objective observer who is uninterested and unaffected by the outcome, yet privy to all relevant information. Mainly, the impartial spectator serves as a way for someone to try and imagine that they were free from their own biases and self-interests and were passing judgment as a neutral third party. It seems that for this reason as though the impartial spectator is the one who is in the greatest position to evaluate the virtuousness of a person's sentiments.

The impartial spectator has two defining criteria. One, the impartial spectator must be disinterested, meaning they very well may care, but they still remain unbiased and impartial to the outcome of the behavior. The more interesting criteria though of the impartial spectator is that she would be completely informed of the situation. Consider an example of two people desperately crying and appearing clearly distraught. The impartial spectator would be able to judge the person who is expressing this emotion as a result of a family member dying as distinctly different from the other person who simply dropped their fork. One person's emotion is objectively more worthy and valuable by the impartial spectator's standards. But this is a slippery slope that I wish to be careful of, for this example (and Smith's theory in general) seems to suggest that there are right and wrong emotions and that the impartial spectator is judge, juror, and possible executioner.

The analogy of a judge, jury, and executioner serves as an adequate way in which to explain the problem that can arise between the psychological and the philosophical, an issue that I believe Aristotle's virtuous friend can solve for Smith under an individualized approach. It

seems as though more harm might come to a person if they are, similarly to in the court system, placed in some kind of jail for making a mistake in an emotional response for people don't derive as much control over their emotions as they behaviors. Let's consider a more nuanced and human example. Susan has applied to her dream school in order to pursue her dreams of completing a degree in philosophy, and has unfortunately not been admitted. Susan, being a student of logic and rationality, has very obvious emotions of sadness, disappointment, and frustration. Now, the impartial spectator may very well allow Susan a certain amount of time to feel all of these emotions, but eventually an unbiased and logical spectator would realize that these emotions don't contribute to anything constructive, yet Susan still feels them.

Because Susan is a student of philosophy and logic, she recognizes the view of an impartial spectator and tries to control her emotions and dissuade herself from feeling sad. But this example of the impartial spectator seems dangerous and lacking in the empirical understanding that human beings cannot completely control the emotions that they feel. Sure, perhaps Susan can control her behavior to get up off the couch and stop crying on a daily basis (which seems constructively and objectively good), but if the impartial spectator has complete knowledge, the impartial spectator may still be able to pass judgment on Susan's residual sad feelings, leading to an uncomfortable fight between head and heart. This is a fear in philosophy for me in particular, that too harsh and unbiased a critic may lead to psychological harm due to the false belief that feelings are 1) controllable, and 2) objectively good or bad. This is why we must consider the impartial spectator in conjunction with Smith's theory of sentiment of empathy, which ends up looking a lot like Aristotle's virtuous friend in order to ensure a proper balance of all the virtues instead of an over emphasis on temperance and reason.

Let us consider a somewhat arbitrary example in which top-down rules usually fail for some strikingly similar reason. Law dictates that all shoes should be a size seven. The ruler of this fictitious place would like for everyone in his kingdom to be a size seven. However, this law doesn't actually make people's feet a size seven; instead it makes things arbitrarily difficult for some people, exacerbating a clearly poor fit. The shoes are failing pretty obviously at their function, which is to provide adequate foot protection, support, and comfort. Having the freedom to wear whatever size shoes one has seems more beneficial to everyone based on their specific individual size, while still keeping in mind that the shoe does have an objective function that all shoes share. This pluralistic way of shoe sizes is similar to the ways in which people have different psychological dispositions, such as to be quick tempered or one to shy away in situations of confrontation. A one size fits all approach for these people in creating a moral life will inevitably create unnecessary discomfort and psychological pain, similar to that of a shoe that does not fit. So long as the moral rules are derived from individual experience, imagination, and contexts, then the fit seems to all the more successful at performing the common objective function of eudaimonia in the same way as the correct size of a pair of shoes.

Smith's moral theory is certainly unique, but shares some commonalities with Aristotelian virtue ethics. Virtue, for both Smith and Aristotle, is not something achieved automatically, instead it is something achieved through contemplation, reason, prudence, and moderation. But these similarities seem to split when we consider how most of Aristotle's virtue theory is rooted in action and actualization, not just potential. This is where I believe Smith can truly add to Aristotle's work, for Smith creates a rich internal world of constructing virtue of emotions and sentiments that can then flow outward in a more Aristotelian sense. "There may frequently be a considerable degree of virtue in those actions which fall short of the most perfect

propriety; because they may still approach nearer to perfection than could well be expected upon occasions in which it was so extremely difficult to attain it: and this is very often the case upon those occasions which require the greatest exertions of self-command” (I.i.5.5).

I must also offer a solution to the problem of Smith’s theory of the impartial spectator slipping into a theory in which behavior and action is guided by social norms and the status quo without enough regard to virtuous activity. For example, simply because the majority of one’s neighbors might respond negatively to some action, such as denouncing slavery in the southern US pre-Civil War, doesn’t mean that someone should act against their correct moral assessment. It would be easy to imagine a way in which an incorrect reading of Smith and the way in which other’s judgments about us should affect our behaviors would suggest participating in enslaving other human beings. This is intuitively incorrect, but is also incorrect for Smith. First of all, the people who are participating in slavery have their own flawed impartial spectator and have made an error in constructing an objective and moral one in their individual thought experiment. But even more so, the people who are participating in enslaving others are operating outside of Smith’s very theory of moral sympathy between persons. Smith’s theory is contingent upon people regarding each other as other beings worthy of autonomy, sympathy, and empathy. By failing to do even this, these people would already be failing to correctly be worthy of any judgment upon a virtuous person.

Slavery can sometimes be a fairly easy issue to dissect for it denies most, if not all, preconditions of moral action. But let us consider a more recent and nuanced situation. ICE agents were instructed to deport a man who missed the cut off for DACA by six months. The ICE agents were acting lawfully as they sent this man to a foreign country, but the question we should be engaging with is the question not of legality, but morality. These agents were

individuals, people who have their own moral compass that should be guiding them, according to Smith, to act with empathy and consideration of others through an understanding of people having sentiment towards one another. Recognizing another person as an autonomous being with individual rights and liberties is one thing, but Smith correctly claims that it is another thing required by morality for them to regard them as sympathetic beings with which consideration for their well-being should also be taken. An impartial spectator would be able to serve as the thought experiment that instills the right to consideration between human beings once again, ensuring they are operating under a moral structure with high regard places on the well-being of other persons through interpersonal relations.

I find it important to also make a distinction that while the impartial spectator indicates certain things because they are praiseworthy, it is not simply this endorsement though that makes it so. The impartial spectator's judgment, if it is contrived of correctly without bias and based in a sympathy-understood rationale, is the correct recommendation based on its origin. Something that is discovered through an unselfish lens and involves rational thought and regard for other beings as equals is inherently praiseworthy due to its regard for justificatory facts, not because of the source providing it. The impartial spectator would necessarily recommend a certain action because it is praiseworthy, not the other way around. Otherwise, our complete understanding of the impartial spectator would fail to be a useful thought experiment, let alone a worthwhile philosophical thought.

However, I do think that it is praiseworthy of a human being to act in accordance with the impartial spectator's recommendation, when correct, in a similar way, as it is praiseworthy of them to act in accordance with virtue. The impartial spectator's job is to guide behavior towards being virtuous, specifically in regards to virtues of love and sympathy, which are at stake when

humans are trying to compromise between living in social structures and being self-interested. It is also important to say that just acting without consideration of the self is not simply praiseworthy. There are multiple situations in which it is justified to act with self-interest as the main motivation, such as when deciding a career path or when trying to leave a bad relationship. But the impartial spectator may not always have fully individualized knowledge in these situations, which is why it becomes important to turn to the virtuous friend instead.

II. Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

Despite a natural sympathy towards Smith and his moral theory, it is difficult to find anyone with a more accurate and complex notion of human morality than Aristotle. The two philosophers go hand in hand, as is the purpose of this paper, but it is difficult to oversell the importance of Aristotle. Aristotle created the very ethical framework of virtue ethics that Adam Smith was working under, and without him, it is difficult to fathom what a moral life even looks like. If we think of the discussion of morality in philosophy as anything like playing a board game, we have to recognize that Aristotle designed the board in which we are playing.

Firstly, Aristotle answers the age-old question of human purpose. If we are willing to entertain the idea that life is not meaningless, then there must be some kind of goal or meaningfulness all humans are striving towards. Aristotle was a firm believer that all things have a natural end, or a telos that is dependent on what kind of thing it is. For example, a teleological end for a chair is directly related to its success at being something for someone to sit in. Humans, unlike chair or even animals, have a much more complicated end based on our nature. A human's telos, according to Aristotle, is eudaimonia, or flourishing. While there is a great variability in humans and their flourishing, there are some necessary requirements in order for human flourishing to occur. In order for the chair to be a good chair, it must be excellent in

performing its function. Therefore, when a chair meets the requirements of its function, such as being comfortable when providing a place to watch a baseball game, or providing structure and back support at an office desk, it has achieved its end with excellence. However, as complex rational animals, humans have a more difficult task of calling upon something Aristotle called practical reason in order to achieve eudaimonia. Our function is necessarily wrapped up in our ability to act in accordance with virtue.

Aristotle defines virtue in a general sense as “a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency” (1107a). For example, the virtue of temperance occupies a space in between the vice of deficiency, which is insensitivity, and the vice of excess, which is self-indulgence. Based on the complex nature of human beings and the variability in our natures, it became clear to Aristotle that humans have their own starting points on the scales of virtue. Despite one’s natural disposition to possibly be self-indulgent, it is through practical reason about how that self-indulgence plays out in their actions and experiences that would inform them that they need to work towards changing their disposition in the direction of temperance. When one acts on a disposition rooted in vice, they will necessarily see negative feedback from their experience. Practical reason suggests that next time; they should change their behavior and receive more positive results. Therefore, practical reason contributes to the continued habituation of the good, and continued discouraging of the bad.

While it is colloquially common for people to define a person as someone of virtuous character, Aristotle had something else in mind. In order to achieve a virtuous character, a person must work to habituate their dispositions to be that of virtue instead of vice. However, like most things in philosophy, it is not always so simple. He distinctly explains the complicated nature of virtue as something with multiple parts. “Virtue, then, is (a) a state that decides, (b) <consisting>

in a mean, (c) the mean relative to us, (d) which is defined by reference to reason, (e) i.e., to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it” (1107a). Because humans live such varied lives, new and constantly evolving situations will arise. Therefore, some situations will call for action of more of one virtue than another, or in some cases, even some vice-like behavior in the case of hiding Jews in the basement in Nazi Germany. It is because of the nature of choice, and being choice making creatures that human beings are required to use practical reason in order to achieve wisdom about how to act in any and all situations constantly. There will always be a constant need for humans to continue developing virtues, but in theory the feedback loop that is connected to virtue should eventually change the character of a person to have a new disposition. Action precedes character in Aristotle’s understanding of virtue and is something inherently connected to reasoning and action together. This context-dependent nature of Aristotle’s theory that makes following a set of definite and steadfast rules about such an inconsistent and ever changing world impossible.

The ability to be virtuous not only plays a big role in a human’s quest towards eudaimonia, but it also plays a large role in human friendship. Aristotle views friendship as an extremely important part of a human’s ability to flourish, for we are naturally social beings who benefit from having relationships with others. There are many different types of friendships, according to Aristotle, all of which he explores in Book VIII of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The different types of friendship are defined by the object of the love, such as the love of someone for utility or pleasure. The true friendship, the one that incorporates virtue and goodness is a friendship in which the friends love one another for his or her own sake. Aristotle calls this the complete friendship, and describes it as “the friendship of good people similar in virtue, for they wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in

themselves” (1156b8). Therefore, because practical reason is required in any and all virtuous activity, it is also necessarily required for a friendship in which two people help one another grow in their virtuous dispositions and actions. Friendship is a required rite of passage in bringing out one’s best self, and it also reflects a more nuanced understanding of human sympathy as well.

III. Individualistic Perfectionism

There is obviously more to Aristotle’s ethical theory than just the notion of friendship. Aristotle’s virtue ethics is expanded on in many books, but one in particular serves as a great precursor to combining the notion of the Aristotelian “good friend” with Smith’s impartial spectator. *The Perfectionist Turn* by Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen is an account of a neo-Aristotelian theory in the modern world, which has both an account of the individual, draws upon practical wisdom, and stresses the importance of the sociality of human beings. Therefore, it is their understanding of the way in which ethics are bounded by individuality, as well as the fact that virtue is innately social at the same time, is an important lens by which to combine Smith and Aristotle.

The project of *The Perfectionist Turn* is ““to advance a neo-Aristotelian account of human flourishing, in which human good is characterized by these interrelated and interpenetrating features: (1) objectivity, (2) inclusivity, (3) individuality, (4) agent-relativity, (5) self-directedness, and (6) sociality” (Den Uyl & Rasmussen 34). While their complete theory is useful to mine, their evaluations of **individuality, objectivity, and sociality** are going to be of most importance for my project.

First, let us consider individuality. An important distinction that Den Uyl and Rasmussen make early on is that their theory of ethics is both individual and pluralistic. Under their theory,

all humans have a natural end of eudaimonia, but the way in which they should go about achieving it as well as what eudaimonia may look like are completely based on the individual. Whether one is a biology major or a philosophy major is evaluated based on its effectiveness of moving that individual towards his or her own flourishing. Biology is not an inherently bad major, it would have just been a bad major *for me*, as the individual that I am.

It is also important to acknowledge that Den Uyl and Rasmussen do not condone moral relativism. There are not only objective facts about the universe, such as someone's natural end, there are also objective ways in which actions are bad, or ineffective at moving towards eudaimonia. For example, if someone wants to become a surgeon, they would seem to make an objectively bad decision to study musical theater in college. Also, it is objectively wrong to murder someone, as it robs another beings of the rights and liberties that are presupposed by the notion that individuals have the right to pursue their own flourishing. And, drawing upon the society in which everyone must wear a size seven, it is easy to see that people have an objectively correct shoes size, though they differ amongst the people. Their notion of objectivity is specifically where I believe Smith's impartial spectator is the most useful in serving up judgments and recommendations based on an objective view, though it is somewhat lacking in the pluralistic and individualized point of view.

"An examination of human nature in general does not reveal any universal rules that dictate the proper weighing of the goods and virtues of human flourishing," (54) write Den Uyl and Rasmussen, though I do not completely agree. Sure, no ethical theory under the guise of Aristotelian virtue ethics is going to have a mathematical formula in which to weigh possible action, circa utilitarianism. But Smith offers an empirical way to look at human nature as something that naturally contains sympathy. This understanding of human nature may not

provide a universal rule in the weighing of these good, I agree, but Smith's general theory is an essential way into understanding practical wisdom and can provide some objectively reasoned universals about how to treat other social beings within a society. They continue on, saying, "a proper weighing is only achieved by individuals using practical wisdom to discover the proper balance for themselves" (54). And once again, while I agree, there are certain ways the impartial spectator can dictate the "proper weighing of the goods and virtues" under the umbrella of practical wisdom. However, an individualistic view of humans is the key not only in a successful ethical theory, but the key in connecting Smith and Aristotle and adequately evaluating what they offer one another.

Along with individuality and objectivity, Den Uyl and Rasmussen also touch upon the notion of sociality. They, like Aristotle, observe that "humans are naturally social, and human flourishing is only achieved with or amongst others" (53). I want to make a clear distinction that while sociality is an inherent aspect of human nature it also provides the maximum potential for virtuous activity and self-discovery. I want to argue that sociality is not just an *aspect* of achieving eudaimonia, but at the center of it. The project of *The Perfectionist Turn* is different than mine, but I believe that to mention the importance of sociality along with the importance of actualized action is to highlight something incredibly important that deserves more attention. It is a great potential for actualized virtuous behavior amongst people that can give rise to a richer knowledge of practical wisdom. Living within communities means it is necessary for humans to use practical wisdom not only for themselves, but also with others. This is not only an empirical observation about the way in which people empathize with one another, taken straight from

Smith, but a massive avenue to explore and experiment with virtuous activity of the soul, especially considering the soul is inherently social.

IV. Aristotle & Smith

If there is one main takeaway from Smith it is that philosophy needs to be an interdisciplinary practice. Smith, as I've said before, was known as an economist and is often cited in political philosophy. Not only can philosophy be a useful way in which to inform how we think about the social sciences, but the social sciences can also inform how we think about certain philosophical problems. I have and will continue to expand upon the claim that psychology can provide philosophy with important empirical information about living good lives. But we must also recall that Plato's city analogy is one of the more effective ways of detailing normative claims about human psyche. Therefore, it is important to recognize and dissect the ways in which Smith's political and economic views drawn direct parallels to his, and Aristotle's moral theory.

In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith supports the notion that a capitalist economic structure in which there is not artificial involvement on the part of the government is the best. If the government puts a price cap on commodity X then they are incorrectly influencing the market with misinformation and creating misplaced value claims. These misplaced value claims that are imposed by the government is how I propose that Smith's economic theory can be applied to the political and the moral. Economies can only flourish if it they have the freedom to let individuals dictate their subjective valuation of goods, just as human beings can only flourish if they have the freedom to assign value to morals in their life free from a top-down, command-based morality. It may well be true that it is moral to be a just person, but that must come from the living of life and the use of rationality, not assigned by those in power, whether it is a

government or a church, for there is no justification built in. It is through an Aristotelian approach, one through reason and action, and a Smithian view of human interaction and sympathetic nature, that the justification can build the claim. Or, as Den Uyl and Rasmussen call it, the use of practical wisdom can build the justification for the claim.

I'm sympathetic to those who believe Aristotle offered a complex enough moral theory to stand tall without the help of Smith. Why should we even care about Smith's theory when it seems like Aristotle gives us such a detailed account of human nature? My main argument is that both philosophers are concerned with how one should act in order to achieve happiness by means of virtuous action. The introspective notion in regards to how individuals have tastes and preferences is covered by *both* Aristotle and Smith, as is a human's desire to be social and engage in relationships. But there is an intersectional area here that is strengthened by looking at the theories of both philosophers, particularly when it comes to the virtuous friend and the impartial spectator, both of which serve different but similar purposes.

To Aristotle, the virtuous friend is someone that an individual respects and admires for their virtuous activity, but one with whom they can interact on a peer-to-peer basis. The work of an individual and the virtuous friend is interactive and collaborative. When questions of moral action come about, one is able to think and discuss with the friend about what course of action would be best. Due to the collaborative nature of this relationship, we can presuppose that this friend has some level of knowledge about the individuality of the individual in question. For example, friend John would most likely know his friend Fred's desires, interests, weaknesses, strength, and values. With that information, and the fact that John by definition is virtuous, he has a great ability to guide Fred towards the Aristotelian definition of good action, that being

action that is objectively good and individual in preference and projected course. But problems could arise when it comes to the issue of objectively good action.

John has a relationship with Fred, which means he cares for Fred on a certain level and wishes the best for his friend. By definition, this may very well mean that John has certain biases that blind him from seeing certain actions of his friend in an objective light. This is where Adam Smith's impartial spectator becomes such an important counterpart to Aristotle's virtuous friend. The impartial spectator is a figure that has no relationship with the individual in question and serves as an exemplification of the general public, which can bring other issues to the forefront, which I have previously addressed. The impartial spectator is basically an anthropomorphized version of the behavioral guiding structure to act as if someone is always watching. How might a stranger view your actions? What characterization of your morality would they assign based on your action? How do your actions appear when someone has little to no insight into your motivations? Because the impartial spectator cannot know your motivations, they are the perfect person to judge whether or not your decision or action was objectively good or bad.

Aristotle's virtuous friend, when separate from his great moral theory at least, seems to be more on the subjective side and sympathetic to one's internal motivations. But Smith's impartial spectator seems almost too objective, especially in cases when we are required by both moral theories to take into consideration a person's internal *and* external world. This requirement, in conjunction with the fact that both philosophers agree that humans are social beings who navigate the world through relationships, is the reason our understanding is strengthened by a combination of the two figures. If we have the same person, or theoretical person being judge, juror, and executioner, it seems likely that some virtuous activity would be clearly missed. This is precisely the reason that some want to claim that the combination of these

two things, both the impartial spectator and the virtuous friend fall under the more broad understanding of practical wisdom.

Another tool Aristotle claims can aid in virtuous behavior and activity is the phronemos. The phronemos is a kind of virtuous role model for Aristotle. Despite the fact that it may not be someone to interact with on a daily basis like the virtuous friend, the phronemos serves instead as a model of virtuous behavior. For example, I admire the likes of Deirdre McCloskey and despite not knowing her personally could imagine what she may do in a certain situation and modify my behavior accordingly. There are particular similarities between the impartial spectator and the phronemos including the way that both Smith and Aristotle use both in order to conjure a kind of temperate evaluation of whether or not an act is virtuous. Despite the fact that both do similar things heuristically, they are still markedly different. The impartial spectator has the ability to evaluate a potential action either negatively or positively. The phronemos on the other hand acts in her own right. A phronemos by definition lives and acts beyond just the confines of our minds but with their own autonomy and practical reason. These are actual people we are able to perceive. The phronemos can serve as a tool of suggestion far beyond the ability of the impartial spectator. To use my previous example, McCloskey has an overall ethical framework I find compelling and she also follows the Episcopalian religion. There is nothing about the impartial spectator that would suggest I look into the Episcopal Church, but considering a newfound interest in finding a potential religion I may now have a place to look. This is solely to the credit of the phronemos and not to any complex thought experiment.

It is common for Den Uyl and Rasmussen to cite practical wisdom as the answer to most questions of moral action. How does one know whether to do 'x' or 'y' in situation 'b'? Practical wisdom. This idea is a good one, but needs some expanding, which is where Adam Smith can

provide us with a deeper understanding. Practical wisdom is an umbrella term that encapsulates all of the different faculties human beings can use when assessing their actions. Within that bank of tools there are things like past experience, imagination, reasoning capabilities, the phronemos, the virtuous friend, and also, the impartial spectator. An aspect of practical wisdom can and should be thought of as being strengthened by Smith's theory of the impartial spectator because it is a tool to use in order to guide behavior that also includes a certain understanding of the value of other human beings as well as objectivity.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen break the term "practical wisdom" down into something that combines the use of "practical reason," the "development of character," and "self-understanding" (55). The final aspect of practical reason, "self-understanding," is my main concern in this paper. They continue with defining this part as "understanding the world around one, as well as one's own nature, opportunities, and dispositions" (55). One way of understanding the world around us is through Smith's thought experiment. How people relate to themselves and others is something both Den Uyl and Rasmussen categorize as self-understanding, and something Smith believes as explorative through the impartial spectator. This kind of self-exploration is essential to any ethical normative claims. Let us consider some of the more successful economist and what made them successful. Deirdre McCloskey mentions that it was the Austrian economists like Hayek, Menger, Mises, and Lavoie who championed observation and epistemic humility instead of all-knowing pride that got it so right. "I said Lavoie improved Austrian economics, and this is one way he did it, by uncovering a hermeneutics in economics, and by listening for the hermeneutics inside the actual economy" (McCloskey 190). Listening for the hermeneutics, like in economics, is what Smith does within ethics that enables him to actualize objectivity into the

pluralistic and individualized universe Den Uyl and Rasmussen lay out. The impartial spectator operates at an individual basis, yet is informed by the position of the objective third party.

In order to see such an example of the impartial spectator play out, consider this mundane example. Cilantro tastes like soap to me based on my genetic composition, but it is delicious to my brother. While the moral stakes of this example are lacking, it seems perfectly plausible that the impartial spectator would conclude I am justified to avoid cilantro, while my brother is not. But when morality is at play and we are discussing normative claims, the thought experiment still works in the same way. In a similar way to my dislike for cilantro, there are psychological predispositions that we each possess individually that can affect us in similar ways. Perhaps based on psychological factors of interest to someone in a different field, I am extremely adverse to public speaking. It seems as though an impartial spectator, with that information, would condone a career in which public speaking is not the primary activity. This is not to say that the practice of this activity would not be a practice of achieving virtue, it would be. But it is necessary to observe the starting point to adequately judge the level of praiseworthiness of such practice. Therefore, this is where the analogy falls short. One predisposition will not change, but the other can and will, but both require the acknowledgement of the starting point. We have to listen to these empirical messages, from our psyche and our community, our natural tastes and preferences, and then work upwards with them in mind to achieve morality, just like we do in economics. This is why I think Smith is so important. He provides not only an economic theory but a moral one that maps onto his understanding of a human nature that is individualized, social, sympathetic, and driven.

I think that there is a tendency in philosophy to cut out emotion and feeling and leave such “frivolous” and “subjective” things to the painters and the poets. Harry Frankfurt notices

this trend and traces mainly to the likes of Kant and utilitarianism. McCloskey cites Frankfurt when she writes that “[he] seems to be marshaling a reductio ad absurdum to show that Kantianism or for that matter utilitarianism does not give a coherent account of an ethical life. The ethical life cannot in fact to be reduced, Frankfurt is saying, to formulas for deciding ethical dilemmas, formulas applicable to any rational creature as such” (McCloskey 309). A simple list of do’s and don’ts is not a nuanced enough ethical theory for any human beings curious about how to live a good life. While Kant or Bentham may argue amongst themselves about the validity of their arguments there is a significant way in which their theories are void of any real meaning. The purpose of life seems much more likely to be something along the lines of eudaimonia sense or social harmony instead of maximizing utility and following the fixed moral rules. It seems difficult to find any ethical framework, despite its ability to fit on a notecard, worthwhile if it means a miserable yet somehow moral life.

Unlike Kant and Bentham, Adam Smith’s moral theory of sentiments places a large amount of importance on the feelings behind virtuous activity. Aristotle did the same, but to explore the feelings of love, hope, hate, anger, faith, empathy, and more towards other humans as well as the self can illuminate and inform more ethical behavior. Deirdre McCloskey writes, “we would not call a mother ‘virtuous’ who felt no emotion in carrying out her duties towards her children. Nor would we call a good Samaritan ‘good’ who saved the drowning victim in order to achieve fame... Virtue is not merely a matter of observable action. It is dispositional feeling, for example, love and regret and anguish and joy for our acts of will,” (McCloskey 125) which, I argue, happen at its best when it is expressed between persons.

The main philosophical problem that has piqued my interest is the way in which psychology, emotions, relationships, and overall empirical, subjective humanness *should* be

combined with the kind of Aristotelian love for rationality and wisdom. McCloskey, an admirer of Smith herself, agrees. Despite her major skepticism of psychologists and their field, she concedes that they recently got one observation correct. “I should admit the great truth underlying [Peterson and Seligman’s] work: that emotion and intellect are intertwined, not always to be distinguished” (McCloskey 316). Aristotle takes into consideration the individual, and this empirical psychological fact, in his moral theory. He defines practical wisdom as something that is derived from the human experience of living, learning, and feeling. There are no universal rules that apply to everyone with practical wisdom. It is instead a descriptive way to explain the way that human beings are able to decipher what is good and just for them as an individual striving to be virtuous. By definition practical reason suggest a component of acknowledging and evaluating desires and working to cultivate them alongside virtuous activity instead of neglecting them outright. Adam Smith can strengthen this very notion through his theory of mutual sympathy in a unique way. It is my claim that the way Smith describes and observes human beings as interacting with sympathy towards one another is one of the strongest cases in which the more subjective and individualized based aspects of a person are expressed. Den Uyl and Rasmussen describe the individual as paramount to their theory and one of the best ways to observe human individuality is actually through another person’s relationships with others. How they interact, care, love, hate, and trust one another is a clue into the subjective nature being *combined* with the rational and prudent parts of being a human. Or, even better yet, you must experience it for yourself. As Virginia Held said “we should pay far more attention...to relationships amongst people, relationships we cannot see but can be experienced nonetheless” (Held, *Feminist Morality*, 8).

Under Aristotle's virtue ethics, a person's morality comes from their exercise in virtuous activities. Things like moderation, courage, temperance, and justice are some of the virtues, and it would follow that they are inherently valuable, or at least valuable in relation to contributing to the virtuous life. And Aristotle also has always claimed that human beings are social and that we exist within communities. No one can reach eudaimonia by being a hermit. But no one can reach eudaimonia purely through the theoretical either. McCloskey calls upon Hursthouse who notes "moral knowledge, unlike mathematic knowledge cannot be acquired merely by attending lectures and is [therefore] not characteristically to be found in people too young to have much experience of life" (McCloskey 271). Instead, it is *phronésis*, the kind of knowledge that is only acquired through action and experience. *Phronésis* is not fully captured by the impartial spectator, for a two year old or even a twenty year old wouldn't have a highly functioning impartial spectator. But, by having a virtuous friend or virtuous relationship in the Aristotelian sense, they are not only gaining this kind of experiential knowledge or practical wisdom, but they are also refining the effectiveness of the impartial spectator. This intersection and mutual benefit is another reason Aristotle and Smith complement each other so well. The desire to be cared about or loved in a relationship requires a similar movement toward the mean of virtue that Aristotle discusses. The combination of the desire and the cognitive recognition of the required work towards the mean in achieving the desire is an example of how our natural sympathies go along with our virtuous habituation and culmination of practical wisdom.

The great trope of philosophers over prioritizing reason is not a new concept. McCloskey pokes fun at such a notion, challenging the common contradiction that "everyone is rational; and that everyone who doesn't believe so is an idiot" (McCloskey 190). She goes into great detail to explain how Bentham and Kant made the grave mistake of thinking that the theoretical, or the

sophia, is the only aspect to virtuous living. On the other hand though, while Aristotle is often cited for his emphasis on reason, the great thing about virtue ethics, for both Aristotle and Smith, is that it provides the potential for guidance from things like emotion, relationships, and experience in conjunction with reason. Virtue that is cultivated with prudence is context dependent, individualistic, and is marked by an appropriate balance of both desire and theoretical and *sophia*-like reason in order to bring forth actual virtuosity. If we value another human being as a being worthy of sympathy and empathy, as Smith suggests we naturally do, then we can use that empirical sense data in order to guide our behavior. Pure reason doesn't inherently include the more empirical and subjective data points that still appear in daily human life and interpersonal relationships. Smith, both with his theory of the natural sympathies we feel for one another, and his more objective impartial spectator, provides the perfect template for a virtue ethicist who wants to complete an ethical framework from the empirical and social science-rich bottom up. McCloskey cites the importance of an underlying psychological theory informing a philosophical one in order to illustrate how desire can be reflection upon by reason, and reason can be influenced by our internal desires, hope, and love. A bottom up approach to ethics is one that takes into consideration the individual and pluralistic interests of different humans, while still abiding by universal objectives. Smith, with his theory, is the connective tissue between the two.

Adam Smith adds a more empirical component to Aristotle's virtue ethics. He makes it valid and reasonable to take into consideration the value of other human beings, not just as individuals, but also as members of our community. To care about another person and to have psychological reactions and feelings as a result are not only valid, but things in which to consider when guiding our ethical behavior. And seeing perfectionism as the way in which we guide our

ethical behavior is straight out of Aristotle's playbook and even more so out of *The Perfectionist Turn*.

I think of psychology and the sentiments as the foundation of a house, while philosophy is everything on top. I realize that this is a controversial idea and most philosophers, aside from Aristotle and Smith, are going to want to suggest that philosophy is the foundation of everything. But if philosophy, in the study of ethics at least, is something that guides us towards being moral beings, I believe the empirical must be the foundation instead. If we build an ethical framework without considering the real individual workings of a human life then we fail to realize a system that can really work. We have to recognize that human beings have specific biases based on their psychological makeup, but if the ethical framework we endorse takes that into consideration and works with it as opposed to denying its reality is a much stronger theory of ethics. This is what Smith does so well and can contribute to all Aristotelian study.

Smith seems to want to make a move toward a value, or virtue found within other people, or at least the way in which we treat other people. The impartial spectator, under this understanding, is the Aristotelian way of actualizing, or practicing a virtue. In *The Perfectionist Turn* it is common for the authors to cite a kind of practical wisdom that a person must utilize in order to exercise virtues correctly. In this case, the practical wisdom is going to be a combination of experience gained through social interaction and the idea of an impartial spectator. Should we run into a social situation never before experienced or tested in our bank of practical wisdom, we can look to the Smithian spectator for guidance. But all of this presupposes that there is a kind of value that is inherent to our regarding another human being as not just another individual, but another individual with thoughts, feelings, and a deserving-ness to be warranted appropriate treatment.

The addition of Smith into Aristotelian virtue ethics is really a more complex understanding of the virtuous nature of being loved and loving another, whether it be a husband, wife, child, friend or neighbor. The way we react to these relationships is inherent to us as humans according to Smith, and with that innateness is the potential for true eudaimonia. Moving from the notion that we have sympathy, we are able to act and live lives in which that sympathy is developed in the same way as any other virtue and it then gives rise to even more potentiality for Aristotelian living. In 1936 D. H. Lawrence wrote, “our life consists in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us... [If you view] love as the supreme, the only emotion worth living for, then you will write an immoral novel. Because... all emotions go to the achieving of a living relationship” (McCloskey 303). All virtues go to the achieving of a living relationship, and a multitude of living relationships go to the achieving of eudaimonia. Just as love is not the only aspect that makes relationships flourish, it is also not a function of one virtue to make a happy life. Instead, in a remarkably similar way, relationships and the Aristotelian “good life” require an intricate balance of the virtues and of the emotions. And, in a remarkably unique way, one can give rise to the other.

Throughout much of both Smith and Aristotle, it is obviously clear that virtuous activity is a combination of reason inflicted upon more emotive and sympathetic desires that are inherent to human beings. But Aristotle’s virtuous friend seems to come out superior when examining not just the usefulness of the two (impartial spectator and virtuous friend) but the potentiality for virtue. It is my claim that the relationship between two virtuous people is one of the most actualized forms of eudaimonia. Like Den Uyl and Rasmussen said, eudaimonia is not going to look the same for any individual, and no two virtuous friendships will look the same either. There is something so incredibly virtuous about caring for another person as if they are an end in

and of themselves, recognizing them as an autonomous being, and accepting them as imperfect yet striving towards virtue. In order to interact with someone on this level, one must be able to listen **humbly** to know the person, reason with **prudence** about how that person needs and want to be received, **temper** his or her anger or sadness, and be **courageous** in occasionally sharing it. Relationships of all different kinds will continue to change and be different, and the ability to adjust and learn and observe is paramount to any ethical framework, and paramount to any working relationship. The necessities of a virtuous friendship are the necessities of virtue alone, which is the reason why Smith and Aristotle complement each other so well. It is not because the impartial spectator can mediate our selfish tendencies, nor is it because we learn to seek out only virtuous people. The culmination of the two is the way in which virtuous activity is shared amongst a community of people who genuinely care about one another in the most praiseworthy of ways.

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