

Adam Smith and the Pursuit of Praiseworthiness

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Abstract

Adam Smith and the Pursuit of Praiseworthiness

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Adam Smith made significant changes to the 6th and final edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) that altered both the argument and tone of the work. These changes appear to be a response to the flaws inherent in conventional morality and the corruptive influence commercial society has on our pursuit of happiness. The concept of praiseworthiness is essential to understanding the changes Smith made to the 6th edition of TMS and how these fit together to redefine his argument. The existing literature on Smith has neglected the concept of praiseworthiness and has thus offered incomplete understandings of TMS. By focusing on praiseworthiness I attempt to provide a more complete analysis of Smith's argument and its significance. I argue that the key to understanding praiseworthiness is the teleological framework outlined by Smith within TMS. This teleology tells us how we can perfect ourselves by following the golden rule and thus how to live a life of virtue and happiness. Prior to the 6th edition of TMS Smith focused on a descriptive analysis of sympathy and how this made social cohesion possible. The changes made to the 6th edition supplement this descriptive analysis by offering a normative argument that prioritizes self-perfection over social cohesion. Praiseworthiness facilitates the development of an authoritative and independent conscience which allows us to depart from corrupt moral conventions and pursue self-perfection and happiness.

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Introduction

In the 6th edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) Smith develops the concept of praiseworthiness as an alternative to the potentially corruptive influence of conventional morality. The existing literature on TMS has neglected this concept and as a consequence created a gap in our understanding of Smith's moral philosophy. TMS cannot be fully and properly understood without a complete analysis of praiseworthiness. By focusing on praiseworthiness, and how it relates to other changes made to the final edition of TMS, I intend to fill in any gaps in our understanding of the work and offer a more complete picture of Smith's moral philosophy. Praiseworthiness facilitates the pursuit of self-perfection we ought to follow if we want to avoid moral corruption and live virtuous, tranquil lives. However, despite offering a path of self-perfection, Smith is vague as to how we can reliably determine what praiseworthiness is and thus how to develop virtue and attain tranquility. Consequently, the theory of self-perfection offered in TMS' final edition is incomplete. A potential source for determining what praiseworthiness entails—and thus how to self-perfect—is Smith's teleology. Smith regularly invokes the Author of Nature to reveal a *telos* immanent within human nature. We become praiseworthy, and attain our *telos*, when we conform to this Author of Nature's providential plan.

The concept of praiseworthiness is a part of the significant changes made to the final edition of TMS. These changes to the 6th and final edition of TMS suggest that Smith had grown dissatisfied with the development and direction of conventional morality (i.e. propriety).¹ The source of this dissatisfaction is commercial society and our propensity to mistake the mere appearance of happiness for the real thing. Prior to its 6th edition, TMS focused on an empirical moral theory that explained how moral rules and standards of judgment are created and refined over time and how social cohesion was possible. Additionally, within the first five editions of

¹ Hiroshi Mizuta argues that Smith acknowledged the existence and role of public opinion and individual conscience in *Moral Philosophy and Civil Society*. Andrew Skinner and Thomas Wilson, eds. (Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press, 1975) p.127-128. According to Mizuta by the 6th edition Smith had prioritized the supremacy of conscience over social conventions. He speculates that what led to this was the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, the execution of Jean Calas, and the French Revolution. Vivienne Brown (1994) in *Adam Smith's Discourse* claims that the Stoic structure of TMS is deeply critical of commercial society (p.3). However, this critique only becomes significant in the final edition. Accordingly, Hanley (2009) argues that the additions to TMS' 6th edition are a response to—and remedy for—the moral failings of commercial society (p.5). Forman-Barzilai (2010) echoes this, claiming that authority of conscience was developed by Smith as a means to escape corruption. Likewise, Griswold (1999) claims Smith no longer trusted the "harmonious order" of the universe to protect morals (p.329).

TMS there is a general assumption that commercial society would produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. However, by 1790 it appears as though Smith had come to believe that commercial society corrupted morality, making people vain and miserable.² Consequently, he supplemented the empirical account of morality with a normative argument about what morality should look like and what type of people we ought to become.³ To accomplish this, the theory of self-perfection is superimposed on to the preexisting theory that prioritized social cohesion over individual excellence. This path of self-perfection provides a means for individuals to depart from conventional morality which may be necessary to the pursuit of happiness. The path of self-perfection is a product of three significant changes made to the 6th edition of TMS.⁴ The *development of an authoritative conscience* allows individuals to diverge from conventional morality, especially in instances where these conventions appear to be corrupted. This authoritative conscience (i.e. the impartial spectator) speaks to us with the voice of Nature and allows us to pursue true happiness rather than its mere appearance. The *theory of moral corruption* developed in the final edition of TMS explains how commercial society distorts morality and how this distortion leads us away from happiness and towards misery. Subsequently, Smith's theory of moral corruption helps to explain why an authoritative conscience might be necessary. Finally, the *virtue ethics* developed by Smith in TMS' 6th edition provides the necessary target and content for our pursuit of self-perfection. The cardinal virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command define what self-perfection is and how it can be attained. The concept of praiseworthiness explains how these three significant changes fit together into a coherent whole. Ultimately it is the pursuit of praiseworthiness that allows our

² According to Rasmussen (2008) Smith's criticism of commercial society borrows heavily from Rousseau (p.6). However, as Rasmussen later points out, Smith retains his support for commercial society (p.159). One of commercial society's deepest flaws is the perpetuated belief that the rich and powerful are happy, largely due to the attention they receive. See Griswold (1999) p.128. Fleischacker (2004) adds to this by arguing that wealth is more obvious than virtue and that material goods seem easier to attain (p.115). However, despite his criticism of it, Smith believes that only commercial society can generate the wealth needed for happiness (Alvey, 2003, p.93).

³ For interpretations of Smith as a strict social scientist see T.D. Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), Andrew Skinner, *A System of Social Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics* ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). Such interpretations typically advocate historical readings of TMS and all must explain away the roles of Providence and a benevolent deity.

⁴ The editors of the Glasgow Edition of TMS have tracked and contextualized these changes. My focus is on how these changes fit together and map on to the preexisting arguments of the first five editions. One of the important themes that comes out of these changes is Smith's increasing concern with the excellence of character (see Griswold, 1999, p.179-180). Accordingly, Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that in the 6th edition Smith provides a path to Stoic self-perfection.

authoritative consciences to escape the corrupt conventions of society and attain a life of virtue and happiness.

My focus in this work is on the significant changes Smith made to the final edition of TMS and how they fit together to create a theory of self-perfection facilitated by the concept of praiseworthiness. Thus, I argue that the 6th edition of TMS introduces a second morality that is distinct from, and superior to, the morality present in the first five editions. Unlike the editors of the Glasgow edition of TMS and Charles Griswold in *Adam Smith and the Virtue of Enlightenment* I believe these changes supplement the empirical analysis of human nature and the operation of sympathy with a normative argument on how one ought to live.⁵ This approach necessarily puts my own approach at odds with the significant body of literature that frames Smith as an empirical social scientist.⁶ This empirical (i.e. Humean) interpretation of TMS is more applicable to the first five editions of the book. Prior to the 6th edition, Smith focused on constructing a moral psychology that could sufficiently explain existing moral rules and standards of judgment. Smith's analysis of morality and judgment in the first five editions is largely descriptive. Smith opts to discuss what society does approve and disapprove of.⁷ A strong example of this approach is Smith's discussion of virtue within TMS first five editions. In these editions Smith discusses virtue from the perspective of what society has routinely and consistently agreed is virtuous.⁸ Consequently, becoming virtuous simply required an individual to conform to the preexisting standards of virtue. These predetermined, and conventional, virtues are a product of the routine operation of our moral psychology. The empirical interpretations of Smith cast him as distinctly modern. TMS is thus understood as a mechanistic explanation of

⁵ Alvey (2003) claims that Smith does have a theory of *eudaimonia* that we should all strive for. According to him this is attained when we perfect our benevolence (p.40). Macfie (1967) claims Smith's theory of human perfection (i.e. how we ought to live) reflects Cicero's synthesis of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics (p.44). Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that Smith's virtue ethics provide an "imaginary perfection [...] against which people might compare their own mortal and imperfect characters" (p.108).

⁶ Smith's empirical account of human nature remains essential to understanding his more normative claims in TMS' 6th edition. Fleischacker (2004) argues that Smith's account of human nature also includes what we "aspire for" and is "never reduced to the desires [we] merely happen to have" (p.63).

⁷ The rules of approbation and disapprobation (and by extension the standards of propriety) are based on experience. Thus, Otteson (2002) claims that propriety is "backwards looking" (p.82-82). See also Haakonssen (1987) p.43.

⁸ Griswold (1999) discusses two different definitions of virtue in TMS. The first, provided by Smith, links virtue to propriety by defining it as "uncommonly great and beautiful" (TMS, 32). Later, in Part VI of TMS' 6th edition, virtue is defined as a *natural* object of our admiration and approval, linking it more directly to the Author of Nature's providential plan and detaching it from mere propriety. See Griswold p.179.

human nature. However, I believe these interpretations neglect how the changes Smith made to the 6th edition affect the moral psychology and theory articulated in the previous five.

The changes Smith made to the final edition of TMS provide a more normative understanding and perspective on morality. I believe in the 6th edition Smith is more interested in intervening in order to improve the reader's morality and direct us towards a life of virtue that superior to conventional morality. Similarly, the references made in TMS to a deity become less mechanistic in the 6th edition, suggesting Smith believes humanity has strayed away from Nature's plan by opting to pursue riches and greatness. I argue that in TMS' final edition Smith has returned to a more ancient moral perspective that preferences what moral rules and standards of judgment should be over what they actually are. This approach is facilitated through a teleology based upon conformity with Nature and a subsequent path of self-perfection capable of breaking away from the potentially flawed moral conventions.⁹ In constructing this path of self-perfection Smith does not abandon the empirical accomplishments of TMS' earlier editions. The teleology contained in the 6th edition is superimposed upon the existing moral psychology, subsequently offering two diverging, and perhaps potentially conflicting, moral theories. The preexisting conventional morality can still be relied upon to produce a peaceful and opulent society. However, the 6th edition casts significant doubt on whether conventional morality can reliably produce individual happiness (understood by Smith as tranquility).¹⁰ Though it relies on the moral psychology constructed in the previous editions, the theory of self-perfection offered in the 6th edition promises to deliver us to happiness by promoting what we ought to pursue in lieu of conforming to existing conventional morality. However, though Smith believes the pursuit of self-perfection to be superior he does acknowledge its limitations as well as the merits of

⁹ Both the introduction and conclusion of Part VI confirm that the cardinal virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command are recommended to us by Nature (TMS, 250, 308). In his initial comments on benevolence Smith highlights the Stoic origins of virtue (TMS, 258). These virtues depend on a "rule of emotions by conscience". See Griswold (1999) p.12. Alvey (2003) argues that living in accordance with Nature promotes the perfection of our nature and the peace and order of society (p.33). However, Alvey later claims that these two ends—the peace and order of society and human perfection—are at odds with each other (p.256).

¹⁰ Hanley (2009) argues that this is because, for Smith, commerce necessarily corrupts our natural self-love (p.6). The conflict between commercial society and perfection is one of the main themes in Alvey's *Adam Smith: Optimist of Pessimist? A New Problem Concerning the Basis of Commercial Society*.

conventional morals.¹¹ Furthermore, because the pursuit of self-perfection remains dependent upon preexisting conventional morality whether or not Smith has succeeded in providing a path to true happiness remains questionable.

Praiseworthiness ties the changes made to TMS' 6th edition together and facilitates the successful pursuit of self-perfection. Consequently, to understand the 6th edition, and Smith's intention in writing it, we must explain what praiseworthiness is and how it operates. This concept has been largely neglected by the secondary literature. Typically praiseworthiness has been treated as another form of moral approbation, little different from propriety and praise.¹² These interpretations subsequently cast praiseworthiness as a mere product of conventional morality and thus incapable of leading an individual away from the same existing standards of behavior and judgment that produce it. These interpretations, I believe, fail to place the concept of praiseworthiness in the context of the changes made to TMS' final iteration. In the light of these changes, I argue, praiseworthiness becomes distinct from, and superior to, mere propriety. A significant departure from this approach to understanding praiseworthiness is found in Evensky's analysis.¹³ According to him, praiseworthiness helps to explain how morality evolves and improves over time. More important than the societal progress facilitated by praiseworthiness is the individual moral progress it allows. Praiseworthiness is what allows us to identify and pursue the path of self-perfection outlined in the 6th edition. To effectively accomplish this I argue that it must be disentangled from conventional morality. This is facilitated by the teleology present in the final iteration of TMS.

¹¹ Haakonssen (1981) argues that propriety creates a set of shared moral standards that, while far from perfect, make social life possible (p.55). Mutual sympathy, he argues, is what facilitates this. Alvey argues that all we require for this imperfect social cohesion is a "concord" of sympathy (p.43). See also Evensky (2005) p.39-40.

¹² Otteson (2002) connects praiseworthiness to our approval seeking desire for mutual sympathy (p.125-128). Griswold (1999) believes it to be revealed through moral reflection. (Alvey (2003) exposes some of the weakness in this characterization by establishing propriety as merely what we can approve of in others, and not something we should necessarily strive for (p.43). Forman-Barzilai (2010) sees the emergence of a deistic god, speaking to us through the impartial spectator, in the intersection between our conscience and the desire to be praiseworthy (p.101). My analysis agrees with the latter two authors. If praiseworthiness were a mere part of propriety there would be no motivation to distinguish it from actual praise.

¹³ I agree with Evensky's (2005) claim that praiseworthiness facilitates our separation from the conventional morals of the crowd (p.45).

The role final causes play in Smith's moral philosophy is disputed in the secondary literature.¹⁴ Alvey (2003) points out that Smith never uses the word "teleology" or its derivative "telos".¹⁵ Despite this Smith does frequently refer to a "Deity", "Author of Nature", and a "Providential plan".¹⁶ Haakonssen (1981) and Campbell (1971) agree that there is logic to Smith's philosophy that is independent from any teleology. Thus, Haakonssen argues that any references made to teleology in TMS can be discarded in favor of the purely empirical arguments made by Smith.¹⁷ Similarly, Raphael (1985) argues that TMS is a product of 18th century empiricism and that Smith only makes rhetorical references to final causes. Griswold (2006) argues that Smith uses teleology as a means to order and explain a seemingly chaotic universe. Campbell (1981), Macfie (1967), Skinner (1979), and Winch (1978) all view Smith as a strict social scientist with no practical use for final causes. I agree with Viner's judgment that dismissing teleology from Smith's philosophy renders it unintelligible.¹⁸ Similarly, Alvey has convincingly argued that Smith's philosophy relies on the concepts of spontaneous order and unintended consequences. In TMS Smith argues that moral rules are not the product of some rational calculation but are instead produced by our passions and obedience to the impartial spectator (i.e. our conscience). Similar arguments are made about the benefits of commercial society in WN.¹⁹ The greater good—for ourselves and society—is produced by the unintended consequences of our nature, and not by some rational plan made about how to attain the best for us and everyone else.²⁰ Furthermore, Alvey has also argued that Stoic explanations of nature were more influential in Britain in the 18th century while purely empirical accounts were more widely accepted in continental Europe at the time.²¹ Thus, any attempt to label Smith as a pure

¹⁴ Alvey provides a concise discussion of this in "The Secret, Natural Theological Foundations of Adam Smith's Work" *Journal of Markets and Morality* Vol. 7 No.2 (Fall 2004). In "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith" *History of Economic Thought* 8(1) p.1-21 Lisa Hill discusses the potential teleological foundation of Smith's other major work, *The Wealth of Nations* (WN).

¹⁵ See Alvey, *Adam Smith: Optimist or Pessimist? A New Problem Concerning the Basis of Commercial Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) p.3.

¹⁶ The debate over whether a deity is necessary to Smith's moral philosophy is reviewed by Jerry Evensky in *Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy: A Historical and Contemporary Perspective on Markets, Law, Ethics, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.23-25.

¹⁷ For a refutation of treating Smith's allusions to teleology as unnecessary see Viner, "Adam Smith and Laissez-Faire," *Journal of Political Economy* 35 (1927).

¹⁸ Viner, 1927, p.82.

¹⁹ See WN IV.2.9

²⁰ See Alvey (2004) p.344-345.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 338.

social scientist, uninterested in teleological explanations, based upon his historical context runs the risk of being anachronistic. Dismissing the potential role of teleology in Smith's philosophy is counterintuitive to discovering any authorial intent within the text and would ignore the significant changes made to TMS' last edition. If we wish to take Smith at his word it would behoove us to understand what role final causes play in his works rather than merely explain them away because they clash with the *ethos* of modern social sciences.

Text and Context

Like Hanley in *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* I prioritize an accurate interpretation of the text over the historical context it was written in. This analysis should be capable of revealing the meaning of the text while also providing some insight into the author's intent. Thus, focusing on the changes Smith made to the 6th edition of TMS, and how these operate, can provide insight into what he may have intended to accomplish with these changes. However, a text's meaning should not be conflated with authorial intent.²² It is logically possible for an author to produce something without intending to. Authorial intent serves an essential role in limiting what the meaning of a text *could* be without clearly and absolutely defining what it is. This provides some limited flexibility for the reader in interpreting the meaning of a text.

Historical context undoubtedly plays a role in shaping an author's understanding and writing. For example, the developing forces of commercial society undeniably influenced Smith's thinking throughout all six editions of TMS. However, the insights and arguments outlined by Smith in TMS should not be reduced to the context that inspired them and doing so risks transforming Smith into a mere pamphleteer.²³ There are portions of TMS that can only be understood as responses to the problems and questions of the time; however, these are surrounded by insights into human nature that transcend mere context. Consequently, I use Smith's historical circumstances to highlight, explain, and further clarify his arguments. In doing this I hope to respect the influence of these circumstances and subsequently avoid violating Skinner's (1969) maxim that "[n]o agent can eventually said to have meant or done something

²² Indeed, if intention creates meaning, then the intention of a reader must play some role in creating meaning. See Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²³ see Fleischacker (2005) p.xvi.

which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done”.²⁴ However, I simultaneously aim to avoid reducing everything Smith said to a byproduct of his time and place. Such a reduction, I believe, would sacrifice the “self-awareness” that the history of ideas ought to afford us.²⁵

In order to understand how historical context may have influenced Smith’s thought it is necessary make some reference to his arguments in WN. The dynamics of commercial society loom large in Smith’s arguments and WN undoubtedly represents his most mature understanding of these. Thus, to properly explain how commercial society shapes our understanding, and pursuit, of praiseworthiness I make regular references to WN. Within WN Smith makes the case that economics ought to be governed and directed by our self-interest because this motivation can be consistently relied upon.²⁶ Pure self-interest is a reliable and dignified means to manage an economic system that aims at generating opulence. However, economic pursuits are but one aspect of human existence. According to Smith, politics, friendships, and family life all require more benevolent considerations and although self-interest may play some role in these relationships to reduce them all to this one motivation would be immoral. Additionally, there is a distinction to be made in Smith’s writings between self-interest and selfishness.²⁷ Self-interest is one of our first principles that, when properly moderated and directed, aims to provide us with the necessities of life while simultaneously and gradually improving our condition over time. Selfishness, on the other hand, is perhaps better understood as a disposition to ignore our benevolent sentiments in favor of a hapless pursuit of riches and greatness. As Smith makes clear in his virtue ethics, we can successfully improve our condition without becoming selfish.²⁸ Understood this way WN can be better understood as a guide for how an individual and society

²⁴ See Skinner, Quentin, 1969. “Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas”, *History and Theory* 8: 3-53 (p.28).

²⁵ See Skinner (1969) p.52-53. Skinner argues that the key to this awareness is distinguishing what is merely “contingent” from what is “necessary” about human experience.

²⁶ See Muller (1993) p.71.

²⁷ Griswold rightly points out that “selfishness is key to the conflictual and dissolving nature of human life” (p.81). However, self-interest is an inherent part of Nature’s harmony.

²⁸ I am inclined to agree with Fleischacker’s (2005) argument that “self-betterment and vanity are not the same thing” (p.113). Through prudence we can improve our lot in life without succumbing to the love of praise. However, unlike Fleischacker I do see vanity as an essential part of commercial society’s generation of opulence (p.114).

can consistently improve their condition and not solely as a book about the supposed virtues of selfishness.

My own reading of Smith's works attempts to strike a balance between the agnosticism offered by Vivienne Brown and a strict reading of authorial intent.²⁹ An example that skews closer to the latter would be Griswold's *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*. In his book Griswold attempts to apply the "principle of charity" to interpret what Smith was attempting to say and why he may have said it. According to Griswold when reading TMS we must assume "Smith knew what he was doing and [...] he wrote exactly what he wanted to write".³⁰ This is a valid approach to reading TMS and one I employ, but only to a degree. Pushing the principle of charity too far risks distorting a text into something we would like and hope it to be by explaining away any conflicts, oversights, or mistakes made by an author. My textual analysis accepts that what an author attempts to do may differ from what they actually achieve. Consequently, if there are gaps, inconsistencies, or a mistake in Smith's writing it is up to the reader to acknowledge these and, whenever possible, explain them in a way that is consistent with the text itself rather than dismiss them as vestigial or unnecessary. This is especially important to my own approach and argument. My focus on the additions to the final version of TMS may run contrary to Smith's belief that these did not alter his argument in any significant way.³¹ Clearly I believe Smith to be incorrect in his assessment; the changes made to the 6th edition did more than merely highlight and clarify certain points. Much of the focus in TMS is shifted by these changes and an entirely new moral path (i.e. self-perfection) is opened by them. Although he may have had the pursuit of praiseworthiness in mind when he originally began writing TMS this pursuit only becomes possible within the 6th and final edition. However, despite this disagreement I do not believe it wise or practical to dismiss authorial intent altogether. Such an approach could create even greater distortions of a text by reshaping it into what the reader would have said in the author's place. Striking a balance between agnosticism

²⁹ According to Brown all we can do is read a text with "the greatest possible fidelity" but admits that "meaning is constructed in the process of reading rather than lying immanent in the text awaiting discovery" (p.2). Though I disagree with Brown's conclusion and approach I believe her criticism of historical contextualist readings is merited. Contextualists are, according to Brown, "entirely unselfconscious about the act of reading itself" (Ibid).

³⁰ Griswold (1999) p.26.

³¹ In his advertisement to the 6th edition Smith claims the changes he made to the text clarify and substantiate the arguments he already laid out in the previous five editions.

and strict authorial intent ought to open up a text to various readings and understandings without necessarily sacrificing accuracy. Additionally, it ought to help us read these texts beyond their historical circumstances.

Outline

The first significant change made to the 6th edition of TMS is the successful creation of an authoritative conscience.³² Smith initially developed his theory of conscience in the 2nd edition. However, in its initial development conscience was a mere reflection of existing social conventions as and such it was not properly authoritative. Smith refers to these social conventions as propriety. What is proper is whatever a society has consistently approved of. Within this paradigm the impartial spectator was nothing more than an echo of existing propriety. Thus, prior to the 6th edition conscience was primarily a means to promote adherence to the rules of propriety and functioned to help ensure social cohesion. Conscience accomplished this by rewarding us with approbation when we obeyed these rules and punished us with disapprobation when we did not. By the 6th edition Smith had come to recognize and appreciate the flaws in this theory of conscience. Several of these flaws are functional in nature. With propriety as the sole means for our conscience to make judgments moral conventions to be remarkably similar across time and space and no individuals would have the opportunity of breaking away from these without being disapproved of. Thus propriety promotes social cohesion by requiring conformity. Furthermore, Smith recognizes that without an authoritative conscience there would be no effective way to evaluate the rules of propriety and no individual could reliably break away from the rules of propriety and become more than what society requires. Mere propriety creates conformity, mediocrity, and a lack of progress. I discuss the flaws inherent to propriety and how they necessitate an authoritative conscience in the first chapter. I claim that to overcome this Smith seeks to disentangle the impartial spectator by liberating it from mere propriety.

In the second chapter I argue that Smith sought to create a truly authoritative conscience by linking it to the concept of praiseworthiness. Unlike propriety—and even praise—

³² Conscience in TMS can be defined as the “inner voice we hear [...] telling us whether we have proper motives and whether our actions have merit” (Otterson, 2002, p.66).

praiseworthiness ought to be determined by what is truly worthy of approval and not merely what has garnered this in the past. Consequently, praiseworthiness is capable of resolving the flaws associated with the rules of propriety. However, Smith fails to provide a clear and distinct means to determine what praiseworthiness entails. Without this there would be no way for our conscience to confidently determine what is praiseworthy, effectively preventing it from becoming authoritative. I believe we can discover what praiseworthiness consists of by tying it to the teleology present in TMS. If the purpose of praiseworthiness is to perfect our character and moral sentiments then knowing what this perfection is, and how it is attained, should help us distinguish what is praiseworthy from what is merely proper. According to Smith, the Author of Nature designed the human species to successfully pursue tranquility. The conditions required for this *telos* include security, liberty, wealth, dignity, and mutual sympathy. Commercial society helps us satisfy these necessary conditions and, thus, helps us pursue tranquility. Additionally, the opulence generated by commerce makes it possible for everyone in society to pursue tranquility. Consequently, commercial society makes self-perfection more attainable and more accessible. Smith's advocacy of commercial society is thus predicated on his belief that it will allow more people to live a life of tranquility than any other society. The desire to be praiseworthy is what directs us to the Author of Nature's providential path and knowing what this path consists of ought to help us determine what praiseworthiness entails. Ultimately Smith argues that we can use the golden rule to guide us towards praiseworthiness, self-perfection, and a life of tranquility.

Smith's theory of moral corruption reaffirms the dangers of relying solely on propriety and the subsequent need for an authoritative conscience capable of opposing moral conventions. In the third chapter I outline what this theory is, how it relates to self-perfection, and its potential symptoms. Additionally, I discuss the conditions that make corruption possible. These include the flaws in our nature (i.e. the limits of our moral psychology) and the inequality created (and relied upon) by commercial society.³³ Moral corruption is caused by the conventional admiration the rich and powerful receive in commercial society. According to Smith this admiration causes

³³ Material inequality remains an intractable component of commercial society. However, some level of equality must exist for justice. See Fleischacker (2004) p.79. Similarly, to make impartial judgments about others we must treat them as equals (p.73).

us to emulate the presumably superior rich and great and in the process we stray from our intended teleological path. I claim that the admiration of the rich and great creates a false *telos* in our imagination and thus confusion about the true nature of happiness and self-perfection. In other words, corruption causes us to believe that being rich and powerful will bring us tranquility. The pursuit of fortune and power has serious moral consequences. In chapter three, I contend that the most direct consequences of moral corruption are anxiety and loneliness. By making us anxious and lonely the pursuit of riches and power makes us miserable rather than tranquil. This occurs because the desire to be rich and powerful makes us vain. It is the consistent praise the rich and great receive in commercial society that attracts our attention and the desire to be similarly praised that prompts our emulation. Consequently, corruption distorts our natural desire to be praiseworthy into a love of praise. This turns praiseworthiness against its intended purpose (i.e. self-perfection) places us on the path to misery rather than tranquility.³⁴

Smith's theory of moral corruption has consequences for how he perceives commercial society. Given how the rules of propriety are created it seems likely that admiring and emulating the rich and great would become the norm in commercial society. If this were to occur the vain love of praise would become conventional and commonplace. Consequently, the misery created by corruption would become more common than the praiseworthy pursuit of tranquility. Though it still provides the opportunity for everyone to pursue tranquility commercial society simultaneously encourages, and requires, the pursuit of misery.³⁵ I argue in chapter four that in order to make self-perfection more accessible and attainable, commercial society requires the vain pursuit of riches and greatness. It is the vain desire for luxury and prestige that makes commercial society and all its benefits possible. Thus, Alvey (2003) argues that commercial society is a necessary but not sufficient condition for human happiness.³⁶ If everyone were to successfully pursue tranquility production would grind to a halt, wealth would diminish, and the very conditions that facilitated this pursuit would vanish. Moreover, Smith makes it clear that the

³⁴ As Fleischacker (2004) correctly points out, the vain are looking for a positional good (p.113). This creates a restless striving for more and more praise that leads to anxiety.

³⁵ This is the lesson of Smith's parable of the poor man's son. All the toiling and effort of this individual fails to bring them tranquility, but does to improve and ennoble society (TMS, 211-212).

³⁶ Alvey (2003), p.207.

vain pursuit of fortune and power is a part of *Nature's* design.³⁷ My claim in chapter four is that moral corruption brings the Author of Nature's providential plan into conflict with itself. Thus, the historical ends of Nature (i.e. opulence) no longer promote the attainment of the final cause immanent in our human nature. However, commercial society still remains the best *possible* society for the pursuit of tranquility. The Author of Nature is more concerned with alleviating poverty and the problems this creates than with promoting individual happiness. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to alleviate this conflict and make the pursuit of tranquility more popular and enticing than the vain pursuit of wealth and greatness. This is especially true of politics. Smith argues that the primary goal of legislators should be to promote the peace, order, and security of society and the continued generation of opulence. Trying to make everyone happy, Smith claims, is more likely to create more social problems and more misery. Tragically, it appears as though only a few people will ever break away from the corrupted conventions of society while the bulk of individuals toil away in misery. The people most likely to do this are the so-called "middling classes". Their position between the extremes of poverty and riches should make it less likely to succumb to the delusional temptations of wealth and power and thus more likely to follow the golden rule and live a life of praiseworthiness.

The development of an authoritative conscience *via* praiseworthiness culminates with Smith's virtue ethics. The cardinal virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command are recommended to us by Nature, and allow us to satisfy the material and psychological conditions for tranquility. These virtues represent the self-perfection at which praiseworthiness aims. Simultaneously these virtues offer an alternative and potential remedy for the temptations and symptoms of moral corruption. Prudence offers a reliable escape from the anxious pursuit of wealth that satisfies our desire to better our condition and earn the respect and admiration of others. Benevolence helps us to avoid the loneliness caused by corruption by allowing us to build and maintain relationships of affection with our relatives, friends, and fellow citizens. These relationships afford us the opportunity to contribute to the happiness of other people while also supporting our own. In doing so benevolence provides us with the mutual sympathy (i.e. peace of mind) we require for tranquility. Mutual sympathy indicates that we are worthy of respect,

³⁷ Without the vain pursuit of wealth and power Alvey argues that the entire human species would become "indolent" (p.119).

admiration, or love thus informing us that we are good people. Finally, self-command helps immunize us against the temptations of wealth and power. Self-command controls our passions—especially our selfish ones—so that we can consistently follow the golden rule and maintain our pursuit of praiseworthiness. Although all of these virtues are recommended to us by Nature and our subsequent desire to be praiseworthy, none of them can bring us tranquility on their own. Smith makes this point most effectively when he points out that some of history’s most self-commanding individuals are also great criminals (TMS, 282). Thus, while we might respect and admire a person’s control over their passions we should not consider them praiseworthy nor emulate them if they are not also prudent and benevolent. Similarly, a prudent individual can successfully and reliably improve their condition without being benevolent. The individuals most worthy of our respect and admiration are those who embody all three virtues simultaneously. The key to living a praiseworthy and happy life may be emulating these wise and virtuous individuals rather than the more seductive lives of the rich and powerful.

In order to identify praiseworthiness so that we can live a virtuous and tranquil life, Smith recommends moderating our self-interest and increasing our benevolence. Accomplishing this should allow our conscience to listen and adhere to the golden rule. According to Smith, the key to this conscientious change is gratitude. Gratitude is the benevolent desire to reward people for contributing to the well-being of others. Smith argues that the proper development and expression of our gratitude is the surest way to prove to others—and by extension ourselves—that we are worthy of the respect, admiration, and love (i.e. the recognition and mutual sympathy) that everyone desires. Furthermore, gratitude increases our benevolence by nurturing affectionate relationships and thus helps us more readily identify and obey the golden rule. A properly gracious person will have strong bonds with family, friends, and society as a whole and this increased benevolence effectively moderates our self-interest. In the final chapter of this work I argue that developing our graciousness allows our conscience to identify and pursue praiseworthiness and may inevitably lead us to a life of virtue and happiness.

Conclusion

Smith’s arguments in TMS are not without serious flaws. Though Smith sought to provide a path of self-perfection that is distinct from, and superior to, existing moral conventions

(i.e. propriety), whether or not he accomplished this is not clear. Smith's arguments rest on the reliability of our impartial spectator to accurately determine what is praiseworthy rather than what is merely proper. As I noted above, Smith does not explicitly say how we can achieve this. Consequently, the reader is left to determine what the standards of praiseworthiness are on Smith's behalf. This creates obvious problems with determining authorial intent. It is possible Smith intended praiseworthiness to be nothing more than a subsection of propriety and sought no connection to any teleological understanding of nature.³⁸ However, this interpretation of Smith's intent would call in to question his repeated use of teleological arguments. To counter this problem I have tried to connect the concept of praiseworthiness to larger arguments and claims made by Smith that fit thematically with the pursuit of self-perfection, including allusions to an Author of Nature. I believe that connecting praiseworthiness to the teleology present in TMS and subsequent virtues provides an analysis of praiseworthiness that reflects Smith's intended meaning and, more importantly, is consistent with text itself.

A subsequent flaw in Smith's theory of self-perfection is a result of his inability (or unwillingness) to completely divorce the standards of praiseworthiness from those of mere propriety. This occurs at two different levels. According to Smith, the development of our conscience begins as an internalization of conventional morality. Smith makes it clear that an individual born and raised without any type of societal contact would effectively have no conscience (TMS, 134). Exactly at what point the conscience becomes authoritative is thus unclear but it seems as though this only occurs after an individual has absorbed and adopted the general rules of propriety. Consequently, in order to become praiseworthy a person may first have to conform to the potentially corrupt conventions of society. Furthermore, even praiseworthy individuals appear to be reliant on the approval of others in order to develop a clear conscience and tranquility. Though Smith argues that praiseworthiness is its own reward the praise of our own impartial spectators appears to be a poor substitute for mutual sympathy. Mutual sympathy is a pervasive and immutable part of Smith's moral psychology and it cannot be achieved if we are not approved of by others *and* are incapable of returning this approval. This problem is reflected in Smith's virtue ethics. The cardinal virtues outlined by Smith in TMS' 6th edition are still respected and admired by the potentially corrupted, non-virtuous,

³⁸ see Haakonssen (1981) and Campbell (1971).

members of commercial society. Even though virtue is recommended to us by Nature (and not the praise or approval of others) Smith still constructs a virtue ethics that *can* be approved of by the vain and miserable. Given the rarity of virtue suggested by Smith it seems likely that a praiseworthy and virtuous individual would have to rely on the approval of their moral inferiors to attain mutual sympathy.

As an alternative to moral corruption Smith's virtue ethics may not sufficiently account for the effect our admiration and emulation of the rich and great has on our moral judgment. By transforming our natural desire to be praiseworthy into a vain love of praise moral corruption may make us incapable of appreciating the merits of a virtuous life and thus unlikely to follow the Author of Nature's plan. Consequently, Smith's admonishments to live a prudent, benevolent, and self-commanding life may fall on deaf ears and those individuals who have been seduced by wealth and greatness may see nothing enticing about the sacrifices required to become virtuous. This may inevitably reduce the scope of Smith's normative argument. It may be that in attempting to direct our consciences towards praiseworthiness and tranquility, Smith is preaching to the converted. Additionally, since commercial society requires moral corruption in order to function properly there is little incentive to increase this scope and relieve more people of their delusions about happiness. I believe Smith has underestimated the damage moral corruption can do to a society. A corrupt commercial society may be capable of making life *possible* without making it *desirable* and consequently might be generating opulence without any of the associated moral benefits. However, without a proper solution corruption may become widespread and serious enough to threaten the fabric of society itself. Widespread and continuous adulation of the rich and powerful may eventually lead to the undignified dependence and dangerous injustices that defined past, barbaric, societies.

Regardless of these flaws and Smith's obviously different historical circumstances I believe TMS can help guide our contemporary economic, moral, and political lives. In the 6th edition of TMS, Smith offers an understanding of self-perfection that contains important insights capable of liberating us from many of our own erroneous assumptions about the nature of happiness and prosperity. Consequently, we should not read Smith's works as mere products of their historical conditions, isolated from ours completely, and incapable of addressing our current problems and pursuits. Within TMS Smith highlights persistent problems associated with the

human condition and possible resolutions to these. Smith's wisdom and insights should not be discarded merely because we find ourselves in a variant of capitalist society instead of a commercial one. I believe TMS provides a moral foundation to commerce; a guide to living an authentic (i.e. natural) life; a description of happiness that is both attainable and desirable; and a means to distinguish ourselves without sacrificing this happiness.³⁹ All of these are contained within---and are satisfied by---our pursuit of praiseworthiness. However problematic this pursuit of praiseworthiness may be it provides a viable alternative to the vain and miserable quest for money and power that sacrifices neither psychological nor material needs.

³⁹ Haakonssen (1981) is correct in his assessment that it is our natural desire to be recognized *via* mutual sympathy that instigates our judgment of others and ourselves and the subsequent development of character (p49).

The Problems of Propriety and the Authority of Conscience

1.0 Introduction

The first significant change Smith made to the final edition of TMS was the development of a conscience capable of evaluating and overruling preexisting moral standards. The creation of this *authoritative conscience* facilitates the pursuit of self-perfection. Prior to the 6th edition of TMS conscience was dependent on and restricted by the general rules of propriety.⁴⁰ These rules are the unintended, yet necessary, product of the routine operation of our sympathy. Without propriety, social life would be impossible.⁴¹ Additionally, because our conscience develops first as an internalization of propriety these general rules play a fundamental role in shaping our conscience. However, so long as our conscience remains bound to these rules it cannot become truly authoritative. Our conscience's role as a reflection of propriety would be to reward our obedience to the general rules and punish our disobedience.⁴² In order to become authoritative our consciences must be capable of making judgments about propriety and whether or not we should obey its general rules. Otherwise our conscience would operate as nothing more than a

⁴⁰ In addition to the authority of conscience Smith included an expanded theory of moral corruption and a discussion on the cardinal virtues in the 6th edition. For a helpful analysis of the connection between these two other additions see Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010). My own discussion of these other additions and how they fit together appears in later chapters.

⁴¹ For a helpful discussion of propriety and its importance see Montes, *Adam Smith in Context* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) esp p.97-129. For a more critical understanding of the concept see McKenna, *Adam Smith: The Rhetoric of Propriety* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006). Additionally, for insights into what propriety may actually been for Smith see Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain, 1660-1800* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

⁴² For a historical treatment of the development of conscience see Richard Sorabji, *Moral Conscience through the Ages: Fifth Century BCE to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

means for ensuring thoughtless adherence to preexisting rules of morality. To become truly authoritative our conscience needs standards of moral judgment that are distinct from—and superior to—mere propriety. These distinct and superior standards will enable us to make judgments about the merits of propriety and, when necessary, overrule it. Smith’s concept of praiseworthiness satisfies these conditions. As both a moral motivation and criteria for moral judgment praiseworthiness can direct us away from social conformity and mediocrity and towards virtue and moral perfection.⁴³ Smith’s development of the authoritative conscience in TMS’ final edition exposes several weaknesses inherent in propriety. Though capable of producing a tolerably (i.e. imperfectly) just, stable, and happy society, the general rules of propriety cannot prevent—or cure—the false beliefs that divert us away from our pursuit of happiness. Through the authority of conscience Smith superimposes a path of self-perfection ovetop of the pre-existing system of practical social morality.⁴⁴ This superimposition provides a means of escaping the flaws inherent in mere propriety as well as a means for counteracting the false ideas and beliefs that may make us miserable.

The general rules of propriety are a product of our sympathy. According to Griswold (1999) these general rules are best understood as maxims or even “rules of thumb”. In other words, the general rules of propriety are a convenient tool for everyday moral judgment. Griswold adds that these rules are continuously “modified and reinterpreted over time” but that they are never “reinvented wholesale”.⁴⁵ Moreover, these general rules are an unintended consequence of the routine—and ordinary—operation of our sympathy.⁴⁶ Consequently,

⁴³ Smith is sometimes characterized as the “father” of so-called “bourgeois virtues”. For an understanding of what this label means see McCloskey *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Forman-Barzilai argues that the system of practical (and attainable) morality is Aristotelian in *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy* (San Diego, CA: University of California Press, 2010) p.79-80. Forman-Barzilai concludes that Smith’s system of propriety matches Aristotle’s virtues. For the Stoic influence on Smith’s thought see Raphael, D.D., and Macfie, A.L. “Introduction” to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. D.D. Raphael, and A.L. Macfie, eds. Vol 1. *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976). Gloria Vivenza offers a more comprehensive look at the classical influence on Smith in *Adam Smith and the Classics: The Classical Heritage in Adam Smith’s Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ See Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Griswold adds to this by arguing that these moral “rules of thumb” are developed by observing particulars and that they are inevitable (p.186-189).

⁴⁶ Accordingly, Haakonssen argues that “the general rules of morality are thus the unintended outcome of a multitude of individual instances of natural moral evaluations” in *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.61.

although these standards of moral judgment align with our natural sense of propriety they are not necessarily a product of conscious deliberation.⁴⁷ Although the general rules of propriety are unforeseen and unintended Smith does not see them as either arbitrary or unnecessary. Initially (i.e. prior to TMS' 6th edition) Smith conceived of these general rules as a fortuitous byproduct of a harmonic moral psychology and economic system that—although far from perfect—always tended towards the greatest good.⁴⁸ By the 6th edition of TMS Smith had softened on this harmonic position.⁴⁹ The substantial changes Smith made to the final edition of TMS make suggest that he no longer believed propriety was enough to ensure the flourishing of society. In other words, by the 6th edition Smith had come to realize that on its own propriety could not promote and guarantee the pursuit of happiness. However, though Smith backed away from this belief in a natural harmony of morals he did not abandon the argument that the general rules of propriety were necessary.⁵⁰ Without these general rules neither society nor virtue would be possible. For society—and by extension virtue—to exist we must be capable of generating, and adhering to, common moral standards.⁵¹ In the first section of this chapter I outline how the routine operation of our sympathy generates common moral standards that inevitably contribute to the development of conscience. This opening section will touch upon how the general rules of propriety help to shape society as well as individuals. These shared moral standards are moderated by our desire for mutual sympathy.⁵² This desire for mutual sympathy operates as a “golden mean” that eliminates extreme behaviors.⁵³

⁴⁷ This natural sense of propriety is created by our desire for mutual sympathy and recognition.

⁴⁸ see Otteson's claim that “the natural exercise of our faculties—including our moral faculties—[...] leads to the development of a system of morality that is ultimately conducive to general utility” in *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ According to Otteson (2002) this harmonious order was a product of our natural desire to be worthy of other people's approval (see p.125-128). Otteson argues specifically that the “marketplace of morals” will inevitably produce the perfect society and perfect virtue (p.127).

⁵⁰ Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that, though Smith had come to realize the imperfections in his system, he remained focused on the benefits of “social coordination” offered through adherence to the rules of propriety (p.106). Cropsey makes similar arguments throughout *Polity and Economy: An Interpretation of the Principles of Adam Smith* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957).

⁵¹ See Hanley (2009) p.43-44 (especially notes 39 and 40) for a brief discussion of propriety as a precondition for virtue.

⁵² Haakonssen (1981) highlights the essential role mutual sympathy plays in shaping propriety by arguing “the operation of mutual sympathy unintendedly creates common social standards—standards which are at least sufficiently common to make social life possible” p.55.

⁵³ Evensky provides an insightful discussion on how society generates a “golden mean” in *Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy: A Historical and Contemporary Perspective on Markets, Law, Ethics, and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.49-53.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the initial development of conscience. Smith's theory of the impartial spectator is essential to the generation of propriety and the development of conscience.⁵⁴ According to Smith our conscience develops after we have internalized the general rules of propriety.⁵⁵ Our impartial spectators play a fundamental role in this development. It is the voice of the impartial spectator that informs us when we have—or have not—conformed to the rules of propriety.⁵⁶ Thus, the impartial spectator can be understood as a metaphor for the voice of conscience. In its initial role as conscience, the impartial spectator is represented as the “practical man”.⁵⁷ As the so-called “practical man” our conscience's function is to approve or disapprove of our own behavior based upon the rules of propriety. To fulfill this role the impartial spectator or “man within the breast” needs no access to special (i.e. transcendent or objective) moral standards.⁵⁸ The only standards our conscience requires in its initial development are the ones that have been created by the routine operation of sympathy in society. However, Smith's attempt to develop an authoritative—and independent—conscience in TMS' 6th edition changes how the impartial spectator operates. An authoritative conscience must be capable of more than merely adhering to the general rules of propriety. The authoritative and independent conscience developed in TMS' 6th edition must also be capable of evaluating these rules and—when necessary—transcending them. In order to successfully evaluate and transcend propriety our impartial spectators need access to standards of moral judgment that are distinct from the socially generated rules of propriety. Praiseworthiness not only allows our conscience

⁵⁴ For a concise discussion on the impartial spectator as conscience see Raphael, “The Impartial Spectator” in *Essays on Adam Smith*. Andrew Skinner and Thomas Wilson, eds. (Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press, 1975) p.83-99. See also Macfie, *The Individual and Society: Papers on Adam Smith* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967) p82-100. These views present a strictly conventionalist interpretation of the impartial spectator and conscience. This interpretation has been challenged by Otteson (2002) and Forman-Barzilai (2010).

⁵⁵ See Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator : Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 35.

⁵⁶ For the various roles conscience plays in TMS see Otteson (2002) p.66.

⁵⁷ This view is held in opposition to Firth's (1952) view of the impartial spectator as the “ideal observer”. See Firth, “Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 12(3):317-345. Those who see the impartial spectator as the “practical man” include; Campbell in *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, (London, UK: George Allen and Unwin, 1971); Raphael (2007), and Otteson (2002). I agree that the impartial spectator *begins* as a practical judge. However, over the development of TMS the impartial spectator becomes more and more transcendent, culminating in the final edition where it needs distinct moral standards.

⁵⁸ Though Griswold (1999) accepts the normativity present in TMS he rejects the need for distinct, transcendent, moral standards. See esp. p.131 and 213. For a discussion on the role—and necessity—of transcendent moral standards see Hanley (2009) p.141-142.

to make judgments about the content of propriety, it also makes it possible to reject and/or disobey any existing rules we determine to be unworthy of our approval.

A significant portion of TMS—throughout all of its iterations—is focused on empirical analysis. Consequently, it is possible to read TMS exclusively as a description of how moral judgment operates to create rules and why we feel obligated to follow them.⁵⁹ However, such a reading misses key normative passages throughout TMS as well as the overarching moral prescription.⁶⁰ Thus, a strict empirical reading of TMS must explain away frequent normative claims made by Smith. Additionally, I do not believe empirical readings convincingly explain why Smith was motivated to make significant changes to TMS' final edition. In this chapter I argue the development of an authoritative conscience reveals Smith's dissatisfaction with the results of mere propriety.⁶¹ By the 6th edition of TMS he was no longer convinced that the general rules of propriety were sufficient. Smith recognized that mere propriety was incapable of solving certain moral problems linked to conventional propriety.⁶² The most serious of these problems is propriety's inability to prevent the genesis and spread of moral corruption. Corruption, and the misery it creates, is more likely to become a part of propriety than a possible solution to it. By the 6th edition of TMS Smith seems to have become aware of the problems inherent in propriety and offers a potential solution to them. Before discussing how the authority of conscience is established this chapter analyzes the problems this authoritativeness seeks to resolve. The specific flaws in propriety relevant to the authority of conscience are its inherent

⁵⁹ For strict empirical readings of TMS see Campbell (1971); Skinner, *A System of Social Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); and Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay on Historiographic Revisionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). A pioneering refutation of this empirical stance is found in Lindgren, *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), esp p.15-19.

⁶⁰ Otteson (2002) argues that Smith's normativity only becomes clear when the larger picture of TMS is understood. For the most part I agree with Otteson's claim. I believe the changes made to the 6th edition provide insight into this larger picture. For other works on the normativity present in TMS see Hanley (2009); Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1993); and Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations': A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that Smith developed the authority of conscience in the 6th edition in response to the moral corruption he saw endemic to commercial society (p.98).

⁶² Ignatieff (1986) argues that Smith and Rousseau are linked by their shared Stoic belief in the corruptive influence of conventions. See Ignatieff, "Smith, Rousseau, and the Republic of Needs," in *Scotland and Europe 1200-1850*, ed. T.C. Smout (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986). For a more in depth analysis of the connection between Smith and Rousseau see Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith's Response to Rousseau* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008). Forman-Barzilai (2010) "In his evolving views on conscience [...] Smith was probably influenced less by Rousseau and more by various Stoic theories" (p.97).

relativity and its conformity. Because of its inherent flaws propriety may authorize and perpetuate immoral behaviors (i.e. vanity). Consequently, we need a means to judge and evaluate the general rules of propriety and a way to transcend them.

By establishing the authority of conscience Smith transforms the role of the impartial spectator. In the final edition of TMS the impartial spectator takes on the role of “demigod”.⁶³ In TMS’ 6th edition Smith establishes both the authority of conscience and its independence from propriety by linking it to praiseworthiness.⁶⁴ As both a moral motivation and criteria for judgment, praiseworthiness allows our impartial spectators to evaluate and transcend mere propriety. As such, the role of conscience is no longer merely to match our behavior with the general rules of propriety. As a demigod the impartial spectator’s role is to direct us towards the life of virtue. In the final section of this chapter I argue that by linking conscience to praiseworthiness Smith offers a system of self-perfection as a remedy for the moral ills inherent in the existing (i.e. pre-6th edition) system of social morality based on propriety.⁶⁵ This pursuit of perfection involves aligning our character with the providential wisdom of the Author of Nature and in doing so we become virtuous and happy.⁶⁶ Though difficult to attain for most, this self-perfection offers a resolution to the flaws in propriety by allowing individuals to identify and pursue moral excellences distinct from the relativistic and conformist rules of propriety. Furthermore, this pursuit of self-perfection *via* praiseworthiness explains the other significant changes Smith made to the 6th edition of TMS and transforms it from an analysis of the operation of social morality into a discussion of the merits—and necessity—of self-perfection.

⁶³ This “demigod” is both metaphorically and practically superior to the impartial spectator’s initial role as the “practical man”. Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that this demigod in TMS is a “deistic God” which emerges in order to determine praiseworthiness (p.101). Similarly, Otteson (2002) argues that the voice of the impartial spectator inevitably becomes “the voice of God” (p.66). For a conventionalist reading of Smith’s “demigod” see Hope, “Smith’s Demigod,” in *Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Vincent Hope (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

⁶⁴ Forman-Barzilai (2010) connects praiseworthiness to authority of conscience, arguing that it creates a “third-way” between conventionalism and transcendental moral standards (p.102).

⁶⁵ For a discussion on Smith and self-perfection see Forman-Barzilai (2010). Also see Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and for a connection between perfection and Stoicism see Alvey, “Moral Education as Means to Human Perfection and Social Order: Adam Smith’s View of Education in Commercial Society,” *History of the Human Sciences* 14 (2001): 2.

⁶⁶ On the role the “Author of Nature” plays in our pursuit of happiness see TMS 126. See TMS 105-106 for Smith’s claim about the “wisdom of God” and the “natural principles” that keep us in harmony with it. Note that Smith here invoking “God” in the same way as he would the “Author of Nature” and “Nature”.

This chapter concludes by summarizing the major points and a brief discussion on how the authority of conscience connects to the other changes Smith made to the 6th edition of TMS. I recognize that Smith provides no immediate means to determine exactly what the standards of praiseworthiness are. Thus, our impartial spectators may be left without a means for effectively and consistently distinguishing praiseworthiness from mere propriety. This would severely limit our ability to identify and pursue self-perfection and may make us incapable of differentiating moral corruption from virtue and happiness. The secondary literature on this potential problem tends to be one-sided. A common and influential argument claims that, because Smith was a conventionalist, no distinct and transcendent standards of morality are available or necessary to his system.⁶⁷ However, I do not believe that this conventionalist account adequately explains the changes Smith made to the 6th edition or the distinctions he makes between propriety, praise, and praiseworthiness. If existing conventions were all that we had or needed to make moral judgments, there would be no need to make sharp distinctions between what is praised and what is praiseworthy. If propriety determines both of these then they should be identical.⁶⁸ Because no guidelines for determining the standards of praiseworthiness are readily available in TMS it is up to the reader to determine what these might be and how they can overcome the limitations of propriety and, more importantly, the corruptive influence conventions may have on our morality. I argue that a possible source for the standards of praiseworthiness—and thus the life of virtue and happiness—is nature.

1.1 Sympathy and Propriety

According to Smith the routine operation of our sympathy is what inevitably establishes the general rules of morality that govern our day to day lives. Haakonssen (1981) argues that these general rules ought to be “sufficiently common to make social life possible” (p.55). These conventional rules are based upon propriety sympathetic concord between actors and spectators wherein right and wrong are determined by what are approved of and disapproved of

⁶⁷ Griswold (1999) argues that the structure of moral psychology and judgment is enough to determine the differences between propriety and praiseworthiness. Thus, no moral standards beyond conventional rules are necessary or available (p.131). Otteson (2002) agrees, arguing that when the impartial spectator directs us to adhere to general rules these become the manifestations of God’s will (p.75-77).

⁶⁸ In short, if praiseworthiness was a mere subsection of propriety then whatever in society is praised would be worthy of that praise.

respectively. This sympathetic concord produces the general rules of propriety which we use to judge other individuals and expect to be judged by. Because we expect to be judged by these standards they serve an essential and unavoidable role in shaping our character.⁶⁹ Additionally, the rules of propriety play a crucial role in ensuring the peace and order of society.⁷⁰ However, propriety contains specific flaws that Smith tried to repair in the 6th edition of TMS. These flaws are an unavoidable product of the process that creates the general rules of propriety.⁷¹

Smith introduces his theory of sympathy in TMS by distinguishing it from two other theories. First, Smith begins by distinguishing his theory of sympathy from Hume's by characterizing this theory of sympathy as a form of contagion.⁷² Hume argues that sympathy enables us to adopt the *idea* of a passion or sentiment when we witness another person experiencing them. This idea is then transformed into an *impression* by our imagination.⁷³ For instance when we see someone who is angry we adopt a similar, though perhaps muted, feeling as a result of our sympathy. The distinction between Smith and Hume's theories of sympathy is made through an important observation. According to Smith the contagion theory of sympathy fails because it cannot account for the fact that we frequently experience sentiments and passions that the people we sympathize with do not, or cannot, feel (TMS, 16). Smith's observation is supported by three examples. First, mothers routinely sympathize with their infants when they see them in distress. However, Smith contends that the feelings mothers develop as a result of this sympathy cannot be shared by the infant. Because an infant has no foresight it cannot develop the "[...] most complete image of misery and distress the mother feels on their behalf" (TMS, 17). Similarly, Smith acknowledges our propensity to pity the dead for their loss of life. However, the dead are incapable of feeling any sentiments or passions (Ibid). Finally, we frequently feel a deep sense of shame when people embarrass themselves in public, yet these people are often blissfully unaware of this embarrassment (TMS, 16-17). Smith concludes from

⁶⁹ Evensky (2005) offers the claim that "The reciprocal nature of [sympathy] is the tie that binds society together" and that our subsequent need for approval shapes our character and behavior (p.40).

⁷⁰ Propriety is responsible for establishing the rules of justice. Otteson (2002) discusses the essential role justice plays in preserving society (p.228).

⁷¹ See Hanley (2009) p.72-78 for a concise discussion on the limitations of general rules.

⁷² See Frazer (2010), *The Enlightenment of Sympathy* for an analysis of Hume's theory of sympathy as contagion as well as a comparison to Smith's theory. For an account of Smith's theory of sympathy as contagion see Cropsey (1957).

⁷³ See Hume, T 2.1.11.8; SBN 319-20.

all of this that sympathy is not a matter of contagion but one of *projection*.⁷⁴ We feel certain sentiments or passions on behalf of the very young, dead, or foolish because we place ourselves in their position and imagine what we would feel in those circumstances. Although Smith rejects Hume's theory of contagion he does preserve the important role imagination plays in our sympathetic judgment of other people.⁷⁵

The second theory of sympathy Smith refutes is Rousseau's (TMS, 15). Smith refers to Rousseau's theory of pity in order to refute it as simplistic and narrow. According to Rousseau, our ability to sympathize with suffering—and feel pity—ought to prevent us from causing harm to others.⁷⁶ Smith agrees that sympathy may have once referred to pity and/or compassion; however, he claims that now it must be used “to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (Ibid.). Smith critiques Rousseau in order to demonstrate the importance of our sympathy with the positive (i.e. pleasurable) sentiments. For Smith, sympathizing with emotions like joy is as important to the generation of moral standards and the development of our own character and behavior as our sympathy with sorrow. Although our sympathy with the positive, pleasurable, sentiments is different than with the negative (i.e. painful) both are essential to the formation of the standards of propriety and our own character. By distinguishing his theory of sympathy from these other two Smith lays the foundation for how sympathy operates to create general rules.

Smith's theory of sympathy contains within it a theory of moral judgment (Forman-Barzilai, 2010,p.6).⁷⁷ Thus, when we sympathize with another person we do so—at least partially—in order to judge their character and behavior. Forman-Barzilai adds that our sympathy is an “ordinary exchange of approbation and shame” that socializes us over time (p.12-13). Haakonssen argues that it is our natural desire to agree with others that mobilizes our

⁷⁴ See Frazer (2010), 97-100 for an explanation of Smith's “projective empathy”.

⁷⁵ Montes (2003) also argues that Smith rejected Hume's “proto-utilitarianism” (p.45) Otteson (2002) agrees, adding that propriety is based on past experiences and not future utility. See also Haakonssen (1987) for a “backward looking” understanding of propriety (p.47).

⁷⁶ See Rousseau's *Second Discourse*.

⁷⁷ This is an important component of Smith's argument. When we sympathize we not only create rules, we also evaluate them. The creation, and refining, of rules and determination of their merit occurs simultaneously. Consequently, we need some means for making these judgments. The impartial spectator, as conscience, is responsible for judging these rules. My argument in this chapter is that our impartial spectators should not use conventions to judge conventions.

sympathetic judgment (Haakonssen, 1981, 49). Propriety is the standard we use to make these sympathetic judgments. Propriety, Smith argues, is reached “[w]hen the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotion of the spectator” (TMS, 21).⁷⁸ We attain this concord by considering “the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it” (TMS, 24).⁷⁹ We approve of another person’s character or behavior when we judge that we would adopt the same character or behave the same way if we were in their particular situation. Conversely, we judge something to be improper when we fail to reach a sympathetic concord with the actor. In this case we determine that we would not adopt a similar character or behaved similarly if we were in their situation.⁸⁰ Sympathy thereby allows for case by case judgments of other people’s character and behavior as well as our own. Weighing as many of the mitigating factors that contributed to another individual’s character or behavior is essential to proper (i.e. fair and impartial) moral judgment. However, such thorough judgments of every incident we encounter in our lives are impractical. Simply put, we do not have the time or ability to gather all of the information required to make perfect judgments about others *all the time*. Smith highlights this problem with an analogy about a grieving stranger (TMS, 23). Although we do not—and cannot—know all of the factors that have contributed to this stranger’s grief, we do know that grieving over the death of a loved one is proper. Consequently, we reach a “conditional sympathy” with this stranger based upon “general rules derived from preceding experience” (Ibid.).⁸¹ Should more information about the particular circumstances we are judging come to light we ought to be open changing our judgment. The general rules are an aggregate of past judgments of propriety. According to Haakonssen these rules are the “unintended outcome of a multitude of individual instances of natural moral evaluations” (Haakonssen, 1981, 61).

⁷⁸ Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that the level of concord required only needs to reach the level necessary for sociability (p.68).

⁷⁹ Montes (2003) includes two relevant definitions for propriety in *Adam Smith in Context*; (a) “an inner sense that ought to be exercised in order to reach mutual sympathy” and (b) an agreement between motives and actions (p.101-102). Montes links propriety to duty *via* Cicero’s *officia* (p.98).

⁸⁰ An offshoot of this judgment is the sense of merit or demerit we award to any character or behavior that does some good or harm respectively. However, merit and demerit are still dependent upon the judgment of propriety or impropriety. Montes (2003) argues we determine merit and demerit based upon indirect sympathy with the affected person and direct sympathy with the actor (p.103).

⁸¹ In TMS Smith argues when we “observe in a great variety of particular cases what pleases or displeases our moral faculties, what these approve or disapprove of, and, by induction from this experience, we establish those general rules” (TMS, 376).

Ultimately, because they are based upon what has repeatedly been approved or disapproved of, the conventional standards of propriety are reducible to popular opinion.

In order to properly create and apply the rules of propriety we use what Smith terms as our impartial spectators.⁸² The impartial spectator aims at preventing us from injecting any bias or subjectivity into the rules of propriety by acting as “an extension or idealization of our society’s mode of moral judgments” (Fleischacker, 2005, 52).⁸³ Here “idealization” refers to the impartiality Smith believes is axiomatic to moral evaluation.⁸⁴ This, ideally, allows us to make judgments about others—and ourselves—through a general point of view rather than a purely subjective one. Thus, the vantage point of the impartial spectator ought to help us to avoid subjectivity and create general rules that may apply equally to everyone.

The general rules of propriety are also shaped by our natural desire for mutual sympathy. This desire acts as a *golden mean*, eliminating all excesses and deficiencies from these rules and by extension our character and behavior.⁸⁵ Without this desire for mutual sympathy we may not have any interest in either (a) making judgments about other people or (b) having those judgments influence our behavior in any significant way. Accordingly, Haakonssen (1987) argues that “sympathy is put to work by an even more fundamental principle in human nature, the desire to agree, to be in accord with our fellow men” (p.49). Smith explains how this desire

⁸² It is worth noting that Smith did not introduce the impartial spectator until the 2nd edition of TMS. For insight into the development of the impartial spectator throughout TMS six editions see D.D. Raphael, (1975), “The Impartial Spectator” in *Essays on Adam Smith*. Raphael (1975) argues that Smith’s development of the impartial spectator may have been in response to the criticisms of Sir Gilbert Elliot (p.91). Montes (2003) provides a more recent general summary of the impartial spectator (p.82-100).

⁸³ In “Adam Smith and Cultural Relativism” Fleischacker (2011) defines the impartial spectator as an “idealized version of our friends and neighbors” (p.8). Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that the impartial spectator is a “self-referential” standpoint when used to judge others. She makes this argument in distinction to Nagel’s (1986) “view from nowhere” argument (p.70). In *Poetic Justice* (1997) Nussbaum places Smith’s impartial spectator closer to Rawls’ original position (p.134 n.23). All three of these arguments may accurately explain how the impartial spectator can make proper judgments of others. Additionally, they may provide insightful explanations for how the impartial spectator operated *before* the 6th edition of TMS. However, for our impartial spectators to facilitate the authority of conscience we need access to moral standards that transcend conventions (i.e. idealized individuals or self-references) and contain more discernable content than some abstract neutral position.

⁸⁴ Without this impartiality Smith’s moral theory would be reduced to a Hobbesian system where right and wrong are determined solely by the preferences and desires of each individual, creating a social cohesion problem. Sympathy and impartiality, according to Smith, avoid this cohesion issue by creating shared (albeit imperfect) values.

⁸⁵ Evensky (2007) argues that social rules themselves act as a golden mean (p.49). While it is true social rules help moderate our behavior they are only capable of doing so *after* they have been appropriately moderated by our desire for mutual sympathy.

works, and why it is important, with the example of shared literary tastes among friends (TMS, 19). Smith explains that when we enjoy a book or a poem we are inspired to share it with a friend and are subsequently “amused by sympathy with his amusement which thus enlivens our own” (Ibid). In other words, we find it pleasurable when people close to us enjoy the same things we enjoy. Conversely, if this friend dislikes the book or poem we are fond of Smith argues that we are “vexed” and can “no longer take any pleasure in reading it to him” (Ibid). According to Smith all of this occurs because “nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary” (TMS, 18). However, this natural desire for mutual sympathy is not confined to aesthetic tastes. Through this aesthetic analogy Smith makes a much larger argument about our human nature and moral psychology. Our desire for mutual sympathy also compels us to seek out moral agreement with other individuals. We seek to approve of others while also attaining their approval. This satisfies our desire for mutual sympathy because, Smith points out “[t]o approve of another man’s opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them” (TMS, 22). This agreement helps to prevent the rules of propriety from becoming solipsistic. More to the point, this need for mutual agreement effectively moderates propriety and any subsequent behaviors.⁸⁶

Smith’s discussion of the bodily passions—and our reactions to them—demonstrates exactly how mutual sympathy moderates propriety (TMS, 34-39). According to Smith the bodily passions are our appetites and pain. Smith argues that our ability to sympathize with the expression of appetites is naturally restrained. This restraint arises from our aversion to strong expressions on these passions (TMS, 35). Thus, we are capable of sympathizing with the appetites but only to a certain degree. The same can be said of our reactions to pain. Smith argues that it is both “unmanly” and “unbecoming” to cry out in pain (TMS, 36).⁸⁷ However, Smith does admit that we do have a strong, instinctual, ability to sympathize with pain even if the reciprocal pain we feel is much different in degree and kind, we just prefer to sympathize

⁸⁶ The moderating effect of mutual sympathy highlights the Aristotelian character of Smith’s system of propriety. For a discussion of the Aristotelian themes found in the literature on Smith see Hanley (2009) p.54 n.4.

⁸⁷ Seemingly this would be because of moral conventions regarding masculinity. However, Smith argues throughout TMS that we have an inherent and natural dislike for extremes and thus sympathizing with extreme reactions is always difficult.

with more controlled expressions of this pain, likely because doing so is less painful for us. Smith adds that our ability to sympathize with bodily pain is enlivened by both the novelty of that pain and any danger that may accompany the pain. To the latter point Smith claims that “[p]ain never calls forth any very lively sympathy unless it is accompanied with danger.” (TMS, 37). Smith adds that what we truly sympathize with in such an instance is the fear—a product of our imagination—and not the actual pain (Ibid.). Furthermore, though the novelty of a particular cause of pain may enliven our sympathy this inevitably wears off as we grow more and more accustomed to it. Our sympathy with the bodily passions helps to determine the general rules of propriety. Our desire for mutual sympathy naturally restrains our reactions to—and expressions of—these bodily passions. This natural restraint on our ability to sympathize with appetites and pain oblige us to moderate our own responses to these passions in order to ensure we receive sympathy. Because we are disgusted by the excessive reactions others have to the bodily passions we know to expect disgust if we should react the same way. The moderation of our appetites gives rise to the virtue of *temperance* (TMS, 36). Similarly, Smith claims the ability to control our reactions to pain “is the foundation of the propriety of constancy and patience” (TMS, 38).⁸⁸ Smith argues that all of our passions—and not just our bodily ones—must be moderated to the point of “mediocrity” so that we can attain mutual sympathy arguing that “if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent, or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them” (TMS, 34).⁸⁹ This principle of mediocrity—determined by the desire for mutual sympathy—is a defining feature of the rules of propriety.

By moderating it through the desire for mutual sympathy, Smith establishes propriety as a socially created mean between two extremes.⁹⁰ These general rules of propriety are necessary to both the creation and continuation of society. First, propriety makes social cohesion possible. The shared moral standards created by our sense of propriety—and moderated by mutual sympathy—may prevent society from becoming a collection of antagonistic individuals.

⁸⁸ Temperance, constancy, and patience would seem to qualify as “lower-order virtues” (Brown 1994 p.183). These are the “imperfect but attainable virtues” (TMS, 343). See Forman-Barzilai (2010) p.108.

⁸⁹ The other types of passions discussed by Smith include the unsocial, social, and selfish passions (TMS, 34-54).

⁹⁰ Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that Smith’s propriety is akin to Aristotelian virtue (p.79-80). However, she is careful to distance the cardinal virtues in TMS from Aristotle (p.80 n.21).

Furthermore, by establishing right and wrong that everyone is expected to adhere to, propriety contributes to the perpetuation of society. Smith's discussion of the so-called "sacred" rules of justice demonstrates exactly how propriety achieves both of these. Justice, Smith contends, consist in not harming others and punishing those who do. Accordingly, Smith defines justice as a negative virtue:

[m]ere justice is, upon most occasions, but a negative virtue, and only hinders us from hurting our neighbour. The man who barely abstains from violating either the person, or the estate, or the reputation of his neighbours, has surely very little positive merit. He fulfils, however, all the rules of what is peculiarly called justice, and does every thing which his equals can with propriety force him to do, or which they can punish him for not doing. We may often fulfil all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing (TMS, 99).

Smith goes on to explain that justice is a necessary pillar for society, claiming that it is "the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice" and that, without tolerable adherence to its rules "the immense fabric of human society [...] must in a moment crumble into atoms" (TMS, 104). Unlike all of the other virtues justice can be reduced to a list of strict rules. According to Smith these rules include "the laws which guard the life and person of our neighbour [...] those which guard his property and possessions [and] those which guard what are called his personal rights, or what is due to him from the promises of others" (TMS, 102). Thus, unlike other virtues justice can be legislated and enforced with relatively strict accuracy. Because of how necessary they are to society Smith refers to the rules of justice as sacred. These rules are produced by—and are a part of—propriety.⁹¹ Though propriety may be imperfect it is nonetheless necessary to the functioning of society.

In addition to its contributions to society, propriety is also essential to the moral well-being of the individual. Prior to the 6th edition of TMS the system of propriety was the sole means for determining right from wrong. Although Smith introduced a new means—*via* the authority of conscience and praiseworthiness—for judging right from wrong in the 6th edition he did not abandon propriety altogether. For *most* people the rules of propriety remain the sole means for determining right from wrong, virtue from vice, and a good character from a bad one. A majority of individuals use their conscience to conform to existing conventions and thus fail to properly exercise their conscience's authoritativeness. Though such individuals will fail to attain

⁹¹ Like the other components of propriety the rules of justice are also moderated. However, these sacred rules appear to be more effectively moderated by a "divided sympathy" with the perpetrator and victim (TMS, 87-89).

the level of self-perfection Smith outlines later in the 6th edition they are still considered moral and good so long as they follow the rules of propriety.⁹² Moreover, though they people who conform to propriety may not experience the happiness of the wise and virtuous they are still, by all indications given my Smith, capable of living happy lives.⁹³ Consequently, though Smith saw the need to supplement propriety he still recognized the role its rules played in shaping the moral lives and character of everyone, even those who eventually seek to transcend mere propriety. Most importantly, propriety plays an essential role in the individual's development of conscience.

1.2 Propriety and Conscience

In *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours* Muller argues that Smith's theory of conscience is a product of our "egoistic desire for approval, and our ability to imagine ourselves in the place of others" (Muller, 1993, p.101). Otteson (2002) adds that conscience is at least partially explained by our realization that we have been judged unfairly by others (p.67-68). Resultantly, we become aware that we are observed and judged by others and that to attain their approval we must behave in a certain way. Thus, we initially use our conscience to ensure that we will attain the approval of others and avoid their disapproval by conforming to the rules of propriety. Smith explains the initial development of conscience through the *mirror of society* metaphor (TMS, 134). Smith uses this metaphor to explain our conscience's dependence on social relations, arguing that,

[w]ere it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he 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, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face (TMS, 133-134).

When attempting to judge our own character and behavior society serves the same purpose a mirror does when we examine our own physical appearance. Accordingly, conscience can be understood as the internalization of existing standards of conventional propriety. Raphael (2007) argues that conscience begins as "a social product, a mirror of social feeling" (p.35).

Consequently, our conscience only emerges after we have lived in society for some period of

⁹² Forman-Barzilai (2010) points out that a failure to achieve self-perfection does not constitute a moral failure (p.108). See also Waszek, "Two Concepts of Morality: A Distinction of Adam Smith's Ethics and Its Stoic Origins," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 591-606.

⁹³ See Otteson (2002) p.235.

time.⁹⁴ Because we have no access to any *a priori* moral standards (or aesthetic standards) we must use the existing standards of our present society to judge ourselves. When we internalize the standards of propriety we also internalize any potential flaws or limitations associated with it. Moreover, because our conscience is initially dependent on propriety any judgments we make about ourselves are necessarily informed by, and confined to, popular opinion. Consequently, so long as our conscience is solely dependent upon the rules of propriety it will be fundamentally flawed and incapable of asserting its authority. Without the ability to overrule propriety, our conscience would remain dependent upon it. Praiseworthiness inverts this relationship, making the standards of propriety dependent on our authoritative conscience.

According to Vivienne Brown (1994) Smith's theory of conscience operates dialogically. Whereas our sympathy operates as an imaginary dialogue with the principal actors our conscience is an imagined conversation with ourselves. Brown characterizes this conversation as "soliloquy, a dialogic relation with one's own self" (Brown, 1994, 48-49). This need to converse with ourselves is what defines Smith's concept of the impartial spectator. Although the impartial spectator was originally introduced by Smith to correct for any subjectivity in moral judgments its role as the voice of our conscience is also essential to his arguments.⁹⁵ In order to have a proper dialogue about my own character and behavior Smith claims I must "divide myself [...] into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from the other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of" (TMS, 135-136).⁹⁶ To facilitate this dialogue and necessary division we require the voice of the impartial spectator. However, the impartial spectator may not be a preexisting part of our moral psychology. Rather, it is possible to see it as creation of our imagination we employ out of necessity and convenience (Raphael, 2007, 35). The impartial spectator can be conceived of as a metaphor for how our

⁹⁴ For similar understandings see Fleischacker (1999) and Muller (1993) esp. p.100. Berry, in "Sociality and Socialization" suggests that conscience in TMS is a mere "reflex" of existing general rules (p.253) albeit a reflex which was capable of "evaluating all aspects of social life" (p.254). Otteson (2002) argues that this internalization of general rules is all our impartial spectators need and that ultimately our conscience speaks to us through habit and experience (p.70-71).

⁹⁵ Raphael (1975) argues that the impartial spectator—as a judge of social behavior—is implicit in Hume and what truly distinguishes Smith's theory is the use of the impartial spectator in self-approbation (p.87). See also Otteson (2002) p.66. In *Virtue by Consensus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and "Smith's Demigod" Hope claims that Smith's focus on the role of conscience is ultimately his great contribution to moral philosophy.

⁹⁶ The same form of judgment does not apply when judging other people. When we judge others we imagine ourselves in their position as use the impartial spectator to eliminate as much bias and subjectivity as possible.

conscience does—and should—operate. However, for our conscience to operate properly our impartial spectators must overcome two defects in our human nature.

Our natural capacity for selfishness is the first defect our impartial spectators, in the role of conscience (i.e. when we judge ourselves), are tasked with overcoming. Although Smith does not characterize humans as selfish *per se*, our self-interested nature does give us the capacity for selfish behavior. For example, Smith characterizes envy as a selfish passion that prevents us from properly sympathizing with other people’s happiness (TMS, 51). Fortunately, according to Smith, we also contain enough benevolent tendencies to offset our self-interest (TMS, 13). For our conscience to function properly and judge impartially we must balance our self-interest with our benevolence. Otherwise we risk judging ourselves in either a too favorable or unfavorable way. To balance this Smith argues that “the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of [the] impartial spectator” (TMS, 159). Our impartial spectator achieves this balance not by diminishing self-interest but by increasing our benevolence. We attain this balance between self-interest and benevolence when we “feel much for others and little for ourselves” and when we love ourselves only as much as “our neighbour is capable of loving us” (TMS, 31). Smith refers to this as the “perfection of human nature” that “can alone produce among mankind that harmony of sentiments and passions in which consists their whole grace and propriety” (Ibid).⁹⁷ Consequently, when each individual has achieved this state of perfection society itself will be perfected. However, how we achieve this perfect balance is more complex than mere adherence to propriety. Smith argues later that:

[i]t is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions (TMS 159).

It is, Smith argues shortly thereafter, “the love of what is honourable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters” that allows our impartial spectator to properly balance our self-interest with benevolence.⁹⁸ However, we cannot attain this balance solely by adhering to the mediocrity generated by propriety.

⁹⁷ Here Smith anticipates his theory of virtue which only appears in the 6th edition of TMS.

⁹⁸ Some authors have claimed that Smith’s use of these terms is vestigial. See Justman, *Autonomous Male*; Minowitz, *Profits, Priests, and Princes*; and Cropsey, *Polity and Economy*. For discussion of what nobility and

The impartial spectator is also charged with managing out capacity for self-delusion. According to Smith, self-delusion is produced by our aversion to seeing ourselves in any bad light. It is “the violence and injustice of our own selfish passions” that “induce the [impartial spectator] to make a report very different from what the real circumstances of the case are capable of authorizing” (TMS, 181). In other words, our excessive selfish passions make it difficult for us to judge ourselves as the circumstances would require. These passions make it “so disagreeable to think ill of ourselves, that we often purposefully turn away from those circumstances which might render that judgment unfavourable” (TMS, 182). Notice Smith uses the word *purposefully* when describing our tendency to self-delude, suggesting that this is often a choice we make rather than a mere mental lapse. We might choose to delude ourselves, Smith argues, because most of us are not the “bold surgeon [...] whose hand does not tremble when he performs an operation upon his own person” (Ibid). Smith claims that it takes incredible courage to “pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion” and see and judge ourselves as we really ought to (Ibid). He goes on to argue that, instead of choosing the difficult task of removing this veil of self-delusion:

we too often, foolishly and weakly, endeavour to exasperate anew those unjust passions which had formerly misled us; we endeavour by artifice to awaken our old hatreds, and irritate afresh our almost forgotten resentments: we even exert ourselves for this miserable purpose, and thus persevere in injustice, merely because we were once unjust, and because we were ashamed and afraid to see that it were so (Ibid).

Our capacity for self-delusion makes it easier for us to indulge in our often violent and unjust selfish passions than to merely look at our own actions and characters in a fair and proper manner. Smith adds, this capacity for self-delusion is most dangerous and egregious when it is most important for our judgments to be fair and proper (TMS, 181). Ideally our natural love for what is noble and truly superior ought to compensate for self-delusion and allow our conscience to operate as it should. However, Smith admits that “[the] coarse clay of which the bulk of humanity are formed, cannot be wrought up to such perfection” (TMS, 187). Accordingly, nature has provided us with a remedy; a “sense of duty” to the existing standards of propriety (TMS,

honor might mean see Welsh, *What is Honor? A Question of Moral Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). I see no reason to dismiss Smith’s allusions to honor and nobility as superfluous relics. A more charitable reading of Smith gives every indication that he believed we could—and should—strive to live honorable and noble lives.

183).⁹⁹ The individual who is incapable of pursuing nobility and superiority ought to have “reverence for the rule[s] which past experience has impressed upon him” which in turn “checks the impetuosity of his passion, and helps him to correct the too partial views which self-love might otherwise suggest, of what is proper to be done in his situation” (TMS, 185). The sense of duty thus compels the individual to conform to the standards of propriety and in doing so curbs the more violent tendencies of self-delusion. This allows our impartial spectator and, by extension, our conscience to operate properly. However, because it is still chained to the standards of propriety this sense of duty does not liberate our conscience and make it authoritative.

The initial role of conscience in TMS (i.e. prior to the 6th edition) was to ensure individuals adhered to the general rules of propriety. To accomplish this, conscience must first mitigate our self-love (through the voice of the impartial spectator) and overcome self-delusion through a sense of duty. After controlling for these two natural defects our conscience can adequately promote our conformity with the general rules of propriety. Conscience does this by rewarding our good behavior with the approval of the impartial spectator and punishing our misbehavior with its disapproval.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, conscience plays an essential role in promoting a certain level of well-being for society as a whole and the individual. Adherence to the general rules of propriety—which includes the sacred rules of justice—is in large part guaranteed by the operation of our consciences. Similarly, the development of our character is dependent upon our conscience’s internalization of propriety. This internalization is the “mirror” that lets us begin to judge ourselves properly.

The system of propriety and theory of conscience offered in the first five editions of TMS align well with Smith’s overarching philosophy. Throughout both WN and TMS Smith indicates that there is a harmonious order to the universe that tends to create the most good for

⁹⁹ Montes (2003) conflates this sense of duty with propriety (p.98). Similarly, Otteson (2002) conflates this sense of duty with the authority of conscience (p.75). Both authors may be guilty of exaggerating the importance of duty in TMS. Smith characterizes duty as a type of failsafe to ensure reasonable adherence to the general rules of propriety. However, duty is neither the sole nor the primary moral motivation in TMS. Other, more important, motivations include the desire for mutual sympathy and the love of honor and beauty.

¹⁰⁰ Otteson (2002) claims that there are three essential functions to our conscience in TMS; (a) an inner voice that tells us what to do, (b) a feeling of guilt for doing wrong and pride for doing right, and (c) voice of God guiding our lives (p.66).

the most people. For example, the rich's endless appetite for luxuries and childish vanities has contributed to the opulence of commercial society (WN, III.4.10). Similarly, in TMS Smith mocks the common deference people have for the rich and great, yet holds that the peace and order created by this is beneficial for all (TMS, 62-65). However, by the 6th edition of TMS Smith had apparently softened on the belief that the unintended consequences of our moral faculties and the subsequent rules of propriety would necessarily—and harmoniously—contribute to order, justice, and happiness.¹⁰¹ Within the 6th edition of TMS Smith recognizes that propriety itself might be flawed and thus work against the general well-being of all.¹⁰² Additionally, because conscience is initially entirely dependent on propriety it cannot act as an effective measure against any potential flaws in propriety. Instead, our conscience would merely internalize and perpetuate these flaws. Without the authority of conscience self-perfection would be improbable—if not altogether impossible—and the solution to moral corruption offered by Smith later in the 6th edition of TMS would be inert.

1.3 The Flaws in Propriety

The changes Smith made to TMS' final edition may be a product of his recognition that propriety was inherently flawed and that these problems make the pursuit of happiness more difficult than it ought to be. The flaws inherent in propriety include the relativity of its general rules and its conformist requirement. These lead to specific moral problems that Smith attempted to repair *via* the authority of conscience. The most serious problem created by the relativity inherent in propriety is its inability to pass judgment on its own general rules. Subsequently, because propriety cannot judge its own rules, it cannot adequately detect or solve any false beliefs about morality and happiness it may create. Additionally, the conformity required by propriety leads to both a lack of moral autonomy and mediocrity of character. Consequently, with propriety as the sole means for moral judgment we would have no means for escaping or improving upon its inadequacies. The changes Smith made to the 6th edition may indicate that

¹⁰¹ Accordingly, Griswold (1999) argues that Smith developed a “protreptic we” in order to persuade the reader to pursue virtue (instead of mere propriety) p.329.

¹⁰² This recognition is part of Smith's growing dissatisfaction with the moral consequences of commercial society. See Hanley (2009) p.24-52. See also Heilbroner, “The Paradox of Progress: Decline and Decay in *The Wealth of Nations*,” in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) and Werhane, *Adam Smith and His Legacy for Modern Capitalism*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

propriety is the source of the false beliefs that plague our lives, making us miserable and threatening the order and justice of society.¹⁰³ Accordingly, the authority of conscience established in the 6th edition of TMS may provide a reasonable means for judging propriety's general rules and escaping its inherent flaws.

The first flaw inherent in propriety is its relativity. Smith may have attempted to repair this flaw with his introduction of the impartial spectator in the 2nd edition of TMS. However, the impartial spectator—in its initial form as unbiased judgment of others—can guard against subjectivity but not against conventional or cultural relativism. This second type of moral relativity (i.e. conventionalism) is a necessary product of propriety's origins and the conscience's necessary internalization of its general rules. The unintended general rules created by our sympathy will always be relative and specific to the society in which we live. If Smith were a moral relativist then the relativistic nature of propriety would be unproblematic. However, there is evidence that Smith believed these conventions could be judged. For example, when Smith compares the morals of commercial societies to “barbaric” (i.e. pre-commercial) ones he demonstrates both how propriety can differ between societies *and* the superiority of the former's general rules.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in TMS Smith dedicates all of Part V to explaining the role “custom and fashion” (i.e. culture) has on our sentiments and subsequent rules of propriety.¹⁰⁵ In TMS' Part V Smith compares the influence custom and fashion have on our morals to the similar affect they have on our perception of beauty (TMS, 231-233).¹⁰⁶ Smith concludes that, like our perception of beauty, our particular society's rules of propriety are so entrenched that we see them as both natural and superior to all other society's (Evensky, 2005, p.50). However, unlike our sense of beauty—which seems to be arbitrary—the rules of propriety appear to be grounded in some natural order. Thus, though there can be great variation in the conventions of different

¹⁰³ Smith's inclusion of a refined theory of moral corruption in the 6th edition suggests that propriety is incapable of preventing the creation and continuation of warped or distorted moral values. I believe the danger of moral corruption is not what it does the individuals, but what it can do for an entire society once it infects the standards of propriety.

¹⁰⁴ See Smith's comments on “barbaric” societies who are incapable of properly adhering to the rules of justice, “In some countries, the rudeness and barbarism of the people hinder the natural sentiments of justice from arriving at that accuracy and precision which, in more civilized nations, they naturally attain to. Their laws are, like their manners, gross and rude and undistinguishing” (TMS, 402).

¹⁰⁵ TMS, 227-246.

¹⁰⁶ See Evensky (2005) p. 49-53.

societies they all appear to have some relation to a universal standards.¹⁰⁷ This explains why all societies (including many barbaric ones) seem to deplore “wanton murder” (Ibid. p.51). Consequently, although propriety may appear to be relative across societies there must be—and *needs* to be—some means to judge these general rules while still allowing for variations. Prior to the final edition of TMS Smith provided no such means. Consequently, the mores of a crude barbaric society would have to be considered equal to those of a refined and civilized commercial society.¹⁰⁸

A second problem directly linked to propriety is the lack of moral autonomy.¹⁰⁹ In the first five editions of TMS propriety was the sole criteria for moral judgment. Consequently, moral autonomy in these editions was reduced to conformity.¹¹⁰ Prior to the 6th edition this conformity to propriety was both inescapable and necessary. Subsequently, the preceding editions of TMS fail to adequately explain variations in moral standards or how these might change over time. Though the influence of custom and fashion can explain variations in propriety across different societies it cannot adequately explain variations among people from the same society, especially a culturally homogenous one. Furthermore, so long as conformity to propriety remains absolutely necessary moral standards within society should remain relatively static. Without some other mechanism to explain how moral autonomy works to change rules moral approbation ought to remain remarkably similar throughout history. Thus, Smith’s moral theory should provide some explanation for how the standards of propriety evolve over time. It is possible that changes in material circumstances might inspire some incremental changes to morals over time but it is difficult to conceive how this might occur without these changes being viewed as improper and thus worthy of disapprobation. Without moral autonomy the earlier

¹⁰⁷ Evensky (2005) refers to this as “invisible absolutes” which society is continuously progressing towards.

¹⁰⁸ Smith consistently praised commercial society for its ability to generate opulence and thus relieve the miseries of poverty. However, these speaks more directly to the supposed material benefits of commercial society and not its perceived moral superiority. Smith clearly believes commercial societies are morally superior to “barbaric” ones but any explanation as to why this is the case (prior to the 6th edition) is reducible to chauvinism.

¹⁰⁹ By “moral autonomy” I mean the capacity to deliberate, reflect upon, and create our own moral rules rather than merely following the rules that been created for you.

¹¹⁰ In *Politics and Vision*, Wolin argues that this conformity is necessary so that conscience can become “social rather than individual” p.344. Wolin’s argument appears to place the cart before the horse; As Smith correctly points out, conscience begins social (as internalization of social values) and only becomes individual once socially determined values are reflected upon.

editions of TMS fail to adequately explain how morals can progress within a society over time as well as what these morals ought to progress towards.

This final problem is propriety's lack of moral incentive, especially in instances where any impropriety may be concealed. This lack of incentive produces mediocrity of character.¹¹¹ Although propriety is capable of producing certain virtues like temperance and patience it cannot create the type of moral excellence outlined by Smith in the 6th edition of TMS. Despite references to honor and nobility throughout TMS' different editions Smith hardly seems concerned with promoting these over the general rules created by our sympathy. However, as I have argued earlier, by the 6th edition Smith had changed his tone and was no longer seemed convinced that "mere propriety" was a reliable means of producing happiness and good moral character on its own. Smith's dissatisfaction with the type of character created by adherence to propriety is reflected in all three of the major changes he made to the final edition of TMS.¹¹² All three of these changes combine to provide a means to overcome the rules of "mere propriety" and ultimately attain a type of happiness that transcends the pleasure experienced by conforming to existing conventions. When Smith refers to propriety as "vulgar and ordinary" and claims that it requires nothing more than what the "weakest of mortals is capable of exerting" we can get a more accurate picture of the type of character it produces (TMS, 32). Undoubtedly, adherence to mere propriety produces a character unworthy of any special attention or admiration. Hanley characterizes the mediocrity of character created by propriety as a product of commercial society, arguing that it pacifies our aspirations and desensitizes us to the transcendent (Hanley, 2009, 42). Whether or not this mediocrity is specific to commercial society is debatable; however, what is clear is that propriety is neither aspirational nor transcendent. The mediocrity of character created by propriety makes individuals—and society—incapable of pursuing the "uncommonly great and beautiful" virtues they ought to aspire to (TMS, 32). Although the system of propriety and the mediocre social rules it creates are still essential to both society and the individual Smith concluded that this system needed to be supplemented. Consequently, Smith began superimposing a system of self-perfection that aims for conformity with Nature over top

¹¹¹ See Hanley (2009) for an analysis of this mediocrity.

¹¹² The authority of conscience, theory of moral corruption, and virtues ethics all outlined in TMS' final edition all demonstrate a need to supplement conventional morals with something more transcendent.

of this, beginning with the authority of conscience. This superimposed system of self-perfection is capable of inspiring people to transcend the mediocre conventions of their society and attain virtue. Although only a few individuals may be capable of aspiring to this self-perfection it is no less necessary to the moral well-being of both individuals and society.

On their own each of these flaws are worthy of amelioration. However, taken together these flaws create a moral problem in need of immediate resolution. In short, the relativist, conformist, and mediocre nature of propriety may render us incapable of detecting and overcoming false beliefs and the moral ills these can create. Consequently, propriety may authorize and perpetuate immoral and unjust practice and behaviors. The idea that propriety may be the source of immorality is the conclusion Smith eventually draws in his theory of moral corruption.¹¹³ Similarly, Smith's condemnation of infanticide in TMS highlights exactly how the flaws in propriety create this overarching problem. Smith strongly condemns the ancient Greek practice of infanticide, specifically blaming customs (i.e. culture) for authorizing and perpetuating this practice (TMS, 246). However, if the sole grounds for determining what is moral are the conventional rules of propriety then this condemnation makes little sense. As long as the ancient Greeks considered infanticide to be proper (as Smith's criticism indicates they did) then the only determination Smith could truly make is that the practice would have been wrong in 18th century Scotland. However, Smith specifically blames propriety for perpetuating infanticide in Greece arguing that it was a product of "[uninterrupted] custom" which had "so thoroughly authorized the practice" (TMS, 246). Furthermore, conformity with the propriety of infanticide was so strong that "even the doctrine of philosophers, which ought to have been more just and accurate, was led away by the established custom [and] instead of censuring, supported the horrible abuse" (Ibid.). Smith goes on to specifically name Plato and Aristotle as guilty parties in the promotion of the "barbarous prerogative" (Ibid.). Smith continues to hint at the role mediocrity of character plays in perpetuating the atrocity, arguing that for most people the fact that "[such] a thing [...] is commonly done [...] is a sufficient apology for what, in itself, is the most unjust and unreasonable conduct" (Ibid.). Smith's discussion of infanticide makes it clear

¹¹³ See TMS, 73-78. Smith argues that it is our love and admiration of the rich that corrupts our morals. This corruption leads to anxiety, loneliness, and misery.

that we require some means for judging—and transcending—the general rules of propriety. The development of an authoritative *and* independent conscience may provide such a means.

1.4 Conscience and Praiseworthiness

The alterations he made to the 6th edition of TMS suggest that Smith was no longer convinced that mere propriety was capable of promoting the happiness and good character for everyone. Furthermore, given the flaws inherent in propriety its general rules may actually be the source of immorality and even misery. Consequently, Smith repairs the flaws in propriety by establishing the authority of conscience in the final edition of TMS.¹¹⁴ For the authority of conscience to be meaningful we must be able to disagree with the existing rules of propriety (Raphael, 1975, 90-91). Muller (1993) agrees, arguing that within TMS “lies a theory of the development of conscience through internalization of social norms, as well as a theory of how the morally developed individual is able to ascend from moral conformity to moral autonomy” (p. 100). Without the ability to disagree our conscience would be a mere echo of conventional—and possibly immoral—popular opinion. Accordingly, we need standards of moral judgment that are both distinct and independent from mere propriety. The concept of praiseworthiness, developed in the 6th edition of TMS, provides these distinct and independent standards.¹¹⁵ As both a moral motivation and a form of moral judgment praiseworthiness is capable of overcoming the relativity and conformity inherent in propriety. By providing us with, and directing us towards, superior (i.e. transcendent) moral standards praiseworthiness is capable of distinguishing what *is* considered moral (i.e. propriety) from what *ought* to be considered moral.¹¹⁶ Consequently, praiseworthiness is a means for judging and evaluating the general rules

¹¹⁴ Raphael (1975), Montes (2003), Otteson (2002), and Forman-Barzilai (2010) all agree that authority of conscience only appears in TMS within the 6th edition.

¹¹⁵ For a connection between conscience and praiseworthiness see Forman-Barzilai (2010) p.96-105.

¹¹⁶ The presence of transcendental standards in TMS is generally refuted within the secondary literature. The empirical readings of Smith all dismiss the need or existence of such standards. See Campbell (1971), Winch (1978), and Skinner (1979). Furthermore, several authors have acknowledged the need for our conscience to “detach” itself from propriety but maintain that this can be done without distinct moral standards. Griswold (2002) asserts that the structure of our moral psychology and judgment are enough to distinguish praiseworthiness from propriety (p.131). Similarly, Haakonssen (1981) argues that our impartial spectators are capable of detaching itself from conventions (p.56). Also see Raphael (2007) p.90-99). Forman-Barzilai (2010) tries to walk a middle line between conventions and transcendence (p.102). Ultimately she accepts the “quasi-theological” conscience Smith

of propriety. Additionally, by providing distinct moral standards praiseworthiness facilitates the development of moral autonomy. The moral autonomy established by praiseworthiness also allows for the pursuit and attainment of self-perfection. The development of praiseworthiness and its link to the authority of conscience transforms the role of the impartial spectator. Prior to this development the impartial spectator's role as the voice of our conscience was that of the so-called "practical man". In this role the sole tasks of our impartial spectators was to properly evaluate the character and actions of others and promote and ensure our own adherence to the rules of propriety. However, the impartial spectator becomes a "demigod" tasked with directing us towards a life of virtue and happiness *via* praiseworthiness.¹¹⁷

In the 6th edition of TMS Smith defines praiseworthiness by describing it as "that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however the natural and proper object of praise" (TMS, 137). Unlike propriety, which is generated by our sympathy and approval, praiseworthiness exists independently from any actual acknowledgment of it. Smith further defines praiseworthiness by distinguishing it from praise, arguing the latter indicates what society actually *does* approve of while the former indicates what it *should* approve of (TMS, 150). Smith goes on to claim that "[the] love of praise is the desire of obtaining the favorable sentiments of our brethren. The love of praise-worthiness is the desire of rendering ourselves the proper objects of those sentiments" (Ibid). This distinction between praise and praiseworthiness indicates that the former is specifically linked to propriety. Significantly, Smith goes on to claim that a love of praise is derived from our more natural love of praiseworthiness (TMS, 137) Another distinction between praise and praiseworthiness is the former is externally recognized while the latter is internal. Smith argues that the praiseworthy person is unconcerned with actual praise. The praiseworthy person thus contrasts with the vain individual who seeks only praise and is unconcerned with the actual merit of this praise (TMS, 139). Although the praiseworthy person is aware that they may never receive any actual praise they remain motivated, and comforted, by the knowledge that their behavior truly merits praise even if this praise only comes

developed in response to charges of conventionalism (p.76). Forman-Barzilai's "third-way" tries to strike a balance between empiricist/conventionalist accounts and transcendentalism (p.102).

¹¹⁷ Smith's definition of praiseworthiness was popular enough to be included in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*. Admittedly this detail is more significant to a strict contextual analysis of TMS. I am more interested in how we can determine what praiseworthiness is than how Smith's contemporaries may have understood the term.

from their own impartial spectator (Ibid). Accordingly, Muller argues that “[the] individual’s love of praise makes him dependent on the reactions of those around him. The love of praiseworthiness, by contrast, can be satisfied whether or not the individual actually receives the praise of those around him” (Muller, 1993, 106). The approval we receive from our own conscience when we are praiseworthy seems to be more than enough to satisfy our need for mutual sympathy. Finally, an important feature of praiseworthiness is its inherent motivation to transcend the “vulgar and ordinary” standards of propriety. It is the desire to be praiseworthy that inspires within us the “real love of virtue” and “real abhorrence of vice” (TMS, 140). This real love of virtue, Smith claims, was given to us by “Nature” (Ibid.). Subsequently, it is our *natural* desire to be praiseworthy that inspires us to pursue self-perfection through a life of happiness and virtue.

In order to determine what praiseworthiness is we use our impartial spectators to judge our own character and behavior. When used to determine whether or not we are praiseworthy (or blameworthy, depending on our actions) our impartial spectators take on the role of the “demigod within the breast” (TMS, 153). Thus, when determining what is praiseworthy the “practical” man definition of the impartial spectator no longer suffices. Instead, our consciences must take on a semi-divine role and guide us towards the real love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. Forman-Barzilai (2010) and Otteson (2002) both suggest that what Smith has in mind here is a specifically protestant understanding of conscience.¹¹⁸ The former argues that Smith’s demigod is “a deistic formulation of the independent and irrefutable authority of the Protestant conscience” (p.102). I believe that Smith has a deistic conscience in mind that is grounded in a teleological understanding of nature rather than a strict Protestant one.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, what seems certain is that, when determining what is praiseworthy, our conscience can no longer rely on the general rules of propriety. Smith further illustrates this point much later in TMS when he distinguishes between “exact propriety and perfection” and “that degree of approximation to this idea which is commonly attained in the world” (TMS, 291). These two measures correspond to

¹¹⁸ See Otteson p.76-77 and Forman-Barzilai p.101.

¹¹⁹ Smith makes no references to scripture or revelation in his discussion of God or a deity. More frequently he alludes to “Nature” or the “Author of nature” as a stand in for God (TMS, 16, 29, 59, 140). Smith also makes direct reference to the Author of nature’s “plan of Providence” (TMS, 191). See Alvey (2003), *Adam Smith: Optimist or Pessimist?* p.3.

praiseworthiness and propriety respectively. Exact propriety and perfection (i.e. praiseworthiness) “exists in the mind of every man, [the] idea of this kind, gradually formed from his observations upon the character and conduct both of himself and of other people” (TMS, 291). Determining what is praiseworthy and living our lives by it thus appears to be a slow, deliberate, and trying process of keen observation rather than a quick, practical, reference to a set of general rules. However, these general rules remain essential to our judgment of other people’s character and behavior. Smith characterizes praiseworthiness as a standard of self-approbation. Thus, though we ought to praise people when they are truly worthy of it, we can neither expect nor demand that others pursue self-perfection so long as they are obeying the rules of propriety.¹²⁰

Praiseworthiness allows our conscience to overcome the relativity and conformity inherent in propriety. Because it is distinct from propriety praiseworthiness gives our impartial spectators a means to judge the practical general rules generated by our sympathy. Rather than determining right and wrong based upon past experiences, our authoritative conscience can use the idea of perfection naturally ingrained in our moral psychology.¹²¹ Although the actualization of this idea perfection may vary depending on differing circumstances it should not vary so much as to allow great acts of barbarity (i.e. infanticide) to endure. Instead of permitting any act that has attained approval in the past our authoritative conscience—when directed by praiseworthiness—compels us to act in a way that is truly worthy of approval. Similarly, praiseworthiness overcomes propriety’s inherent conformity by establishing moral autonomy. Thus, though our conscience begins as an internalization of propriety, praiseworthiness allows it to evolve into a means for attaining moral autonomy (Muller, 1993, p.100). This moral autonomy facilitates the progress of morals at both the individual and societal level. Individually, praiseworthiness makes it possible individuals to break away from vulgar and ordinary propriety and pursue self-perfection Accordingly, Evensky (2005) argues that praiseworthiness is an “independent assessment of worthiness [that] makes the progress of individuals towards virtue possible” (p.45). At the societal level praiseworthiness can help morals progress *via* emulation.

¹²⁰ This becomes problematic with the inclusion of Smith’s theory of moral corruption. It is possible for propriety to become corrupted enough to make people unhappy and vicious. Smith fails to adequately acknowledge this.

¹²¹ Consider Smith’s suggestion that our concept of praiseworthiness precedes any notion of mere praise (TMS, 137). See also TMS, 291.

Smith suggests in TMS that moral progress is at least partially explained psychologically. Smith argues that our inspiration to pursue praiseworthiness begins with our faculty of emulation, claiming that “the anxious desire that we ourselves should excel, is originally founded in our admiration of the excellence of others” (TMS, 137). Accordingly, we try and adopt the same characteristics that we find admirable in other people (Ibid.).¹²² Consequently, praiseworthy individuals can improve upon the rules of propriety by inspiring people to adopt and adhere to different and superior moral standards. What may be considered praiseworthy can, over time, become a part of propriety when enough people adopt it.¹²³ For instance, if enough individuals of admirable (i.e. praiseworthy) character had adopted the belief that infanticide was unjust and cruel then the practice may not have persisted so long in ancient Greece. Similar arguments can be made about the eventual abolition of institutional slavery. Though it may need to work in tandem with material circumstances in order to change general rules, the authoritative and autonomous conscience created by praiseworthiness can facilitate—and explain—changes in morality in a way that conformist propriety cannot.

Smith’s concept of praiseworthiness explains how we are capable of judging existing moral standards and how these standards progress over time. Additionally, the discussion of praiseworthiness in TMS offers a persuasive prescriptive analysis of the merits and benefits of pursuing a praiseworthy life. Smith not only makes self-perfection possible in the 6th edition of TMS he also explains why it is desirable by continually establishing its inherent superiority over other lifestyles, especially the love of praise. Recall for a moment the absence of actual approval associated with the love of praiseworthiness. Though nobody may praise or even approve of the praiseworthy person—and it is possible they may even be disapproved of—Smith makes it clear that the internal approval of the demigod-like impartial spectator more than compensates for this (TMS, 138-139). Contrast this with the person who is actually praised but is unworthy of this approval, Smith refers to them as both a “foolish liar” and an “important coxcomb” who will

¹²² Griswold (2002) sees this as the key to determining what is praiseworthy, arguing that wishing to be “praised for what we find praiseworthy in [others]” is enough to make such a determination (p.131). However, like the other conventionalist readings I believe Griswold has failed to account for the differences between these two forms of approval as well as the acute difference between virtue and propriety.

¹²³ See Evensky (2005), “social progress is not made when one individual transcends the norm. It is made when the norm itself, and thus the common standard of civic ethics, progresses. Refined individuals can contribute to this progress, but the process of this progress is larger than any one individual” (p.48-49).

never be truly satisfied with their undeserved praise (TMS, 138). Smith makes it two important points clear here. First, the pleasure of actual praise is always superseded by praiseworthiness, even in instances when the praiseworthy person is disapproved of or blamed. Additionally, we appear to be intrinsically aware of undeserved praise and thus incapable of being truly satisfied by it. I believe that Smith is suggesting here that our impartial spectators—in the role of demigods—have some access to moral standards that are distinct from, and superior to, mere propriety.

Conclusion

Throughout the first five editions of TMS conscience was entirely subservient to the general rules of propriety. Consequently, the role of conscience (i.e. the impartial spectator) in these editions was to ensure obedience to these general rules. As a result the moral system developed by Smith in these editions can be reduced to conformity to popular opinion. As the sole means for making moral judgments propriety contains two flaws. The first of these is propriety's inherent relativity and subsequent inability to judge its own rules. Additionally, conformity to the rules of propriety perpetuates mediocrity and prohibits the moral progress of individuals and society. In the final edition of TMS Smith overcomes these problems by establishing the authority of conscience. He accomplishes this by developing the concept of praiseworthiness. Praiseworthiness liberates our consciences from propriety's general rules by providing our impartial spectators with distinct and superior moral standards. The development of praiseworthiness in the 6th edition of TMS transforms the impartial spectators from the "practical man" and into a "demigod".

The authoritative conscience developed in the 6th edition of TMS makes the critical evaluation of propriety possible. This allows us to properly judge when adhering to propriety is truly warranted and when it is not and improving its general rules when appropriate. Moreover, our authoritative consciences make us truly morally autonomous and thus capable of creating and following our own moral standards. This autonomy makes it possible for us to transcend mere propriety and pursue self-perfection. By asserting the superiority of this self-perfection (i.e. the life of praiseworthiness) Smith appears to prioritize it over the conventionalism of propriety. However, Smith does not abandon the general rules of propriety in the 6th edition. Smith

recognizes that propriety remains essential to society and for most people, offers a means for living a decent, dignified, life. Instead, Smith supplements this existing system for those dissatisfied with the mediocrity inherent in propriety. For the vast majority of people the path to good moral character and some measure of happiness remains adherence to the general rules of propriety. Although it is not necessary—or possible—for each individual to pursue praiseworthiness its standards are still essential. Moral progress presumes the existence of praiseworthy individuals worthy of emulation who inevitably reshape the general rules of propriety. Thus, although most people are not required to pursue praiseworthiness the moral well-being of society as a whole would seem to depend on it. Additionally, for the small minority of “wise and virtuous” individuals who recognize the flaws and limitations of propriety the autonomy and self-perfection offered may be necessary for their happiness. Being aware of any standards of praiseworthiness may make pursuing and attaining them a requirement.

The authority of conscience established in TMS’ 6th edition may be more clearly significant and relevant when understood in relation to the other changes Smith made. Praiseworthiness may offer a means for avoiding (or escaping) the moral corruption Smith outlines in the final edition of TMS. Choosing to pursue praiseworthiness rather than praise (or even mere propriety) may prevent us from ever developing the false beliefs created by this corruption and thus capable of avoiding the misery associated with it. Similarly, the cardinal virtues outlined in the 6th edition may provide the necessary content to the self-perfection facilitated by the authority of conscience. However, for our conscience to direct us away from moral corruption and towards virtue we need a reliable means for determining what is praiseworthy and what is not. Smith does not include a clear means for determining what praiseworthiness is or a method for distinguishing it from propriety. It is therefore tempting to conclude that no distinct standards are necessary. Although I agree Smith never abandoned his initial conventionalism, nor did he waver in his belief in the necessity of propriety, I do not believe that praiseworthiness can be understood as purely conventional. The firm distinction Smith makes between praiseworthiness and praise (as well as propriety and virtue) suggest to me that there are moral rules that are separate from—and superior to—the rules of propriety. However, because Smith does not directly tell us what these superior standards are we must determine what these are on his behalf. The teleological theory of human nature Smith develops

in TMS is a possible source for these standards. Knowing what humanity's final cause is and how we can attain it may tell us exactly how to live a praiseworthy life.

Teleology and the Voice of Nature

2.0 Introduction

For an authoritative conscience to be meaningful it needs to be capable of going against the conventional standards of propriety. To accomplish this, conscience needs access to moral standards that are distinct from, and perhaps superior to, mere propriety. Praiseworthiness is capable of providing the moral standards that allow us to pursue self-perfection. However, how our conscience is able to determine what praiseworthiness is needs to be explained. In the previous chapter I argued there is good evidence the standards of praiseworthiness exist and that they are distinct from the standards of propriety.¹²⁴ These standards of praiseworthiness are also necessary to the clarity and coherency of TMS' 6th edition. Without distinct standards for praiseworthiness it is unlikely any individual would ever be capable of successfully pursuing the Stoic self-perfection outlined in this final edition. The problem then becomes where exactly we might find these standards. A potential source for the standards of praiseworthiness, and by extension virtue, is Smith's theory of human nature. Smith's theory begins with empirical observations about what human beings are. However, this theory goes beyond mere description, to suggest that human beings may have been designed with a particular purpose. Throughout TMS Smith simultaneously describes what humans *are* while also providing insights on what humans *should* be. In other words, Smith's theory of human nature contains an immanent teleology.¹²⁵ This *telos* represents perfection. This may intuitively tell us what praiseworthiness is. The specific end the Author of Nature designed us to attain is tranquility, which Smith defines as both *ease of body* and *peace of mind*.¹²⁶ We achieve this tranquility when we live according to our natural design. Consequently, our conscience can distinguish the standards of praiseworthiness from mere propriety by listening to the metaphorical voice of Nature.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ These reasons include the distinction between praise and praiseworthiness as well as propriety and virtue.

¹²⁵ See Alvey (2003) p.31. Alvey argues that this immanent *telos* "favors ordered human society, morality, comfortable preservation, and commerce".

¹²⁶ See Otteson (2002) p.235 for a discussion of Smith's theory of happiness as tranquility.

¹²⁷ Smith makes no reference to any voice of Nature. However, I contend that when our conscience aligns with the Author of Nature's design what we are hearing is akin to Nature's voice.

The role teleology plays in TMS is a matter of dispute within the secondary literature.¹²⁸ Generally, those who read Smith as a strict empiricist dismiss or explain away the role final causes play in TMS.¹²⁹ However, I argue that teleology plays an essential role in both TMS and WN.¹³⁰ This teleology gives both TMS and WN a consistency and coherence and renders these two seemingly different works complimentary. More importantly, I argue that this teleology may help to determine the standards of praiseworthiness. Subsequently, knowing what our *telos* is and how we can attain it helps us distinguish praiseworthiness from mere propriety. Smith's teleology centers on his idea of the Author of Nature.¹³¹ This Author of Nature designed the universe and humanity with a specific purpose. This purpose—our *telos*—represents human perfection which is reached through the exercise and adherence to the authoritative conscience.

To live a life according to nature and attain our *telos* we must have some access to Nature's design. We gain insights into Nature's design by exercising our imagination.¹³² For Smith, imagination played a fundamental role in explaining how the universe works *and* what our place within it was. Thus, through imagination we can know what our *telos* is and how we can attain it.¹³³ However, because our moral faculties are imperfect, our understanding of Nature's plan will always be incomplete. As a consequence of this, the pursuit of our *telos* will be imperfect; it will not always be perfectly clear what our final cause is and how we can attain it. However, although we are incapable of a perfect understanding of Nature's design and our place within it, we are capable of closer (i.e. better) approximations of true perfection. Thus, we

¹²⁸ For a concise discussion of this dispute see Alvey "The Secret, Natural Theological Foundations of Adam Smith's Work" *Journal of Markets and Morality* Vol. 7 No.2 (Fall 2004).

¹²⁹ Macfie (1967), Campbell (1971), Haakonssen (1981), and Raphael (1985) all reject any necessary role for teleology in TMS, and argue that efficient causes are sufficient for explaining everything.

¹³⁰ For the role teleology plays in WN see Lisa Hill "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith" *History of Economic Thought* 8(1) p.1-21.

¹³¹ Smith uses "Author of Nature", "Nature", "deity" and even "God" interchangeably. Whenever he makes reference to these in TMS he is, I claim, referring to a design or providential plan.

¹³² Pack (1991) claims that for Smith "science can be viewed as essentially a product of the imagination. The purpose of science is to explain nature and to soothe the imaginations of mankind". See *Capitalism as a Moral System; Adam Smith's Critique of the Free Market Economy*. (London: Edward Elgar) p.199.

¹³³ Evensky (2005) argues that imagination is our only means of discovering what the design of the universe is and what our role in it may be (p.4).

are capable of evaluating moral standards by how close they approximate our intended natural perfection.¹³⁴

Smith's teleology may have been implicit before the 6th edition of TMS. However, the changes Smith made to the 6th edition make this teleology truly significant. The independent and authoritative conscience developed in this final edition is what allows us to successfully pursue self-perfection (i.e. our *telos*). The teleology present in TMS is revealed in Smith's theory of human nature. Frequently, when referring to our nature Smith uses terms such as "Author of nature" or "providence" to indicate that a specific component of our human nature is part of a purposeful design. By focusing on these instances we can get a sense of what our purpose is and some insight into how we can attain it. A careful reading of TMS reveals that happiness is our *telos* (TMS, 171).¹³⁵ Smith characterizes happiness as *tranquility*, which requires *both* ease of body and peace of mind. This state of tranquility is where we are most capable of experiencing and appreciating all the joys and pleasures of life. Tranquility is our final cause, and the efficient causes that direct us to it are contained within our human nature.

Smith's theory of human nature begins with empirical observations. Smith forms his teleology by observing what human nature is and then hypothesizing about the possible purpose behind it.¹³⁶ Smith presents his theory of human nature at the very beginning of TMS by stating

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. (TMS, 13).

Human beings are thus simultaneously self-interested and beneficent. After establishing the first principles of human nature Smith goes on to provide a hierarchy of efficient causes that (ideally) compel us towards our *telos*. These efficient causes are our moral faculties which includes instincts, passions, and sentiments. These components of our human nature exist somewhere in

¹³⁴ Smith appears to put his faith in a linear understanding of progress here and circular reasoning. He considers commercial society is considered the best possible society because it approximates a *telos*, and we know what this *telos* is because commercial society has approximated it.

¹³⁵ Smith argues that tranquility is our "natural and usual state" (TMS, 172). Thus, when we are disturbed or upset we seek out means to recover our "natural" state of tranquility.

¹³⁶ Fleischacker (2005) argues that Smith's theory of human nature is based in part on empiricism yet still skeptical about it. He argues that Smith is "open to information about what people might seek and achieve if they understood themselves differently" (p.62). Thus, Smith's theory of nature still draws upon empirical observation without being entirely confined by it.

between our self-interest and beneficence.¹³⁷ When our moral faculties are properly satisfied, controlled (by our conscience), and developed they direct us towards the pursuit of tranquility and tell us exactly how to attain ease of body and peace of mind. Understanding our human nature provides us with the information necessary to pursue and attain tranquility. Thus, knowing our nature—and its purpose—can play a fundamental role in helping us determine the standards of praiseworthiness.

In order to perfect our moral faculties and bring us in line with the Author of Nature's design, Smith recommends the Christian golden rule. Unlike his version of the golden mean—which only creates conventional morals—Smith's golden rule actually perfects our human nature by bringing seemingly conflicting parts of it into harmony. The golden rule differs from mere propriety because it aims for perfection rather than social cohesion. By loving our neighbors and ourselves as our neighbors loves us we inevitably make our self-interest and beneficence complimentary (rather than conflicting) and subsequently perfect our moral faculties. Consequently we pursue self-perfection and attain tranquility when our impartial spectators use the golden rule to guide and govern our character and behavior. By compelling us to obey the golden rule—rather than mere propriety—our impartial spectators speak to us with the voice of nature and act as demigods. It is this obedience to the golden rule that defines praiseworthiness for us and leads us to the life of virtue and tranquility.

The specific teleology outlined in TMS by Smith is suited to commercial society. The social and economic forces of commercial society have a profound influence on our pursuit of self-perfection. Commercial society, I argue, affects our pursuit of self-perfection in two significant ways. First, commercial society makes tranquility more accessible. Commercial society liberates individuals from the undignified direct dependence of past societies by replacing it with *mutual interdependence*.¹³⁸ Unlike the dependence of past societies, wherein most individuals (i.e. the poor) had to rely on the benevolence of others for their survival and well-being, this interdependence allows each and every individual to pursue and attain ease of body and peace of mind. Additionally, the opulence generated within commercial society

¹³⁷ See Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) for a discussion on first principles in TMS.

¹³⁸ For a discussion of mutual interdependence see Muller (1993) p.72 and Hanley (2009) p.19-20.

contributes significantly to the greater accessibility of tranquility. Unlike past societies, everyone in commercial society ought to have enough wealth to successfully pursue ease of body and peace of mind. In addition to its increased accessibility, commercial society also makes our *telos* more attainable. In the so-called “barbaric” societies of the past (i.e. any non-commercial society) attaining tranquility required faculties and abilities far superior to the norm. Thus, not only was our *telos* only open to a few elites, but attaining it required heroic effort and determination. According to Smith, commercial society “softens” the virtues by eliminating their martial and austere edges.¹³⁹ Though still relatively uncommon and beautiful, the “bourgeois” virtues of commercial society do not require the same superiority as they did in the past.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, in commercial society perfecting our nature and attaining ease of body and peace of mind is easier than in any other society. The greater accessibility and attainability of tranquility within commercial society largely explains why Smith was cautiously optimistic about it. Although it has its imperfections, our pursuit of happiness (i.e. tranquility) is best served within commercial society.

If tranquility—as ease of body and peace of mind—is our natural and perfect final cause (i.e. our self-perfection) then knowing how to attain it ought to tell us how to determine what praiseworthiness is. Thus, our conscience may be able to determine what is praiseworthy by knowing exactly how to attain ease of body and peace of mind. Ultimately, it is our knowledge of Nature’s design that might tell us how to pursue and attain tranquility. Consequently, our conscience becomes truly authoritative and leads us to praiseworthiness—and by extension tranquility—when we listen to the voice of Nature spoken through the impartial spectator.

2.1 The Role of Teleology

Smith never specifically mentions “teleology” or “*telos*” in TMS.¹⁴¹ However, he does refer to ideas such as the “Author of nature”, a “Deity”, and “Providence” several times throughout TMS.¹⁴² We adhere to and promote the “plan of Providence” when we act “according

¹³⁹ See Muller (1993) and Fleischacker (2005).

¹⁴⁰ For a seminal discussion on the “bourgeois virtues” see McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtue: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹ See Alvey (2003) p.3.

¹⁴² See Chapter One, no.80. For a strong example of how the Author of Nature designed us with a specific purpose see TMS, 125-129. For a concise analysis of the debate on the role of a deity in Smith’s philosophy see Evensky,

to the dictates of our moral faculties” (TMS, 191). Furthermore, Smith claims that these dictates may be conceived of as “the commands and laws of the Deity” (i.e. the Author of Nature) and compares them to the laws of motion and the laws of a sovereign (Ibid).¹⁴³ We follow to the Author of Nature’s plan when we obey the dictates of our moral faculties and consequently attain our *telos*.

While the role teleology plays in TMS is disputed in the secondary literature I argue that teleology not only plays an essential role, but also that it is the key to distinguishing praiseworthiness from propriety. Accordingly, I connect Smith’s teleology directly to the authority of conscience and the pursuit of praiseworthiness. However, before linking this teleology to the authoritative conscience I will first establish the necessity of the former in TMS. Both the empirical and normative claims Smith makes in TMS rely on this Natural teleology. Consequently, without it TMS loses coherence and cohesion. The propensity to dismiss the role of final causes (i.e. teleology) in TMS is treated at length by Viner.¹⁴⁴ In *The Role of Providence in the Social Order* he argues that those who dismiss Smith’s teleological arguments are either blinded to their importance or—perhaps more frequently—treat them as mere “ornaments” to the more significant empirical components of Smith’s moral philosophy.¹⁴⁵ There is an influential body of Smith scholarship that has rejected the teleology present in Smith as superfluous. For example, Haakonssen (1981) argues that nothing significant is lost when Smith’s allusions to teleology are dismissed entirely. Similarly, Griswold treats Smith’s teleology as an “ordering principle” we use to make sense of the world rather than an existing part of some providential plan (Griswold, 2006, p.48). Raphael (1985) argues that TMS fits best with the rise of 18th century empiricism, claiming that any references Smith makes to teleology is purely rhetorical. This would appear to make Smith a particularly poor rhetorician. If empiricism was the accepted

p23-25. The debate itself focuses on whether or not a deity is *necessary* to Smith’s philosophy. Haakonssen (1981) and Campbell (1971) agree that there is a logic to Smith’s philosophy independent of any deity or design argument. I would agree that the empirical component of Smith’s philosophy survives without a deity. However, this may not hold true for his normative claims. Our progress, both as individuals and a species, would seem to depend on the existence of a benevolent deity.

¹⁴³ Smith claims that the laws generated by our moral faculties “have a much greater resemblance to what are properly called laws, those general rules which the sovereign lays down to direct the conduct of his subjects. Like them they are the rules to direct the free actions of men: they are prescribed most surely by a lawful superior” (TMS 191).

¹⁴⁴ Viner, “Adam Smith and Laissez-Faire,” *Journal of Political Economy* 35 (1927) p.98-132.

¹⁴⁵ Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977) p.81.

norm at the time then using outdated and unpopular teleological claims would presumably do little to further Smith's arguments. The literature that casts Smith as a strict social scientist has also implicitly rejected any teleological foundation to TMS.¹⁴⁶

Alvey (2004) has provided a convincing counter-argument to these rejections of Smith's teleology by pointing to a growing body of literature that accepts the teleological foundation of TMS and argues against its ornamental treatment (Alvey, 2004, p.336). According to Alvey the tendency to dismiss the role of teleology in TMS is likely a product of the secular nature of contemporary social science (Ibid). Thus, in order to frame Smith as a social scientist any allusions to non-empirical claims must be disregarded. However, Alvey argues that the caricature of Smith as a pure social scientist clashes with the intellectual culture of 18th century Britain. Although the empirical claims of Hume and others may have been popular in continental Europe at the time, Alvey contends that teleological arguments—especially Stoic ones—were much more influential in Britain (p.338). Consequently, dismissing this teleological foundation may amount to an ahistorical and anachronistic reading of TMS.

The tendency to treat the teleology in TMS as ornamental appears to be done on purely ideological grounds. Furthermore, such dismissals would seem to violate the principle of a charitable reading of TMS. TMS went through six editions and the teleological language did not disappear. In fact, I believe Smith develops and refines the role of teleology throughout all of TMS' iterations, culminating in the sixth and final one. Instead of explaining away Smith's allusions to final causes it would seem more appropriate that the reader explain why they are there to begin with and how they add (or subtract) to Smith's arguments. Rather than dismissing them as superfluous I believe Smith's allusions to a deity and providence suggests a *telos* immanent in human nature. I agree with Viner's conclusion that this dismissal renders Smith's entire philosophical project unintelligible (Viner, 1927, p.82). The most serious effect this treatment of Smith has may be on his theories of spontaneous order and unintended consequences. Smith makes it clear throughout both WN and TMS that commercial society and all of its benefits are the product of the individual pursuit of self-interest. This individualistic pursuit of self-interest created the conditions of commercial society over time and thus explains

¹⁴⁶ See Campbell (1981), Macfie (1967), Skinner (1979), and Winch (1978).

the transition from more primitive types of society (e.g. pastoral and feudal). Similarly, the general opulence generated within commercial society is produced by the pursuit of self-interest. However, Smith argues that commercial society and its benefits are not part of some rational human plan. The social benefits produced by the pursuit of self-interest (i.e. opulence, peace, justice etc.) are unforeseen and unintentional (WN IV.2.9). We generate these benefits when we obey the dictates of our moral faculties—such as our passions—and *not* by rationally calculating what would be best for all. When we amputate the teleological foundation of Smith’s philosophy we jeopardize the coherence of this theory.¹⁴⁷ Absent this teleology there is no satisfying explanation for why the pursuit of self-interest would necessarily contribute to the general good of all society or the progress towards a better (i.e. wealthier) society.¹⁴⁸ The same holds true for other aspects of Smith’s philosophy. In TMS he argues that our natural deference to superiors is essential to the peace and order of society (TMS, 65-66). This deference helps maintain the distinction of ranks Smith perceives as necessary to society. Additionally, deferring to our superiors may help to establish the legitimate authority of government. However, despite these benefits Smith characterizes our deference as both unreasonable and potentially damaging (TMS, 64, 65, 67). He even goes so far as to mock one its recipients “Lewis” XIV (TMS, 67). Regardless of its apparently irrational and harmful nature the deference is a net good because of its indirect and unintentional contribution to the peace and order of society. The necessity of this peace and order is an essential part of Smith’s teleological framework.

Removing teleology from Smith’s philosophy may also render TMS incompatible with WN. The teleological foundation of WN and TMS makes both of these works compatible and complimentary thus resolving the so-called Adam Smith Problem (hereafter ASP).¹⁴⁹ The crux of the ASP is the perception that WN and TMS are two disparate works that contradict each other. According to this problem WN is a book entirely focused on the virtues of self-interest, while TMS exposes the merits of benevolence. Consequently, both books could only be read in

¹⁴⁷ See Alvey (2004) p.344-345.

¹⁴⁸ The best example of how this works is Smith’s famous quote about the butcher, brewer, and baker (I.2.2). Each individual pursuing their self-interest—with absolutely no regard for the public good—will necessarily contribute to the greater good of society. The invisible hand metaphor is also relevant here, as it highlights how the pursuit of self-interest distributes wealth in a way that alleviates the worst poverty.

¹⁴⁹ For a historical discussion of the ASP see Montes (2003) “*Das Adam Smith Problem: Its Origins, the Stages of the Current Debate, and One Implication for our Understanding of Sympathy.*” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*. 25(1): 63-90.

complete isolation from the other. Adherents to the ASP typically frame WN as a treatise on the benefits of selfishness and TMS on the merits of benevolence. There is strong argument to be made that the ASP is a pseudo-problem based entirely on a misunderstanding of Smith's core arguments.¹⁵⁰ However, although the problem itself is widely dismissed there is no accepted consensus for how WN and TMS complement each other. Smith's teleology may explain how both these works can be understood as complementary. This teleology links the benefits of commercial society and self-interest to the theory of self-perfection outlined by Smith in TMS' 6th edition. The wealth, security, and liberty created by the pursuit of self-interest in commercial society are all necessary to the teleological pursuit of self-perfection. All of these benefits are not ends in themselves but a means for the pursuit and attainment of our *telos*.

In his most definitive teleological statement Smith establishes his belief in both a designer and a design universe. According to Smith;

In every part of the universe we observe means adjusted with the nicest artifice to the ends which they are intended to produce; and in the mechanism of a plant, or animal body, admire how every thing is contrived for advancing the two great purposes of nature, the support of the individual, and the propagation of the species [...] When by natural principles we are led to advance those ends, which a refined and enlightened reason would recommend to us, we are very apt to impute to that reason, as to their efficient cause, the sentiments and actions by which we advance those ends, and to imagine that to be the wisdom of man, which in reality is the wisdom of God (TMS, 105-106).¹⁵¹

Here Smith admits that humans were created by an "Author of Nature" with a specific purpose. Smith defines this purpose as the "happiness and perfection of the species" (TMS, 126). It is this purpose that links Smith's teleology to the authority of conscience and the concept of praiseworthiness. The goal of praiseworthiness is to direct our conscience towards self-perfection. Consequently, knowing what perfection is (i.e. our *telos*) and how we attain it is what determines the standards of praiseworthiness. In the Stoic tradition, Smith argues we attain perfection when we conform to the Author of Nature's plan. In order to achieve self-perfection our impartial spectator must speak to us with the voice of nature so that we can properly determine and adhere to the standards of praiseworthiness. However, to accomplish this we first need some information and insight into what the Author of Nature's plan is.

¹⁵⁰ Haakonssen (1981), Skinner (1979), and Winch (1978) all argue that the ASP is a pseudo-problem that can be ignored.

¹⁵¹ For an analysis of this passage see Alvey (2003) p.31.

2.2 Nature and Imagination

Smith's natural, Stoic, teleology may hold the key to determining the standards of praiseworthiness that properly facilitate the authoritative conscience. However, in order to properly adhere to this providential plan we require some insight into what the plan is. In other words, to recognize our *telos* and properly pursue it we require some understanding of Nature's design. Such insight will help us distinguish the natural and intended operation of our moral faculties from their conventional, and possibly corrupted, operation. The same faculty we use to determine the laws of motion (i.e. imagination) is capable of revealing Nature's design to us.¹⁵² However, because imagination is inherently limited the insights and information derived from it are necessarily imperfect and incomplete. Thus, our understanding of Nature's design and subsequent teleology are imperfect and as a result, our pursuit of tranquility will be imprecise.

The roots of Smith's contingent teleology can be traced back to his "History of Astronomy" (hereafter, HA).¹⁵³ Within HA Smith argues that philosophy is tasked with "representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into chaos of jarring and discordant appearances" (HA, Preamble). In other words, the job of philosophy is to impose meaning and order upon a seemingly meaningless and chaotic universe by discovering the natural laws that govern it. Unfortunately our ability to accomplish this is hindered by the limits of our understanding. We have no immediate (i.e. sensory) access to the "chains which bind together" the universe which is why Smith identifies them as "invisible". However, we can form plausible explanations for, and ideas of, these principles through our imagination. It is our imagination, Smith argues, that allows us to order and explain the seemingly chaotic universe we inhabit. Over time existing explanations of the universe become more and more tenuous as we attain additional knowledge and information. As

¹⁵² According to Evensky Smith uses the invisible hand metaphor to represent the "connecting principles" that make up the Author of Nature's design (Evensky, 2005, p.4). He further claims that "Smith believes we can only imagine the invisible connecting principles designed by this hand. We cannot know them" (Ibid).

¹⁵³ Evensky (2005) uses HA to demonstrate exactly how Smith's invisible hand metaphor explains the teleological foundations of his thought. My own reading of HA and TMS is inspired by Evensky's work. However, unlike Evensky I do not focus on the invisible hand. Furthermore, I disagree with Evensky's assessment of what Smith's believes our *telos* to be. Evensky characterizes this *telos* in more broad social terms as general opulence while I understand it to be individual tranquility. Nevertheless, Evensky's arguments are essential.

these existing explanations lose their credibility and veracity the former sense that the universe is chaotic creeps back into our minds and we lose the pleasing sense of order and meaning these explanations offered us.¹⁵⁴

We seek out new explanations for the universe that properly fit with the new data we have acquired.¹⁵⁵ This is why Smith admired Newton; Newton offered a new explanation for the operation of the universe that satisfied our curiosity and restored order and meaning to our perception of the universe. However, though new explanations may be truer than those replaced they cannot be properly understood as absolutely true. Instead these explanations should be understood as closer approximations of truth or as explanations that better accommodate new information. Furthermore, these better explanations remain open to necessary revision should any new relevant information be discovered. Because the true nature of the universe is unknowable to us all we can manage is to progress closer and closer to a perfect explanation without ever truly attaining it. Perhaps the first instance of this process is the creation of religion. In HA Smith contends that we develop religion as an explanation for spectacular and seemingly random events;

Comets, eclipses, thunder, lightning, and other meteors, by their greatness, naturally overawe [us] and [we view] them with a reverence that approaches to fear. [Our] inexperience and uncertainty with regard to everything about them, how they came, how they are to go, what went before them, what is to come after them, exasperate his sentiment into terror and consternation (HA, 48).

Initially we explained events like these by imagining they were caused by personified deities.¹⁵⁶ Eventually these polytheistic explanations lost their explanatory power and gave way to monotheism. From this it is easy to see how religious theories have (mostly) given way to scientific explanations of the universe. However, because even scientific explanations are also limited by the evidence that *can* be gathered these are also incapable of capturing absolute truth. Regardless of how sophisticated our explanations become over time they still necessarily fall short of perfection.

¹⁵⁴ Smith's philosophy of science appears to be similar to Kuhn's account of paradigm shifts. For a brief account of their similarities see Christopher Berry, "Smith and Science," in *Cambridge Companion*, p.112-135.

¹⁵⁵ See Skinner, 1979, p.15.

¹⁵⁶ For Smith's arguments on the origins of polytheism see HA 49-50.

The same imaginative process used in HA to examine the causes of natural phenomena is employed by Smith in TMS to understand the potential causes behind moral phenomena. Similar to our discovery of the laws of motion we can use our imagination to discover the laws and commands that ought to govern our moral faculties. This is the method Smith uses to develop his theory of human nature. First, Smith observes a particular moral phenomenon and then explains how our moral faculties operate to produce it. However, Smith goes further by imagining what the final cause behind our moral faculties might be. In other words, Smith's theory of human nature attempts to discern our place and purpose within the Author of Nature's providential plan. An example of this epistemological process is Smith's theory of justice. Smith defines justice as a largely negative virtue (TMS, 99). Thus, by not harming anyone we adhere to the rules of justice. The only instance when it is just to harm someone is when punishment is due. According to Smith, any violation of justice requires appropriate punishment for the offender. Punishing anyone who violates the rules of justice helps to appease people's resentment, preventing it from turning into hatred and anger which Smith refers to as "the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind" (TMS, 47). Smith's theory of justice is based upon two important observations. First, Smith observes the resentment felt towards a person who inflicts harms on others. This resentment inevitably compels us to seek punishment for the offending party. From these observations Smith analyzes the circumstances that give rise to the feeling of resentment and exactly when, and what, punishment is due. This allows him to develop particular rules of justice.

Smith transitions from observation and description to an eventual speculation about the possible purpose to his particular definition of justice. Justice, he imagines, must have been given to human to serve some purpose and argues that "[...] Nature, antecedent to all reflections upon the utility of punishment, has in this manner stamped upon the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, and immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation (TMS, 86). Here Smith establishes the role of Nature in giving us this desire for vengeance as well the necessity of this desire. Later he explains that resentment, and by extension vengeance, "seems to have been given to us by nature for defense" adding that they are "the safeguard of justice and the security of innocence" (TMS, 96). Smith concludes that justice contributes to our natural need for peace and order by making society possible and

sustainable (TMS, 103-105). Justice, Otteson claims, is essential to society and Smith sees all other things (e.g. friendship) as “ornaments that embellish and make the edifice of society agreeable” (Otteson, 2002, p.228).¹⁵⁷ A second example of this process is Smith’s analysis of our sympathy with joy and grief. Smith observes that we are much less willing to sympathize with other people’s grief than we are with their joy (TMS, 51-52). Because the former is painful, Smith argues, we are much less inclined to experience it. Often this causes us to become apathetic towards those who suffer. However, Smith speculates that our hesitation to sympathize with grief is a purposeful part of our natural design, stating that “Nature, it seems, when she loaded us with our own sorrows, thought that they were enough, and therefore did not command us to take any further share in those of others, than what was necessary to prompt us to relieve them” (TMS, 59). These are only two examples of Smith’s teleological understanding of human nature. The more we know about human nature the better we understand our potential purpose. Like our understanding of the universe our insight into the Author of Nature’s providential plan for humanity improves as we collect more and more data.

If humans were perfect creatures our understanding of nature and our place within it would yield absolute, universal, moral truths.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately our natural imperfections ensure that we will never acquire any unconditional knowledge of Nature’s providential plan. Additionally, the experiential nature of morality guarantees that any insights into our human nature—and its potential final cause—will be pre-conditioned by the conventions of our particular society. Consequently, the teleology outlined by Smith in TMS ought to be considered contingent. If better explanations of human nature became available or society itself were to fundamentally change then our *telos*—and how we attain it—ought to change accordingly. Smith’s teleology is thus based upon the best available evidence available to him about human nature and the dynamics of commercial society that influence our perception of this evidence. As

¹⁵⁷ Although justice has a clear and measureable social utility but it is pursued for the purpose of satisfying individual resentment (Evensky, 2005, p.72).

¹⁵⁸ Evensky (2005) refers to our imperfection as “frailty” and argues that this is what makes humans unique creatures and what distinguishes natural philosophy from moral philosophy (p.8). He further adds that because of this frailty the pursuit of our *telos* is neither “fluid nor inevitable” (p.28).

a result of our natural imperfections our perception of our *telos* and any moral standards derived from this will always be flawed and imprecise.¹⁵⁹

The first relevant imperfection that limits our understanding of the Author of Nature's plan concerns the quantity and quality of information we are capable of attaining about moral phenomena. Sympathy is the primary means we have of attaining the necessary information for understanding our moral faculties. By imagining ourselves in the positions of others we gain valuable insight into the causes of moral phenomena. However, the amount of information we are capable of gathering about another person's circumstances is significantly limited. At any given time we can only know so much about a person's character and behavior. Often the variables that contribute to these are too numerous for us to make anything more than a superficial judgment about another individual. This seems especially true when we consider how quickly our sympathy acts. More often than not our sympathy with another person is reflexive and automatic. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that we are projected into the place of another rather than that we project ourselves. As a result of this immediacy we often have very little time to collect the data necessary to make a proper judgment about an individual's character or behavior. Because it is possible that we may judge another without access to all the necessary facts or the proper time to collect them it is reasonable to assume that our judgments are often flawed. Consequently, any moral judgments we make ought to be conditional. Should more or better evidence become available we must be willing to revise past judgments we held to be true. More importantly, the limited information we are capable of gathering affects our insight into the operation of our moral faculties. There could be hidden variables we have no knowledge of that influence the character and behaviors of others and ourselves. Admittedly, the amount of information about the operation of our moral faculties will continue to accumulate, and thus improve, over time. However, it would be naïve and presumptuous to assume that this could ever reach a perfect understanding of other people's circumstances and motivations.

Our understanding of our moral faculties and *telos* is also affected by the quality of information we are capable of gathering. The first qualitative influence is our inability to

¹⁵⁹ My claim here is that, for Smith, universal morals standards exist but that our ability to perceive them is flawed. Moreover, how these standards are perceived may necessarily vary across different societies, depending on their understanding of human nature.

completely abandon our own perspective.. Smith argues that even after we project ourselves into another's place we still retain our own experiences and perspectives (TMS, 24-25). If human beings were perfect, this limitation could potentially be overcome with the impartial spectator. The primary purpose of the impartial spectator, when judging others, is to remove any biases we may have when we assess the behavior and character of other people. However, in these instances the impartial spectator is a practical tool and not a perfect one. Though it can help mitigate the influence any biases may have on our judgments the impartial spectator cannot eliminate them altogether.¹⁶⁰ In order to make judgments about others and ourselves our impartial spectators must make reference to our experiences which inadvertently allows bias to creep in. Consequently, when we make judgments we may often only apply our own interpretation of propriety rather than propriety in its strictest sense. Ultimately, because our impartial spectators must use previously biased information to make judgments it is possible that it can only effectively distance us away from our biases but never escape them.

An additional, more malignant, influence on our perception of moral faculties deals specifically with our ability to properly and fairly sympathize with other individuals. Smith argues that, because we are imperfect creatures, we often let our passions interfere with our sympathy and consequently we form improper judgments of others. An example of a passion that interferes with our sympathy and skews our moral judgment is envy. In TMS Smith defines envy as a selfish passion that interferes with our sympathy with joy (TMS, 51). Smith specifically cites the envy we are prone to feel when someone has had a quick and drastic change in fortune. These individuals often end up unhappy because people refuse to share their joy. Smith goes so far as to argue that we expect these fortunate individuals to “have more sympathy with our envy and aversion to [their] happiness, than we have with [their] happiness” (TMS, 51). Inevitably this envy leads to reciprocal hatred. More importantly, our potentially unfair sympathy with others may influence our understanding of how our moral faculties operate. By routinely interfering with fair and proper sympathy our passions affect our ideas of approbation and disapprobation and, by extension, the standards of propriety. Consequently, it is conceivable the we may see

¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that, for Smith, there is no escaping our own subjective experience (p.70).

envy and hatred as proper responses to other people's good fortune, which in turn can alter our perception of our *telos*.

Finally, the type of society we live in affects our perception and understanding of our *telos*. Smith argues that the specific type of society influences and conditions moral standards and subsequently moral truths as well.¹⁶¹ What is proper or even praiseworthy in one type of society (hunter/gatherer, pastoral, commercial etc.) will not necessarily be proper or praiseworthy in another type. For instance, past societies had a greater need for martial virtues than commercial society where martial duties can fall to standing armies. Consequently, past societies valued characteristics and behaviors differently. For example, courage is more prized in societies where there are no standing armies for defense. Individuals would thus be expected to act with a certain amount of courage in these societies that may never be required in commercial society. Additionally, culture also has a determining influence on a society's morals. As a consequence it is possible for moral standards to vary across different commercial societies. The consequence of this is the recognition that our perception of moral faculties—and the *telos* derived from this understanding—is irrevocably conditioned by our particular society. Consequently, how an individual perceives and pursues praiseworthiness may vary from one society to the next.

Because our understanding of Nature's providential plan is imperfect any moral standards we derive from this understanding ought to be considered contingent. The flaws in our judgment (our natural imperfection) and the influence of our society all prevent us from perceiving any absolute, universal, moral truths. This does not mean that such truths are nonexistent but, rather, that they may always remain invisible to us. If the task of philosophy is to discover and explain—through imagination—the natural laws that govern a designed universe then the task of moral philosophy may be to find the analogous moral laws. Like the operations of the universe itself morals may appear to be chaotic because of our relative and imperfect perception of them. However, much like our attempts to explain the nature and operation of the universe we can use

¹⁶¹ Smith distinguishes types of society by their mode of production and the division of labor. Subsequently, commercial society differs from other types because it is merchant based and has a greater division of labor. Additionally, because everyone in commercial society sells something, including workers who sell their labor, each person can effectively be considered a merchant.

our imagination to develop similar explanations of morals. For Smith this explanation is ultimately a teleological one. Though he never uses the term, the teleology offered by Smith is one that is contained within human nature. By studying our nature and imagining its purpose and possible final cause (i.e. our *telos*) we can gain some insight into what we ought to become. This insight can help our conscience distinguish what is praiseworthy (i.e. what we ought to do or become) from the mere standards of propriety. Consequently, knowledge of the Author of Nature's plan and our according *telos* facilitates both the authority of conscience and the pursuit of the virtues. This idea of a designed and purposeful human nature appears to be axiomatic to Smith. Smith makes no effort to either defend or explain the reasoning behind this axiom.¹⁶² Nevertheless, Smith offers a theory of human nature in TMS that reflects a providential plan. This plan provides a goal that both the individual and society ought to progress towards. The more knowledge we accumulate about this plan (i.e. our teleology) the closer we will be to achieving the perfection of the species. More importantly, knowledge of the Author of Nature's providential plan gives a voice to our impartial spectators and liberates our conscience from the fundamentally arbitrary—albeit practical—standards of propriety. Ultimately, our conscience becomes truly independent and authoritative when it speaks to us with the voice of Nature.

2.3 The Pursuit of Tranquility

Given our knowledge of human nature—and commercial society's potential influence—Smith concludes happiness is our *telos*. Happiness, Smith argues, “may very well be called the natural and ordinary state of mankind” (TMS, 57). More definitively, Smith argues that “The happiness of mankind, as well as all other rational creatures, seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature, when he brought them into existence” (TMS, 191). Here Smith not only clearly establishes what our *telos* is but also establishes the role of a deity in creating this purpose. Smith characterizes happiness as tranquility. “Happiness”, Smith argues, “consists in tranquility and enjoyment” (TMS, 171). Happiness is thus best understood as the

¹⁶² This is not unique to Smith; all moral philosophy (and philosophy in general) begins from some irreducible starting point. What may be noteworthy about Smith's axiomatic position is how out of step it is with his contemporaries (especially Hume) and the bulk of modern thought.

completion of a process; as what we attain when we successfully perfect our moral faculties. Tranquility is the state of being that allows us to truly enjoy life's pleasures and without it "there can be no enjoyment" (Ibid.). Happiness is thus an end state for Smith, one that Griswold argues "consists in one's being at rest in the sense of lacking discord" adding that it "is more like coming to a stop than a process of moving towards a goal" (Griswold, 1999, p.218). However, Smith believed that tranquility required more than just peace of mind. Tranquility also requires ease of body. Accordingly, Evensky argues that, for Smith, "the ideal human life is not tranquility in the face of oppression, it is secure tranquility, that peace of mind that one enjoys along with peace of body" (Evensky, 2005, p.15). Otteson (2005) adds to this by claiming to live a tranquil life "one's material needs are met, one's physical condition is good, one has led (or is leading) a life of virtue and wisdom, and one has established and maintained relations with others that are mutually agreeable (p.235). Consequently, happiness has both psychological and physical conditions that must be fulfilled. Knowing what these conditions are and how they are fulfilled may ultimately help to define the standards of praiseworthiness.

Tranquility's first necessary condition is wealth. Smith makes it clear (both in TMS and WN) that a certain amount of wealth is a pre-condition to human happiness. It is certainly tempting to exaggerate how much wealth is necessary for human happiness; as the author of WN Smith has gained an undeserved reputation as an apologist for capitalism.¹⁶³ However, Smith claims that the amount of wealth necessary for tranquility is modest. It may be the case that all we need are the "necessities of nature" which Smith explains can be attained with the "wages of the meanest labourer" (TMS, 62). The wealth necessary for tranquility is ideally available to all members of society regardless of social rank. This underpins Smith's vindication of commercial society and its capacity to "raise all boats". When unobstructed by such things as mercantile interests commercial society is capable of generating, and circulating, enough wealth for everyone, including the meanest laborer. This does not mean that Smith is blind to the detrimental impact poverty has on the moral well-being of the individual; both WN and TMS consistently lament the mean condition that the poor experience.¹⁶⁴ However, even at its worst

¹⁶³ For counters to the view of Smith as a "Pollyanna" see Evensky (2005) p.164 and Hanley (2009) p.32.

¹⁶⁴ For an analysis of Smith's concern for the poor see Hanley (2009) p.15-36. See also Ignatieff, "Needs and Justice in the *Wealth of Nations*: An Introductory Essay," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Hont and Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-44.

commercial society is capable of making the life of the common laborer superior to that of any African king (WN, I.1.11).

Though a common laborer may not be capable of acquiring the trinkets and baubles that captivate the attentions of the rich their relative wealth ought to provide for all of life's necessities while also ensuring some amount of leisure time. This leisure time is as essential to tranquility as the material necessities are. Without some amount of leisure time an individual is incapable of adequately developing themselves outside of the workplace and consequently becomes "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." (WN, V.1.3.2). To grow morally, mentally, and emotionally an individual requires opportunities for both enjoyment and education, both of which are impossible without leisure time. It follows from all this that laborers ought to be paid a sum that allows them to purchase the essential shelter, food and clothing for themselves and their families. All individuals, Smith claims, ought to be capable of pursuing and attaining happiness. Inequality will still necessarily exist, but in a proper commercial society nobody ought to be so poor that they cannot hope to ever be happy. In addition to providing the necessities for ease of body, wealth is also essential to our peace of mind. Poverty, Smith assures us, is shameful and those who live in it take care to hide themselves from "the sight of mankind" (TMS, 62).¹⁶⁵ Thus, to attain tranquility we must have some measure of wealth in order to ensure we are properly esteemed (by ourselves and others) and can thus avoid the perpetual shame of poverty. On its own wealth is insufficient for ease of body and peace of mine. However, a severe lack of wealth may be more than enough to make a person miserable. Consequently, it would be naïve to dismiss the essential role wealth plays in the pursuit of our *telos*.

A second necessary condition for ease of body and peace of mind is security. We cannot reasonably hope to attain and enjoy tranquility if our person and property are perpetually threatened by both internal (i.e. violations of justice) and external threats (i.e. foreign invasion). Both internal and external security requires a society and, more specifically, a sovereign. The sovereign ensures internal security by enforcing the rules of justice.¹⁶⁶ Smith lists the following

¹⁶⁵ See Hanley (2009) p.50-52.

¹⁶⁶ In WN Smith lists the three primary duties of the sovereign as "protecting the society from violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from

as the “sacred rules” of justice the sovereign must enforce as the laws which guard the life and person of our neighbour [...] which guard his property and possessions [and] those which guard what are called his personal rights, or what is due to him from the promises of others” (TMS, 102). The sovereign enforces these sacred rules of justice largely by punishing offenders. Punishing those who violate any of these rules restores justice and promotes the security of society by satisfying the resentment people feel but also has the added benefit of discouraging further violations.¹⁶⁷ The sovereign also plays a significant role in promoting internal security by passing good laws.¹⁶⁸ These laws ideally help shape citizens to make them more just and thus less prone to infringe upon the property and person of others. Thus the enforcement of justice ensures our ease of body by preventing undue harm and ensuring the use and enjoyment of property. Additionally, believing we will not be attacked or robbed contributes to our peace of mind. Perhaps indirectly, the sovereign’s enforcement of justice also establishes the ground rules for the accumulation of property.¹⁶⁹ By enforcing the rules of justice the sovereign sets the rules for property accumulation and ensures everyone plays by these rules. The sovereign is also charged with protecting us from external threats. This is another area where commercial society is superior to other types. The invention of firearms and the professional armies employed by commercial society helps to protect them from foreign threats.¹⁷⁰ This protection is essential to our tranquility; we cannot live a life of tranquility if we have cause to believe our society will be conquered. Like wealth, security is not enough to guarantee tranquility. It is perfectly possible to live in a completely secure society, with the strictest enforcement of justice, and still live a life of misery.

the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society” (IV.9.51).

¹⁶⁷ Smith highlights the importance of punishing violations of these sacred rules by arguing that “mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent” (TMS, 107).

¹⁶⁸ Evensky claims that, for Smith, “positive law serves as an active tool for the inculcation of values” (Evensky, 2005, p.62). Alvey (2003) agrees, arguing that good laws help make good people (p.156).

¹⁶⁹ According to Evensky, Smith saw the protection of property rights as an essential function of the government. This protection ensures that the poor will either “continue poor or acquire wealth in the same manner as [the rich] have done” (p.64).

¹⁷⁰ Haakonssen (p.171) and Alvey (.107-108) both argue that Smith say firearms as necessary to commercial society’s security. Accordingly, Rome and Greece collapsed because these types of weapons were not available to them.

In addition to wealth and security, tranquility also requires liberty.¹⁷¹ Being reasonably free from external constraints is essential to our pursuit of wealth and the development of our own independent, authoritative, conscience.¹⁷² Liberty allows us to engage in the economic activities that are most likely to increase our wealth. Should the markets change and our current economic endeavors become unprofitable we must be free to adapt and pursue new, more profitable, opportunities. Commercial society offers this freedom, especially to laborers, who are free to move from one job to another as they see fit. Liberty also allows us the opportunity to use our own standards of judgment to determine our character and behavior, rather than merely conforming to existing propriety. Additionally, liberty makes the internal and external security meaningful. Being protected from harm means less if we are forced to live under the rule of a tyrant whose rule will make us dependent and undignified. Similarly, the fear of being conquered has less meaning if it results in one tyrant replacing another. Most importantly, liberty is essential to our dignity and subsequent peace of mind. Perhaps the biggest affront to our dignity is having our lives determined for us by someone else.¹⁷³ Being dependent upon someone else—like a child is to their parent or a puppy to its master—to provide for you and determine who you are is perhaps the most undignified life a person is capable of living. To truly pursue and attain tranquility we need the freedom to define our own character and to provide for ourselves. Compared to previous societies commercial society offers more liberty and thus better facilitates this pursuit.

The final necessary condition for tranquility is order. More specifically, Smith believes that a class-based society is essential to our happiness.¹⁷⁴ This belief reveals the limitations of Smith's more egalitarian arguments. Regardless, Smith argues that a respect for the "distinction of ranks" is a necessary part of Smith's teleology. A stratified society seems to be essential to our dignity and subsequent peace of mind. Stratification in to classes helps to set the parameters for

¹⁷¹ Alvey (2003, p.34) argues that, for Smith, anyone with liberty is capable of pursuing happiness.

¹⁷² Winch (1978) characterizes Smith's theory of liberty as a "sense of security under the law" (p.40). Muller (1993) claims that Smith's theory of liberty is the "freedom to control one's own passions" (p.2). Both arguments have merits however both are too narrow. In *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) Fleischacker argues that the ability to develop and exercise our own judgment is an essential feature of Smith's theory of liberty.

¹⁷³ This argument forms the crux of Smith's criticism of feudalism, which he likens to slavery for its extreme dependency. See Hanley, 2009, p.20.

¹⁷⁴ Smith argues that the "distinction of ranks" is both natural and necessary. Without it we might never develop the ambition required for the improvement of our condition. See TMS p.62-73.

respectability and also explains why accumulating wealth contributes to our sense of dignity. This necessary distinction of ranks is best-served when the rich and powerful are deferred to (Alvey, 2003, 39).¹⁷⁵ This deference helps to ensure a certain level of obedience within society while also protecting and promoting the accumulation of wealth. The distinction of ranks reinforces the accumulation of wealth and internal security. Though this ultimately establishes an unequal society, the knowledge that superiority will be recognized and rewarded is a necessary part of tranquility.

For all of these conditions to be fulfilled we must live in a society. Accordingly, Smith argues that Nature has designed us specifically to live in society.¹⁷⁶ A society can be valued insofar as it offers its citizens wealth, security, liberty, and order.¹⁷⁷ Thus any society can be measured and appraised by its ability to provide and sustain these conditions. Although these conditions are essential to our tranquility they do not necessarily make us happy; rather, wealth, security, liberty, and order facilitate our pursuit of happiness. It is only after these conditions have been established that we can truly pursue and attain our *telos*.

2.4 Nature's Hierarchy

Smith's theory of human nature contains a hierarchy of efficient causes that, when adhered to, bring us ease of body and peace of mind.¹⁷⁸ This hierarchy begins with Smith's two first principles of human nature; self-interest and benevolence.¹⁷⁹ These principles are our foundational motivations that ultimately explain all human activity. Additional components of this hierarchy exist as expressions of one of these first principles. These efficient causes include

¹⁷⁵ See TMS 65-66.

¹⁷⁶ Smith claims that "man, who can only subsist in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made" (TMS, p.103).

¹⁷⁷ See Alvey, 2003, p.38.

¹⁷⁸ Smith's personal and philosophical relationship to Hume has potentially skewed our understanding of his theory of human nature. Hume sought to establish the new "science of man" by empirically analyzing what human nature is rather than speculating about what it could be (or why it is this way). The strong connection between Smith and Hume makes it tempting to read Smith in a similar fashion. It is true that Smith's and Hume's philosophies have much in common. For instance, their shared interest in sympathy (though they disagree on how it operates) places them both within a similar vein of moral philosophy. However, a closer reading of Smith's outline of human nature reveals that, at least on this point, he may have had more in common philosophically with Rousseau than Hume. The descriptive components of TMS align Smith with Hume. However, Smith's normative concerns appear to be inherited from Rousseau. For literature comparing Smith and Rousseau see; Rasmussen (2008) and Hanley (2009).

¹⁷⁹ Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that nature has given humans a balance between self-interest and sociability (i.e. benevolence) (p.48).

instincts, passions, and sentiments. Knowing what these are and how to properly adhere to their intended design will ultimately tell us how we can reach our *telos*.

Smith begins his theory of nature by refuting egoistic assumptions about human motivation. According to Smith humans are both self-interested and beneficent (TMS, 13). This refutation of egoism establishes the very essence of human nature in TMS. To be human, according to Smith, is to be caught between two opposing poles; self-interest and beneficence. Human nature is consequently defined by two conflicting motivations. The rest of our human nature aligns with either our self-interested or beneficent self or, perhaps more likely, contains a mixture of the two. For instance, our desire to improve our condition (the very foundation for WN) corresponds to our self-interested nature. Our self-interested desire to improve our lot in life ultimately generates our “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” and by extension the division of labor that ultimately distinguishes commercial society (WN, I.2.1). Conversely, our beneficent nature may be more properly reflected in our desire for mutual sympathy, though the pleasure that accompanies this may also be linked to our self-interest. These two simultaneous motivations lay the groundwork for the rest of Smith’s theory of human nature and subsequently shape how we pursue—and attain—ease of body and peace of mind. The cardinal virtues of prudence, beneficence, and self-command (explored in a following chapter) are conditioned by our apparently conflicted human nature. Because our other efficient causes reflect these two first principles in order to attain tranquility we must be properly self-interested and beneficent.

Our instincts are the first efficient causes embedded within our human nature. Our instincts contain both self-interested and beneficent elements and aim towards self-preservation and the propagation of the species (TMS, 94).¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, Smith argues that Nature has “endowed us [...] with a love of life, and a dread of dissolution; with a desire of the continuance and perpetuity of the species, and with an aversion to the thoughts of its intire extinction” (Ibid.) Our own survival and the propagation of the species are the first end of our nature; without these there would be little to no hope of ever attaining our final end. However, Smith argues we do not pursue survival out of reason or intent. Instead, “Nature has directed us to [the survival and

¹⁸⁰ See also Alvey, 2003, p. 34.

perpetuation of the species] by original and immediate instincts” (Ibid.). These instincts include: “[h]unger, thirst, the passion which unites the two sexes, the love of pleasure, and the dread of pain” (Ibid.). Smith claims we pursue these instincts for their own sake and not out of “consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends which the great Director of nature intended to produce by them” (Ibid.). We share these original instincts with all other animals. However, one other instinct that may be unique to our species could be added to these. Our desire to please others (i.e. mutual sympathy) is also instinctual.¹⁸¹ This instinctual desire to please others ultimately makes society possible (Alvey, 2003, p.37). Subsequently, this desire to please (which is accompanied by an aversion to offending) contributes to the survival of the species. By ensuring the survival and propagation of the species the instincts facilitate the pursuit of more noble and lofty goals. We can only pursue perfection after we have adequately guaranteed our survival. Consequently, in order to attain tranquility we must properly satisfy our instincts. The best way to ensure the success of our instincts is to live in a society, especially one with wealth, liberty, security, and order.

The second component of our human nature that drives us towards our *telos* is the passions. The passions appear to be our reactions to our original instincts.¹⁸² Like our instincts the passions reflect our self-interested and beneficent poles. Smith groups these passions into five different categories. The first of these categories are the passions that arise from our body (TMS, 34-39). According to Smith the appetites and pain are two examples of such passions. Smith argues that our ability to sympathize with the expression of the appetites is naturally restrained. This restraint arises from our aversion to strong expressions of these passions (TMS, 35). We are capable of sympathizing with the appetites but only to a certain degree. The same can be said of our reactions to pain. Smith argues that it is both “unmanly” and “unbecoming” to cry out in pain (TMS, 36). However, Smith does admit that we do have a strong, instinctual, ability to sympathize with pain even if the reciprocal pain we feel is much different in degree and kind. Smith adds that our ability to sympathize with bodily pain is enlivened by both the novelty of that pain and any danger that may accompany the pain. To the latter point Smith claims that

¹⁸¹ Hanley (2009) argues that this desire to please (i.e. mutual sympathy) is foundational to Smith’s moral theory (p.51).

¹⁸² Smith is never quite clear on the demarcation between the passions and sentiments.

“pain never calls forth any very lively sympathy unless it is accompanied with danger.” (TMS, 37). Smith adds that what we truly sympathize with in such an instance is the fear the person feels (and we imagine we would feel in their place) and not the actual pain (Ibid.). Furthermore, though the novelty of a particular cause of pain may enliven our sympathy this inevitably wears off as we grow more and more accustomed to it. Our bodily passions help to determine how we behave and expect others to behave in certain situations. The natural restraints we have on our ability to sympathize with appetites and pain oblige us to moderate our own responses to these passions in order to ensure we receive sympathy. Because we are disgusted by the excessive reactions others have to the bodily passions we know to expect disgust if we should react the same way. As a consequence, we must control our responses to appetites so that we may more easily attain the sympathy of others.

The second category of passions Smith discusses is “those derived from the imagination [...] which take their origin from a particular turn or habit” (TMS, 39). This particular category is, admittedly, more of a necessary caveat. This category is an acknowledgment of the passions that emerge from our own idiosyncratic personalities. Although these passions are a reflection of our first principles, they are specific to us both in their origination and direction. Examples of such passions include our love for another person or our own particular aesthetic tastes. We do not have a great deal of sympathy for these particular passions, nor, should we be expected to. For instance, though we can share our friend’s anger over an injury we cannot share the love they feel for another person (TMS, 39). As a result of these idiosyncratic passions we must be careful to keep certain behaviors in check. Though it is reasonable to be in love we should be careful to keep our expressions of this passion from becoming excessive. While we cannot expect anyone to sympathize with our love we can be sure to arouse their ire if we demonstrate this passion to excess.

Smith goes on to categorize two opposite sets of passions; the unsocial and the social (TMS, 42-50). Smith describes the former of these passions as those that drive humans from each other. In particular, Smith labels the passions of hatred and resentment as unsocial. Hatred and resentment arise when someone injures or offends us, or someone else. In the second instance Smith argues that “our sympathy is divided between the person who feels [hatred and resentment], and the person who is the object of them” (TMS, 43). This division forces us to

make a judgment about whether these passions are truly deserved. Additionally, this divided sympathy compels the injured party to moderate them so that we can truly sympathize with their hatred and/or resentment. Smith goes so far as to argue that “Before resentment [...] can become graceful and agreeable, it must be humbled and brought down below that pitch to which it would naturally rise” (Ibid). This is because our divided sympathy causes us to “fear for what the one may suffer” which subsequently lessens “our resentment for what the other has suffered” (Ibid). Conversely, Smith defines the social passions as those that bring us together. Within this category Smith includes passions such as generosity, kindness and compassion. In fact, these passions all seem to flow from our beneficent nature. Moreover, we have “the strongest, disposition to sympathize with the benevolent affections” (TMS, 48). Smith adds that these passions always “appear in every respect agreeable to us” (TMS, 48-49). Finally, unlike the other passions, any excessive demonstrations of the social passions will not evoke aversion or disapproval. Smith argues:

There is a helplessness in the character of extreme humanity which more than any thing interests our pity. There is nothing in itself that renders it either ungraceful or disagreeable. We only regret that it is unfit for the world, because the world is unworthy of it (TMS, 50).

We keep our social passions in check not out of fear of disapproval but because we wish to avoid dangers such as exploitation.

The “selfish passions” are the final category discussed in TMS (TMS, 50). These selfish passions are located somewhere between the social and unsocial passions (TMS, 50). Smith adds that these selfish passions are never as “graceful” as the former tend to be nor as “odious” as the latter can often be (TMS, 50-51). These selfish passions are comprised of “[g]rief and joy, when conceived upon account of our own private good or bad fortune” (TMS, 51). Our sympathy with these two passions depends on the level of their expression. Excessive demonstrations of personal grief or joy are never as disagreeable as excessive hatred or resentment. However, Smith claims that great expressions of joy can be difficult for others to sympathize with. This is due to the envy other people experience when fortune brings others great joy. On the other hand, Smith argues that small and continuous expressions of personal joy, or a “habitual cheerfulness”, are eagerly sympathized with (TMS, 52). Our sympathy with people’s personal grief works in the opposite manner. We typically find people who are frequently aggrieved by the smallest of things to be obnoxious. Smith contends that the “man who is made uneasy by every little

disagreeable incident [...] will seldom meet with much sympathy” (TMS, 52-52). Conversely, we appear to have a “strong and very sincere” sympathy with people who feel profound grief as a result of a tragedy (TMS, 53). The sympathy we can expect when expressing the selfish passions ought to govern our behavior when we experience either good or bad fortune. We cannot hope to attain mutual sympathy if our joy arouses people’s envy or if they are annoyed by our petty grief.

Our instinctual need to please others—and avoid offending them—forces us to control our passions. Subsequently, we moderate our passions so that we can reach a sympathetic concord with other people and avoid being disapproved of. This control over the passions ensures our own survival and the survival of the species (by properly satisfying our instincts) while also making social life viable. Our passions, when properly moderated and directed towards proper things, inevitably contribute to the pursuit of tranquility.

The final component of our human nature that directs us towards our *telos* are the sentiments. Smith provides only a vague definition of the sentiments as “affection[s] of the heart, from which any actions proceed” (TMS, 81). This does not usefully distinguish sentiments from passions. However, I believe sentiments can be best understood as judgments made by our impartial spectators.¹⁸³ Consequently, the sentiments play a necessary role in shaping the standards of propriety. According to Evensky there are three “broad categories of sentiments in Smith’s representation of human nature: self-love, justice, and beneficence” (Evensky, 2005, p.35).¹⁸⁴ The sentiments of self-love correspond directly to the self-interested portion of our human nature. These sentiments help to explain our desire to continuously improve our condition. The sentiments that arise from beneficence correspond to our initial desire to contribute to the well-being of others. These sentiments explain our capacity for kindness, generosity and even affection. Finally, our just sentiments are located somewhere between our selfish and selfless poles. Our desire to be free from harm and to have any harm redressed

¹⁸³ It is possible Smith is referring to the same things when he speaks of passions and sentiments. However, I believe a charitable reading of TMS necessitates distinguishing the two in some way. If passions and sentiments did indeed refer to the same thing, my analysis of their role in our teleology would remain the same, albeit more concise.

¹⁸⁴ Evensky argues that only the sentiments of self-love can be the “spring for action” (35). However, this directly clashes with Smith’s definition of sentiments. Furthermore, it is clear that actions do indeed arise from justice and beneficence. Acts of charity arise from our beneficent sentiments while punishment arises from our just sentiments.

through punishment is linked to our self-interested nature. Our just sentiments appear to be a mixture of our two first principles that depends on the particulars of a situation. Our sentiments play a role in determining our character and behavior. We act self-interestedly, beneficently or justly when we have judged that a situation warrants these. Knowing how the sentiments operate provides insight in to the Author of Nature's design, which in turn helps to shed light on our possible *telos*. By determining how we can and do act in particular circumstances the sentiments may help to shed some necessary light on how we *should* act. Consequently, these sentimental categories shape of the pursuit of our potential *telos*. Unlike our passions, the sentiments are responsible for more than the mere satisfaction of our original instincts. The sentiments bring us above and beyond survival and reproduction. Whereas the instincts and passions aim to make life *possible* our sentiments aim at making it *desirable*.¹⁸⁵ The sentiments contribute to our quality of life in two fundamental ways. First, the sentiments of self-love help us secure and expand our own well-being by contributing to our pursuit of wealth and the dignity and joy that this entails. Subsequently, the sentiments of self-love help us transcend mere subsistence and acquire a level of material well-being that affords us ease of body. Similarly, the beneficent sentiments allow us to cultivate the personal relationships (i.e. family, friendship, and citizenship) that help satisfy the requirements for peace of mind. By developing these relationships we can attain mutual sympathy while simultaneously contributing to our need to promote the happiness of others. It is the perfection of our sentiments that facilitates personal and social flourishing and brings us lasting and secure ease of body and peace of mind.

The Author of Nature gave us instincts, passions, and sentiments so that we could successfully pursue and attain tranquility. These three components of our nature, when properly satisfied and directed towards the right ends, eventually bring us ease of body and peace of mind. Thus, we attain our *telos* when we adhere to Nature's design. It is the voice of Nature that directs us towards perfection. Consequently, this voice of Nature should be the voice we listen to when distinguishing between propriety and praiseworthiness. Instead of merely telling us what society has approved—or disapproved—of, Nature is capable of telling us what ought to be approved of

¹⁸⁵ In particular, it is the beneficent sentiments that make life worth living. It is entirely possible to have a stable, opulent, society based entirely on self-love and justice. However, it seems unlikely, to Smith, that we would choose to live in such a society. Friendship, love, generosity, etc. all help to make society desirable (TMS, 103-110).

by confirming what accords with our designed purpose. We can judge what is praiseworthy by determining what is in harmony with Nature's design (i.e. our human nature). By conforming to this design, rather than the standards of mere propriety, we live a life of tranquility. However, how this tranquility is attained is in some measure shaped by the type of society we live in. The material conditions of society shape both how tranquility is attained and who can attain it.

2.5 Natural Perfection and the Golden Rule

Left alone the efficient causes discussed in the previous section are enough to ensure the survival and continuation of the human species. Because he sees the universe as fundamentally harmonic Smith believes that our moral faculties will necessarily promote these ends even when they *appear* to have negative outcomes. In other words, the routine operation of these faculties is enough to generate the rules of propriety that make society—and all its subsequent goods—possible. However, Smith's changes to TMS' final edition indicate (if nothing else) that the mere survival of the species is not enough. His inclusion of an entire section on virtue indicates that there is more to life than mere survival and reproduction. The self-perfection we can, and should, pursue with our authoritative conscience requires more than spontaneous order and unintended consequences. To successfully attain tranquility and achieve self-perfection (i.e. praiseworthiness) we must perfect our moral faculties and direct them towards proper things. To accomplish this we must govern these faculties with something more than mere propriety. The golden rule provides a means for perfecting our moral faculties our nature. When our impartial spectator uses the golden rule to guide us it speaks to us with the voice of nature and guides us to self-perfection. Thus the praiseworthy individual is the person who shapes their character with the golden rule.

Early in TMS Smith argues “that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature” (TMS, 31). Thus, to perfect our moral faculties and attain our *telos* we must cultivate and grow our beneficent first principle and all of its correlates. When our benevolence surpasses and eclipses our self-interest our natural efficient causes will contribute to our pursuit of tranquility rather than mere survival (without sacrificing the latter of course). However, this does not mean

that our self-interested principle disappears or becomes unimportant but, rather, that any tensions between these two motivations ought to disappear. Consequently these principles lose any apparent conflicting qualities and become complementary to each other. In perfecting our nature we limit our self-interested tendencies to those which necessarily contribute to our ease of body and peace of mind. The way we accomplish this is by adhering to the golden rule.

If the purpose of praiseworthiness is to liberate our conscience from the flawed standards of propriety so we can achieve self-perfection then a potential means for determining what it consists of, and how to attain our *telos*, is the golden rule. Traditionally, the golden rule demands that we treat others as we would expect to be treated. This rule presupposes our ability to sympathize with each other and thus remains consistent with Smith's overall approach to morality. However, although Smith retains the traditional Christian meaning of this rule he also reformulates it in order to express its double meaning. According to Smith the golden rule demands that we "love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us" (Ibid). This reformulation accounts for both of our (apparently) conflicting first principles, allowing us to care for our own self-interest without infringing upon our beneficent desire to contribute to the well-being of others. By limiting our self-love so that it infringes upon neither the well-being of others nor our own beneficence we effectively increase the latter. Moreover, the second component of the golden rule asks us to seek the love of others rather than merely satisfying our own self-interested desires. The best way to obtain the love of others (to be "lovely" in Smith's terms) is through acts of benevolence that demonstrate or love for others. Consequently, adhering to the golden rule increases our benevolence while simultaneously moderating our self-interest so that we will be loved by others and, indirectly, by ourselves. Though it increases our benevolence and restrains our self-interest the golden rule does not eliminate the latter. Instead the golden rule requires us to direct our self-interest towards the right types of things so that it may complement our beneficence.¹⁸⁶ This balance between self-love and beneficence is outlined by Smith in discussion of the cardinal virtues. Because it is capable of increasing our benevolence and restraining our self-interest, adhering to the golden rule represents the perfection of our nature. Consequently, it is reasonable

¹⁸⁶ These proper things are outlined by Smith in his discussion of prudence. See TMS, 250-256. See also Chapter Five of this work.

to suggest that the standards of praiseworthiness are derived from the golden rule and that our conscience becomes authoritative and directs us towards our intended *telos* when it follows these standards.

The desire to perfect our nature by following the golden rule is a fundamental part of our nature. However, Smith argues that the Author of Nature did not implant us with a love of humanity sufficient enough to inspire us to the golden rule and self-perfection (TMS, 156). Rather, Smith claims, it is the natural love for a superior character that directs us towards benevolence and the golden rule (Ibid). This love of moral superiority is reiterated by Smith in one form or another throughout TMS. It is this love of superiority that underpins our desire to be praiseworthy and makes our self-perfection possible.

Because the instincts are non-cognitive they do not require the perfection of our nature to achieve their intended ends (survival and continuation of the species). However, the expression of these instincts (i.e. the passions) and our sentiments can be significantly affected by our adherence to the golden rule. Choosing to act in accordance with the golden rule will necessarily restrain our unsocial and selfish passions as well any other passions people may have difficulty sympathizing with (i.e. the bodily passions). Simultaneously this rule encourages the expression of our social passions, which are always agreeable and thus tend to be awarded with the love and approval of others. Similarly, the golden rule perfects our sentiments, encouraging the development of the more beneficent ones like gratitude and justice which contribute to our own happiness and the well-being of society. Developing proper self-interest and benevolence by obeying the golden rule perfects our moral faculties and in doing so helps us develop the qualities of character that ensure ease of body and peace of mind. When we love our neighbors and ourselves in the proper way we will inevitably attain tranquility.

Imagination can tell us that the Author of Nature has designed us with a purpose and even what this intended purpose may be. However, it is the golden rule that directs us towards this purpose. Consequently, the golden rule completes the impartial spectator's transition from a tool for reflecting social standards and into demigod implanted within the human breast by the Author of Nature. This golden rule ensures that we properly develop our first principles, satisfy our instincts, and express our passions. In doing so this rule facilitates the successful pursuit of

self-perfection and allows us to attain the final cause predetermined for us by the Author of Nature, tranquility (understood as both ease of body and peace of mind). Because they are both designed to direct us to self-perfection, praiseworthiness and the golden rule may be considered synonymous with each other. Both of these concepts are linked to our conscience (*via* the impartial spectator) and both give us a means to develop our moral character without merely conforming to the standards of propriety. Subsequently, a praiseworthy person is any individual who shapes their character and behavior by following the golden rule rather than merely conforming to propriety.

2.6 Happiness and Commercial Society

Though our human nature and subsequent *telos* are universal the path between the two is not. Society has a determining influence on our pursuit of tranquility. The perception of happiness will differ across different societies. Therefore, happiness in a pastoral society may differ in degree and kind to that of a commercial society. To properly understand how we become praiseworthy and attain tranquility we must consider society's formative influence on these pursuits. Understanding how commercial society shapes our teleology helps to explain exactly what this *telos* is, how it can be attained, and who is capable of attaining it. The fundamental affects commercial society has on our pursuit of tranquility is to make it more attainable and accessible. Commercial society accomplishes this by generating opulence, changing social roles, and softening the virtues.

In WN Smith argues that commercial society's defining feature is its division of labor. Though all societies contain some division of labor it reaches its most extreme in commercial society.¹⁸⁷ As a result of this extreme division of labor, tranquility may be more attainable and accessible. The first consequence of the division of labor that affects our pursuit of tranquility is the generation of opulence. The division of labor in commercial society produces an abundance of wealth by creating more goods than other societies are capable of producing through

¹⁸⁷ Smith highlights the extreme division of labor found in commercial society in his analysis of the pin factory (WN, I.1.2).

the increase of dexterity in every particular workman [...] the saving of the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another; and [...] the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labour, and enable one man to do the work of many (WN, I.1.5).

The opulence generated by these three factors makes our *telos* (in commercial society) more attainable and accessible by reducing poverty.¹⁸⁸ In a well governed and ordered commercial society wealth is redistributed, by the invisible hand, in a way that “raises all boats”.¹⁸⁹ Although opulence does not—and should not—create equality it can eliminate *abject* poverty which allows the “meanest labourer” to earn a wage that affords them all the necessities of life.¹⁹⁰ This places ease of body within the grasp of the poor and, in turn, ought to allow them to avoid shame and attain peace of mind. All of this is of course predicated on the markets being truly open and free. If corporations (guilds, merchant groups etc.) exert any undue influence on the markets then the creation of opulence will be stunted. As long as these corporations influence the markets for their benefit commercial society will be incapable of abolishing abject poverty and the path to happiness will remain open to only a select few (i.e. the rich). Thus, in order to properly ensure that abject poverty is eliminated and the pursuit of tranquility is truly opened to everyone mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that corporations do not influence the markets for their own benefit. Much of Smith’s advice in WN is targeted towards this specific problem. WN not only describes how commercial society works but how it can be made to work properly and effectively to ensure that each individual, even the poor, can become happy if they choose to pursue what is praiseworthy rather than mere praise.

In addition to the creation of opulence, commercial society’s division of labor also makes our *telos* more attainable and accessible by altering our social roles. In WN Smith argues that in commercial society “Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant” (WN, I.4.1). In other words, commercial society effectively transforms each individual into a merchant. As merchants each individual subsists by selling something for

¹⁸⁸ The opulence created by commercial society has the potential to eliminate poverty altogether but only if society is perfected.

¹⁸⁹ By well governed and ordered here I mean a commercial society that has “peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice” (Lecture in 1755, quoted in Dugald Stewart, *Account Of The Life And Writings Of Adam Smith LLD*, Section IV, 25.

¹⁹⁰ Some relative poverty will still necessarily exist. Though Smith frequently laments the condition of the poor in WN and TMS he was not an absolute egalitarian.

something else even if this only means selling labor for a wage. The change in social roles affects our pursuit of tranquility by liberating us from direct dependence on the whims and benevolence of other people. Smith's criticism of feudalism in WN establishes his contempt for direct dependence which he ultimately likens to slavery (WN. II.3.9; WN. III.2.9; WN. III.4.6).¹⁹¹ Direct dependence, Smith argues, is undignified and unlikely to provide the proper necessities of life. Consequently, to exclusively rely on the benevolence of others for one's subsistence is incompatible with tranquility. Smith treats this reliance as if it were sub-human, likening the reliant individual to a fawning puppy;

When an animal wants to obtain something either of a man or of another animal, it has no other means of persuasion but to gain the favour of those whose service it requires. A puppy fawns upon its dam, and a spaniel endeavours by a thousand attractions to engage the attention of its master who is at dinner, when it wants to be fed by him. Man sometimes uses the same arts with his brethren, and when he has no other means of engaging them to act according to his inclinations, endeavours by every servile and fawning attention to obtain their good will (WN, I.2.2).

The direct dependence common to pre-commercial societies made it impossible for the large group of dependents to attain tranquility. Humanity's *telos* within pre-commercial societies was only within reach of society's masters. Commercial society, by making everyone effectively a merchant, eliminates this direct dependence and replaces it with mutual interdependence.¹⁹² Each individual in commercial society exchanges some necessary good on the open market and receives something back. Consequently, individuals within commercial society all depend upon each other. For example, laborers need factory owners as much as factory owners need laborers. This change in relationship is much more compatible with the pursuit of tranquility because it allows individuals to speak to each other's self-interest. Speaking to self-interest, Smith argues, is not only more effective at providing individuals with the necessities of life it is also more dignified since it does not require that anyone debase themselves. Consequently, the mutual interdependence created by commercial society opens the pursuit of tranquility to everyone.

¹⁹¹ Though direct dependence is a part of feudalism it is not unique to it. Other societies (eg. pastoral) also contained this type of dependence.

¹⁹² Christopher Berry explains the transition from direct dependence to mutual interdependence in "Adam Smith: Commerce, Liberty, Modernity," in *Philosophers of the Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Gilmour (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), p114-118. Also see Muller p.71-72.

Finally, commercial society makes our *telos* more attainable and accessible by “softening” the virtues.¹⁹³ Commercial society renders the martial and austere virtues of pre-commercial societies obsolete. Smith establishes this point by comparing “civilized” nations (i.e. commercial societies) with “barbarous” nations (i.e. pre-commercial societies). According to Smith in commercial societies

the virtues which are founded upon humanity, are more cultivated than those which are founded upon self-denial and the command of the passions [...] The general security and happiness which prevail in [commercial societies] afford little exercise to the contempt of danger, to patience in enduring labour, hunger and pain [...] The abstinence from pleasure becomes less necessary, and the mind is more at liberty to unbend itself [...] (TMS, 259).

It may also be added that standing armies in commercial society make the martial virtues less common and less necessary among the general population. Compare this with pre-commercial societies where each individual

undergoes a sort of Spartan discipline, and by the necessity of [her] situation is inured to every sort of hardship. [She] is in continual danger; [she] is often exposed to the greatest extremities of hunger, and frequently dies of pure want. [Her] circumstances not only habituate [her] to every sort of distress, but teach [her] to give way to none of the passions which that distress is apt to excite (TMS, 259-260).¹⁹⁴

By softening the virtues commercial society eliminates the (relatively) extreme qualities required for happiness. Subsequently, commercial society makes ease of body and peace of mind more attainable for a wider portion of the population.

Commercial society is far from perfect. It allows inequality to persist and, if poorly governed, can reduce the lower class to a state of perpetual misery and wretchedness. What ultimately vindicates commercial society is its ability to establish the conditions necessary to the pursuit of happiness. Commercial society can only fulfill this promise if it is guided by wise and impartial leadership. Such leadership can prevent partial influences on the market and help to ensure a proper redistribution of wealth. In such circumstances inequality would still persist yet it would not necessarily be morally significant. Individuals in commercial society may be less wealthy than others yet still capable of attaining ease of body and peace of mind. Also important is the fact that commercial society does not force anyone to become directly, and necessarily,

¹⁹³ See Muller p.8 and Fleischacker p.78.

¹⁹⁴ Here Smith is clearly referring to a specific type of pre-commercial society. This description contains obvious exaggerations yet as an example of the difference between commercial and pre-commercial mores it suffices.

dependent on a master. Instead commercial society gives each person the opportunity to retain their dignity by participating in a complex web of mutual interdependence. Thus, commercial society not only shapes the virtues by softening them, removing their martial and austere edges, it also establishes the conditions necessary for each individual, regardless of social rank, to pursue their *telos* should they choose to.

Conclusion

Imagination is capable of revealing the nature of the universe to us as well as our intended purpose in this universe. Subsequently, we can use our imagination to understand what the Author of Nature's plan is for us and how we can attain it. Smith argues that humans have been designed by this Author to pursue and attain tranquility. This tranquility consists of both ease of body and peace of mind and subsequently requires several physical and psychological components. In order for us to pursue our *telos* we must live in a peaceful and ordered society with a modest amount of wealth. Additionally, we must be sure that we are good people while also cultivating meaningful relationships with others. When these pre-conditions are properly satisfied we will be capable of successfully pursuing tranquility.

The pursuit of our *telos* is shaped by two factors. According to Smith ability to understand the universe and our place within it is limited. The flawed nature of our moral faculties ensures that we will only ever attain approximate understandings of our *telos*. These approximations may improve over time as we gather more evidence and insight but we will never truly acquire a perfect understanding of the Author of Nature's providential design. Additionally, Smith argues that the particular type of society will shape our understanding of our *telos* and how it is attained. This includes *who* is capable of attaining this *telos*. According to Smith, commercial society makes tranquility more attainable and accessible by softening the virtues, creating opulence, and liberating us from direct dependence. Consequently, everyone in commercial society has a reasonable opportunity to attain self-perfection and live a life of tranquility and enjoyment. Because Smith's teleology is contingent it is possible for self-perfection to vary across both time and space. Although there will likely be great similarities, different societies around the world and at different points in history will have different understandings of self-perfection. However, we can still make moral evaluations about these

understandings by judging how close they approximate the Author of Nature's design (as we understand it).¹⁹⁵

We pursue our *telos* (i.e. happiness *via* self-perfection) when our authoritative conscience acts as a demigod and speaks to us with the voice of Nature. When our impartial spectator takes on this demigod role it directs us away from the flawed conventions of propriety and towards praiseworthiness. To accomplish this, our conscience compels us to obey the golden rule, which Smith claims represents the perfection of our nature. The golden rule perfects our moral faculties by bringing our two first principles (self-interest and beneficence) into harmony with each other. When we love others and ourselves properly these principles become complimentary and we develop the qualities of characters that bring us ease of body and peace of mind. Thus, by adhering to the golden rule we become praiseworthy and live a life of virtue and tranquility.

¹⁹⁵ Smith seems to take for granted that the progress of knowledge will necessarily lead to better, more complete, understandings of Nature's design.

Moral Corruption as False Teleology

3.0 Introduction

A second major addition to the 1790 version of TMS is Smith's theory of moral corruption. Smith laid the groundwork for this theory in prior editions, however, in the 6th edition he expands on the causes and consequences of moral corruption.¹⁹⁶ I understand Smith's theory of moral corruption as a *false teleology*. This creates a false belief about the nature and content of happiness which places us on a path leading to misery. This mistaken belief about happiness is produced by our sympathy with the rich and great.¹⁹⁷ This sympathy diverts us away from our intended natural pursuit of tranquility by convincing us that the rich and great are truly happy *and* that we would be happy as well if we were as rich and great as them. As a consequence of this conviction we admire and subsequently emulate them.¹⁹⁸ Our admiration of the rich and great is ultimately what creates a false *telos* in our minds while our emulation puts us in pursuit of this *telos*. This pursuit distorts the voice of Nature by transforming our desire to be praiseworthy into a love of praise.¹⁹⁹ Subsequently, our conscience is no longer guided by the golden rule. Instead, our now distorted conscience guides us towards whatever will satisfy our corrupt desire for praise. Our admiration of the rich and great and subsequent corruption is facilitated by both natural and social forces. The intersection of natural human frailty and economic inequality creates the false teleology and corrupts our moral sentiments.²⁰⁰ The most

¹⁹⁶ The inclusion of a new chapter on corruption in TMS' 6th edition may reaffirm the need to develop an authoritative, independent conscience. This addition reasserts propriety's inability to direct us to our *telos*. See Forman-Barzilai (2010) p.106. Similarly, in "Smith, Rousseau, and the Republic of Needs" (1986) Ignatieff argues that Smith shared Rousseau's fundamentally Stoic belief that conventions created corruption (p.201-202).

¹⁹⁷ Hereafter I refer to the "rich and great" as the "rich and *famous*". Smith's discussion of the great in TMS indicates he means the individuals who routinely attract our attention; the fact that they are also powerful is secondary to this concern. For a recent examination of Smith's concerns with greatness and fortune see Roberts, *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life; An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature and Happiness*, (London: Portfolio Publishing, 2014). See also Hanley (2009) p.51 for the ill effects of our admiration of the rich and indifference to the poor.

¹⁹⁸ Griswold (1999) argues that this corruption is circular; inevitably we admire the rich and famous *because* they are admired (p.127-128).

¹⁹⁹ Force (2003) stresses Smith's argument that the love of praise is derived from the natural desire to be praiseworthy (p.66).

²⁰⁰ The secondary literature tends to focus more on the imperfections in our nature than any societal causes of corruption. Griswold (1999) highlights the tension between our pursuit of happiness and our capacity for self-delusion (p.16). Evensky (2005) argues that our natural frailty conflicts with our natural progress towards universal opulence (p.28). Fleischacker (2004) discusses the role our sentiments play in pushing us away from happiness (p.5). Similarly, Haakonssen (1981) refers to Smith's "double-edged skepticism" and the unavoidable role the

immediate and significant consequence of corruption is the perversion of our natural sense of praiseworthiness. The desire to be rich and great so that we can attain praise makes us vain. This vanity conflicts with the conditions required for ease of body and peace of mind. Moreover, this vanity makes us both anxious and lonely and consequently makes us miserable.²⁰¹

Analyses of Smith's theory of moral corruption in the secondary literature can be separated into three different camps.²⁰² The first of these is the republican readings which characterize Smith's theory of corruption as political in nature and consequence.²⁰³ Marxist readings of Smith present a different analysis of corruption.²⁰⁴ A common component of these analyses is the belief that Smith provides a proto-Marxist theory of alienation that has both moral and political consequences.²⁰⁵ The third analyses of moral corruption are the psychological readings.²⁰⁶ This portion of the literature characterizes corruption as a problem that inflicts the human being *qua* human being.²⁰⁷ Accordingly, Hanley (2009) has argued that republican and Marxist readings of moral corruption focus on how it affects humans in certain specific roles. He argues that the republican literature focuses on the role of individuals as citizen-soldiers while the Marxist readings focus on their role as laborers.²⁰⁸ Such an approach would ignore the other important roles and capacities affected by corruption (e.g. friends, relatives, and private individuals). I agree with Hanley and other psychological readings of Smith's theory of

sentiments play in diverting us away from happiness. There is no disputing the role our imperfect nature plays in corrupting our morals; however, all of this only occurs within the context of an imperfect society.

²⁰¹ For the connection between moral corruption and vanity see Hanley (2009) p.37-38. Hanley links the vain desire for attention and praise to anxiety and misery.

²⁰² In "Adam Smith and the Theme of Corruption," *Review of Politics* 68 (2006): 636-62 Lisa Hill provides a useful breakdown of the literature's treatment of Smith's theory of corruption. Hill considers this theory to be an eclectic or hybrid of both classical theories and more modern (i.e. proto-Marxist) theories (p.646). Hill inevitably relies on a political understanding of Smith's theory.

²⁰³ These readings focus on the decline of civic duties and institutions. See Justman, *The Autonomous Male of Adam Smith* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Winch (1978) in *Adam Smith's Politics*; Montes (2004), *Smith in Context* esp. 57-69; Phillipson, "Smith as Civic Moralist" in *Wealth and Virtue* p.179-181; and Berry, "Adam Smith and the Virtues of Commerce," in *NOMOS XXXIV: Virtue*, 75, 82-84. A particular focal point of these authors is the decline of the so-called "martial virtues" in commercial society,

²⁰⁴ For a detailed comparison between Smith and Marx see Meek, "Smith and Marx," in *Smith, Marx, and After* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1977) p.3-17.

²⁰⁵ Lamb discusses the topic of alienation and the effects of the division of labor in Smith's writings in "Adam Smith's Concept of Alienation," *Oxford Economic Papers* 25, (1973): p.275-285.

²⁰⁶ See Hanley (2009) p.24-36. Griswold's (1999) interpretation of moral corruption is psychological, focusing on how beauty deceives our imagination and causes us to pursue the wrong things.

²⁰⁷ See Hanley's (2009) argument that Smith is concerned with the "mental mutilation" caused by corruption (p.33-34).

²⁰⁸ See Hanley p.32.

corruption. Additionally, I believe that both the republican and Marxist interpretations suffer from a similar flaw; trying to fit Smith's theory of corruption into their pre-existing ideological frameworks.²⁰⁹ As a consequence the actual contours of Smith's theory are distorted so that it may more accurately reflect the given ideology. Although there are identifiable political consequences to corruption, these are secondary to its psychological causes and consequences. It is only after corruption becomes a part of propriety that it becomes a political problem worthy of the legislator's attention.²¹⁰

All three of the approaches to understanding Smith's theory of corruption share a similar weakness. They pay insufficient attention to its causes, instead opting to focus on its consequences (i.e. symptoms).²¹¹ By neglecting the potential causes of corruption we run the risk of misdiagnosing its symptoms and wrongly attributing moral ills to our undue admiration of the rich and great. Simultaneously, ignoring the cause(s) of corruption may obscure significant symptoms that are definitively linked to it. Additionally, insufficient attention to corruption's causes may have serious consequences for our understanding of its potential remedies. Though an essential contribution to the literature on Smith, Hanley's approach in *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* provides a litany of symptoms he associates with corruption without thoroughly connecting them to their potential cause.²¹² This amounts to a list of moral failings that may or may not be sourced to the pursuit of greatness and fortune. Hanley provides no convincing explanation for how these symptoms are generated by our corruption. Furthermore, this perfunctory treatment of corruption's causes is reflected in his proposed solution. According to Hanley Smith's solution to corruption was a re-education of self-love that begins with directing vanity towards proper (i.e. more natural) things.²¹³ Ultimately Hanley outlines a

²⁰⁹While the Marxist readings clearly try to label Smith as a proto-Marxist the republican readings aim to fit Smith neatly within Pocock's republican views.

²¹⁰ The inevitability of propriety's corruption makes the distortion of our moral sentiments an even greater problem than Smith may have recognized.

²¹¹The republican readings of moral corruption tend to focus on the decay of civic duty and institutions with a particular focus on how it impacts the martial virtues. See, Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For their part, Marxists focus on the negative impact the acute division of labor has on the individual. Although I agree with Hanley's interpretation of corruption as psychological he is too often focused on its symptoms. For example, Hanley lists so many negative consequences to corruption it is difficult to imagine we could go on living together (or with ourselves) once we have been corrupted.

²¹² See p.52 for the long list of symptoms Hanley links to our admiration and emulation of the rich and great.

²¹³ See p.92-99.

solution to corruption that would rid the individual of various moral ills without properly treating the underlying vanity, leaving them to continue a life of misery. To avoid these problems I believe it is essential to begin any discussion on moral corruption with a thorough examination of its causes. By doing so I hope to provide a more convincing account of how it makes us miserable and, later, how it might be remedied.

There are specific conditions that facilitate our admiration of the rich and great. Understanding these conditions reveals some potential means for overcoming corruption. Similarly, these help to explain why the rich and great are such enticing subjects for our sympathy and subsequent admiration and emulation. Some of these conditions are natural. Paradoxically, though the Author of Nature has constructed us to pursue and attain tranquility it has also implanted within us certain imperfections that work against this design.²¹⁴ Often these imperfections have beneficial unintended consequences that, in the grand scheme, contribute more to happiness than misery. However, some of these imperfections are in direct conflict with our pursuit of happiness and help to explain why it is we admire and emulate the rich. It is also possible that human frailty only contributes to our corruption and misery under certain social conditions. One of these conditions is economic inequality. The often drastic differences in material wealth found in commercial society may play a significant role in directing our attention and admiration towards the rich and great. However, despite its potential role in making us miserable, inequality is an essential feature of commercial society.²¹⁵ Consequently, inequality cannot be eliminated without also abandoning commercial society and all of its benefits.

Vanity is the primary symptom of moral corruption. In TMS Smith characterizes vanity as a desire for, and pursuit of, undeserved praise. This desire is a product of our belief that the rich and great are happy because of the attention and praise they receive. Our transformation into vain, praise seeking, individuals comes at the expense of our natural praiseworthiness. This redirects us away from the golden rule and the perfection of our moral faculties. Rather than having our impartial spectator speak to us with the voice of Nature, corruption compels us to

²¹⁴ Griswold (1999) argues that our natural (and intense) desire for approval contributes to corruption. Similarly, Alvey (2003) argues that “Nature seems to provide a disposition which drives [us] away from the just sentiments of the impartial spectator (p.180).

²¹⁵ On the necessity of inequality see Hanley, p. 16-17; Rasmussen (2005) p.103; and Muller, “The Portrait and the Painter,” *Adam Smith Review* 2 (2006): 229-230.

seek out what we believe will be praised. Smith believes that this vain pursuit of praise makes us anxious.²¹⁶ Additionally, our vain pursuit of greatness and fortune sacrifices our benevolent tendencies. Greatness and fortune are entirely self-interested goods that are compatible with the pursuit of praiseworthiness. However, when greatness and fortune are pursued for the purpose of attaining praise we run the risk of becoming selfish.²¹⁷ This selfishness conflicts with the development of meaningful relationships with other people which inevitably leads to loneliness. It is the anxiety and loneliness created by vanity that makes us (and potentially those around us) miserable.

The greatest threat posed by moral corruption is the possibility that it may infect propriety and make vanity an inescapable part of everyday life. Given the flaws inherent in propriety there is no reason to believe its standards would be immune to the detrimental effects of corruption. Like the acceptance of infanticide in ancient Greece as a social norm, vanity would become a part of propriety as soon as a certain portion of the population began pursuing greatness and fortune rather than ease of body and peace of mind. Such an infection would expose an entire population to anxiety, loneliness, and misery. However, the danger posed by widespread vanity goes beyond the misery of a population. Making the admiration and emulation of the rich and great a part of propriety may also make us vicious.²¹⁸ Corruption may accomplish these by perpetuating and validating the vices of avarice, vain-glory, and ambition.

Smith's willingness to blame corruption and subsequent misery on the conventions of commercial society is essential to understanding the importance and purpose of an authoritative conscience and subsequent pursuit of self-perfection. Smith's critique of the false teleology that distorts our natural desire to be praiseworthy is his diagnosis of the ills that can be escaped by following the golden rule and perfecting our moral faculties and character. Furthermore, understanding corruption's causes and symptoms contextualizes the virtues outlined later in

²¹⁶ As Hanley points out, Smith's understanding of vanity is indebted to Rousseau's theory of *amour-propre* (p.36). Both are dependent on attaining the praise of others in order to be satisfied.

²¹⁷ Griswold argues that this selfishness is "key to the conflicted and dissolving nature of human life" (p.81). In other words, the advent of selfishness puts us at odds with others and with ourselves.

²¹⁸ For some insights into the possible connection between corruption and vice see Hanley p.39-44.

TMS. These cardinal virtues (i.e. prudence, benevolence, self-command) provide a remedy for corruption.

3.1 The Genesis of Corruption

Smith lays the groundwork for the genesis of corruption prior to the 6th edition.²¹⁹ However, he goes into more specific and critical detail in I.III.3 of TMS, an addition to the 6th edition of the book. As the title of this chapter makes clear our propensity to admire the wealthy and powerful (a propensity made stronger by our aversion to the poor and weak) leads to vanity and the plethora of subsequent moral ills. There are a few plausible explanations for why Smith was motivated to add this chapter.²²⁰ The content certainly makes it appear as though Smith had grown increasingly dissatisfied with commercial society and its influence on morals. I.III.3 of TMS stands as his ultimate diagnosis of these moral ills. Accordingly he argues the “disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect [...] persons of poor and mean condition [...] is [...] the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (TMS, 73). Smith adds to this diagnosis later in the chapter by contending that “it is scarce agreeable to good morals [...] to say that mere wealth and greatness, abstracted from merit and virtue, deserves our respect” (TMS, 75). This final point makes it clear that we do not admire the rich and powerful because of their moral superiority but, rather, merely because of their wealth.²²¹ Furthermore, while something about the lives of the rich and powerful pulls us towards them in the form of admiration our aversion to poverty and weakness simultaneously pushes us in that direction.

It is our admiration of the rich and great that generates the false *telos* and diverts us from our pursuit of virtue and tranquility. Smith defines admiration as “approbation, mixed and

²¹⁹ In Part I Section III Smith outlines the potential dangers associated with idolizing our superiors (i.e. the rich and great). In the two chapters that predate the 6th edition Smith seems more concerned with the servility and obsequiousness. Thus, Smith’s concerns over misdirected admiration and emulation began forming before the 6th edition of TMS. However, in the additions to this final edition Smith provides a more focused and specific theory of corruption that targets our love of the rich and great. This appears to be a reflection of his growing dissatisfaction with the course and development of commercial society.

²²⁰ Fleischaker (2004) argues that Smith may have been directly responding to the impact commercial development was having on Glasgow at the time. Hill (2006) argues that Smith’s “main purpose in writing about corruption was to confront and criticize the corrupt yet legal norms of the elite class” (p.651).

²²¹ Griswold argues that we are attracted to the “intrinsic fineness” of the “trinkets” the rich and famous possess (p.222). Subsequently, he characterizes corruption as an aesthetic deception (p.220-223).

animated by wonder and surprise” (TMS, 39). We admire the rich and great because they appear to be happy.²²² Conversely, we detest the poor because they appear to be miserable.²²³ The admiration of the rich and great and indifference to the poor holds true across all levels of society. The former may admire themselves while the latter feel ashamed and hate themselves. Furthermore, our love for the rich and shame for the poor unavoidably compound each other. Our admiration of the rich and great is magnified by our indifference to the poor and *vice versa*. The reason we believe the rich and great are happy, and thus worthy of our admiration, is because their wealth makes them the focus of attention.²²⁴ Accordingly, we believe the poor are miserable, and despise them, because of their poverty and consequent anonymity. Whether or not the rich and great are actually happy is unimportant; all that matters is that their wealth gives them the *appearance* of happiness. The same holds true for our detestation of the poor; so long as they appear to be miserable we will think of them as such. According to Smith the rich and great are not, in general, necessarily any happier than their poor counterparts.²²⁵ Moreover, if they *are* happy it is not because of their wealth (and the attention this draws upon them) but for other reasons, i.e., because they happen to be virtuous. Indeed, it may be the case that any rich and powerful individual who has attained tranquility may have done so *in spite* of their wealth rather than because of it. Similarly, though their lack of wealth certainly does not help, the poor are not necessarily miserable and though it may take considerable effort they are capable of attaining tranquility. Regardless of whether or not the rich and great are happy, what gives them the appearance of happiness, their wealth, is what invokes our admiration. This appearance of happiness is so strong that, in the minds of the masses, wealth and happiness become synonymous. Consequently, our admiration of the rich replaces our intended *telos* of tranquility with the false *telos* of wealth and greatness.

Although Smith does not conflate wealth with happiness, it seems clear that the rich and great enjoy at least half of what constitutes tranquility. The wealth these individuals possess

²²² This relates to our natural flaws discussed in chapter two. Our inability to properly distinguish between appearance and reality tricks us into believing the rich and great are truly happy. Smith argues that the rich are not actually happier than other members of society, but, they do “possess more means of happiness” (TMS, 213).

²²³ We believe the poor are miserable largely because of their anonymity. This anonymity, Hanley argues, is as “painful as any material injustice” (p.51).

²²⁴ These individuals are also powerful; however, they are typically powerful because of their wealth.

²²⁵ Smith describes the belief that the rich and great are necessarily happy because of their wealth as a “prejudice of the imagination” (TMS, 65).

ensures they will never go without necessities or luxuries while simultaneously granting them a great deal of leisure time. In addition to enjoying obvious material advantages over the poor, the rich and great also appear to have attained peace of mind. The constant attention the rich and great receive is what gives us the erroneous impression that these individuals are tranquil. This attention typically comes in the form of praise, which indicates the rich and great are loved by a large portion of society.²²⁶ A significant portion of happiness is our desire to be approved of and, more importantly, to believe that we are worthy of this approval.²²⁷ Believing that we are worthy of approbation and love contributes to our tranquility of mind by giving us a clear conscience. However, although we lavish the rich and great with attention and love Smith argues that they are not truly worthy of these. Smith's belief that the rich and great are unworthy of our approbation is established by his critique of their lifestyle.²²⁸ Smith criticizes the lifestyle of the rich in both WN and TMS. In WN Smith highlights the greed of the rich and powerful by arguing "all for ourselves and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind" (WN, III.4.10). Within TMS Smith refers to the rich and great in a contemptuous tone, often characterizing them as vain and effeminate. For instance, Smith condemns the fashion setting ways of the rich as empty vanity divorced from all merit and respect (TMS, 76). Moreover, it also appears as though the rich do not receive the clear conscience that praise should afford them. Smith characterizes much of the love and attention the rich and great receive as empty flattery. Thus, although they may be consistently praised the rich and great may be intuitively aware that this praise is meaningless.²²⁹ Even the most accomplished vain and flattered individual is aware, within their own conscience, they are

²²⁶ See Griswold p.36. Accordingly, Alvey (2003) argues that we love riches because of the attention and love they bring us (p.59).

²²⁷ This desire for approval is part of our natural need for mutual sympathy. This need for mutual sympathy often takes the form of a desire to be loved and to be worthy of love. These are linked to our desire for praise and praiseworthiness. The desire for love and the desire to be worthy of it directly correspond to our desire for praise and our desire to be worthy of this praise. However, Griswold argues that the need for mutual sympathy plays a substantial role in our corruption, claiming that "the intensity of our desire for attention and approbation" may cause us to "take the short-cut to riches and power" (p.127-128).

²²⁸ Smith routinely criticizes the "vulgarity" of the rich. See Hanley, p.16-17.

²²⁹ This calls in to question why the rich and great would continue to pursue empty praise. There are two potential answers to this question. First, because the mere existence of their wealth ensures they will be loved and admired the rich and great have little incentive to change their behaviors and pursue praiseworthiness. This seems especially important when we consider that, according to Smith, the "vices and follies" of these individuals are frequently downplayed or ignored (TMS, 74). Additionally, Smith argues that it is easier to receive attention for being rich and great than it is for being wise and virtuous (Ibid).

undeserving of the love and attention society bestows upon them (TMS, 77-78).²³⁰ Such awareness is clearly antithetical to our peace of mind. Similarly, the great are often undeserving of any praise because they are frequently guilty of great and horrible crimes. At several points in TMS Smith references an individual perceived as great while also noting their frequently violent accomplishments.²³¹ The effect of these references is to convince the reader that the great often achieve their status through unworthy means. Finally, Smith uses examples of individuals who have built their esteem and reputation on hollow ground. Smith routinely mocks individuals such as the “man of fashion” who uses empty flattery and “frivolous accomplishments” to attract the attention and praise of others (TMS, 76). Similarly, Smith uses the derisive term “coxcomb” to describe individuals who employ vain and empty means to increase their public perception (TMS, 68; 138). These individuals achieve their greatness through empty frivolities rather than virtue and wisdom. Ultimately the unworthiness of those we hold in high regard is a recurrent theme in TMS.²³² If we were better equipped to properly determine who was worthy of admiration corruption might not exist.

Finally, if we were merely compelled to admire the rich and great then such admiration would not necessarily be corruptive. It is possible that we could admire these individuals while pursuing virtue and tranquility ourselves. What ultimately makes our admiration of the rich and great corruptive is our capacity for emulation. When given the opportunity to emulate the rich and great or the wise and virtuous, Smith claims we would chose the former. Accordingly, he argues that,

Two different characters are presented to our emulation; the one, of proud ambition and ostentatious avidity; the other of humble modesty and equitable justice. Two different models, two different pictures, are held out to us, according to which we fashion our own character and behavior; the one more gaudy and glittering in its colouring; the other more correct and more exquisite in its outline: the one forcing itself upon the notice of every wandering eye; the other, attracting the attention of scarce any body but the most studious and careful observer. They are the wise and the virtuous chiefly, a select, though, I am afraid, a small party, who are the real and steady admirers of wisdom and virtue. The great mob of mankind are the admirers and worshippers, and, what may seem more

²³⁰ This principle works both ways. Thus, Griswold argues that “no one can completely ignore unmerited reproach or the absence of merited praise” (p.133). This helps to explain why following potentially corrupted propriety may be enticing to certain individuals.

²³¹ Smith’s harshest criticism occurs when he accuses the rich and great of frequently resorting to “fraud and falsehood” and other “enormous crimes” to establish and secure their station in life (p.77).

²³² This is embodied in Smith’s derision of both “Lewis XIV” and “Lewis the Thirteenth (TMS, 67;76).

extraordinary, most frequently the disinterested admirers and worshippers, of wealth and greatness (TMS, 74).

These diverging paths of emulation appear in the 6th edition and help to explain why propriety is not sufficient to promote or sustain happiness. Propriety provides no direction on which character we should emulate and thus which path to follow. All propriety can do is tell us what type of character has been admired and emulated in the past. Additionally, this statement bolsters Smith's belief that it is the appearance of happiness that distracts us away from our natural path. The lives of the rich and great are "gaudy and glittering" and from a superficial perspective appear to satisfy all the requirements of happiness. Our admiration of the rich is what places the false impression of happiness into our imagination and our emulation puts us on the path in pursuit of this false *telos*.

The material and psychological disparities between the rich and poor is a recurring theme in TMS that predates the 6th edition. Though he retained his support for a class system, Smith evidently held some sympathy for the poor. This sympathy is coupled with a disdain for the rich and great's lifestyle. Prior to the 6th edition of TMS Smith's judgments on these disparities were rather benign; he laments the condition of the poor and chastises the rich and great but he does not describe it as a serious moral problem nor does he offer a serious solution. However, within the context of TMS' final edition this gap between the poor and anonymous and the rich and great becomes the primary source for commercial society's moral problems. Furthermore, the disparities between these two stations present major obstacles to both the poor and the rich. Regardless of which class one is born into, the opportunity and temptation to follow a false *telos* will present itself. In commercial society, neither the poor nor the rich are likely to successfully attain ease of body and peace of mind. Instead both are likely to be deluded by the appearance of happiness and make themselves miserable in the vain pursuit of wealth, power, and greatness. It follows from all of this that virtue and happiness are most attainable within the so-called "middling classes" of society.²³³ Individuals within the middle class are fortunate enough to be capable of avoiding both the distractions of wealth and the desperation of poverty. This middling class is, in effect, the moderate class; their modest wealth ensures they can satisfy the requirements for ease of body without the distractions or inflammations of desire that plague the

²³³ Smith claims that for the middling class the "road to virtue and that to fortune [...] are, happily, in most cases, very nearly the same" (TMS, 75).

rich and great. Similarly, the middling class is not forced into anonymity; their moderate station in life should afford them some attention and esteem yet not so much as to spoil them into a state of obscene vanity.²³⁴ It should also follow from all of this that the best, happiest, and possibly least corrupt society is one with a large and thriving middle class.

3.2 Frailty and Inequality

Moral corruption is essentially a product of choosing bad role models.²³⁵ Instead of modeling our character after the wise and virtuous we choose the rich and great because of a delusion in our imagination that tricks us into believing this will make us happy (TMS, 65). Smith contends that this poor choice in role models is a product of our deluded imaginations.²³⁶ This pursuit does not occur in complete isolation. There are both natural and social factors that contribute to the delusion of our imagination and subsequent corruption of our sentiments. Smith makes the case in TMS that we are especially bad at distinguishing appearance from reality.²³⁷ This appears to be especially true with regards to who we believe deserves admiration and emulation. There are several components of our nature that would seem to contribute to this confusion over appearance and reality. For instance, our capacity for self-delusion may cause us to be mistaken about the quality of our own character and lifestyle. Similarly, the envy we are apt to feel when someone close to us had a drastic change in fortune prevents us from making proper judgments about the nature of happiness.²³⁸

The most important part of our nature that contributes to our confusion on the reality of happiness is our aversion to pain and attraction to pleasure. It is this that causes us to associate happiness with the rich and great and misery with the poor. Ironically, Smith argues that the

²³⁴ Respectable behavior and moderate virtue appear to be enough for the middle class to garner sufficient attention from others. According to Smith the middling class knows that they cannot attain success or the “good opinion of their neighbours” without “tolerably regular conduct” (Ibid.).

²³⁵ According to Muller (1993) having the rich as role models would be “disastrous” for commercial society (p.138).

²³⁶ Griswold argues that in some way a product of self-deception; claiming that this deception causes us to erroneously associate happiness with greatness and fortune (p.16). Later he suggests that this deception continues because our deluded imagination convinces us we will be happy if only we can actually become rich and famous (p.262). Alvey argues that this delusion is a product of wanting the wrong types of things (p.180). He adds that this is a problem most people suffer from, not just one particular class.

²³⁷ According to Griswold this is a problem associated with our sentiments being incapable of distinguishing reality from appearance (p.128).

²³⁸ Smith claims that great changes in fortune often generate the selfish passion of envy (TMS, 51). Later he adds that “sudden changes in fortune seldom contribute much to happiness” (TMS, 52).

Author of Nature gave us these impulses to ensure our happiness.²³⁹ However, in commercial society these tendencies push us away from our intended *telos* and towards a false one which warps our natural desire to be praiseworthy into a desire for praise. The specific quality of commercial society that does this is its often extreme—and necessary—inequality. Although commercial society can—and should—eliminate the worst forms of poverty it cannot eliminate inequality altogether. Consequently, some people will live a life of luxury and ease while many more will toil away in complete obscurity. This drastic distinction in the qualities of life inevitably contributes to the delusion of our imagination and begins the process of corruption.

Smith highlights our inability to distinguish appearance from reality in his discussion on our natural deference to superiors.²⁴⁰ According to Smith this deference helps to promote the internal peace and order of society. Consequently, our propensity to defer (and ultimately respect) our superiors ought to help our pursuit of tranquility rather than hinder it. The peace and order of society is dependent on a distinction of ranks and a subsequent respect for these distinctions.²⁴¹ We were designed by Nature to live—and achieve happiness—in societies free from conflict and turmoil. If individuals refuse to respect and defer to the position and authority of civil magistrates, judges, and legislators then the peace and order required for the cultivation of virtue and attainment of tranquility would be impossible. Additionally, our natural respect and deference to superiors aids in our pursuit of happiness by inspiring us to emulate these superiors. Without this natural respect for our superiors and deference we may never aspire to be anything more than what we already are. In other words, the respect of, and deference to, our superiors may be a motivating force in the pursuit of our *telos*. However, our inability to properly identify our true superiors often brings this deference into conflict with our pursuit of happiness.

Our desire to be superior, like those who we respect and defer to, may ultimately put us on the path to virtue. However, as Smith eventually points out in the 6th edition of TMS, this

²³⁹ “It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow”, Smith argues, “that we parade our riches and conceal our poverty” (TMS, 62). Furthermore, due to this imbalance in sympathy with joy and sorrow we ambitiously pursue riches so we need not experience the displeasures of the latter.

²⁴⁰ What constitutes “superior” depends on context. In the context of the “distinction of ranks” and the order of society superiority seems to refer to wealth, greatness and (by extension) authority.

²⁴¹ Accordingly, Alvey claims that Nature gave us a respect for hierarchy so we can be happy. (p.31). Paradoxically, this respectful quality also leads to corruption.

respect and deference may also put us on the path to misery and vice. First, the degree to which this deference may manifest can be harmful to our pursuit of happiness. According to Smith our natural propensity to defer to our (supposed) superiors often manifests as obsequiousness. Smith argues that this obsequiousness can be so severe that

[a] stranger to human nature, who saw the indifference of men about the misery of their inferiors, and the regret and indignation which they feel for the misfortunes and suffering of those above them, would be apt to imagine, that pain must be more agonizing, and the convulsions of death more terrible to persons of higher rank, than those of meaner stations (TMS, 65).

Smith adds to this by pointing out that “[all] the innocent blood that was shed in the civil wars, provoked less indignation than the death of Charles I” (Ibid). This servility is incompatible with happiness because it is undignified. Treating our superiors with unrestrained deference diminishes our own rank and station and communicates to others, and ourselves, that we do not appropriately value and esteem ourselves. Thus, obsequiousness to superiors conflicts with our desire for peace of mind by diminishing our self-worth. Additionally, our excessive deference may also have political consequences. According to Smith, obsequiousness may convince our rulers that we serve them when in reality they ought to serve us.²⁴² Excessive deference to superiors may be one of the cornerstones of tyranny.

Our misdirected and excessive deference might not occur if it were not for our confusion about the true nature of happiness. The root of this confusion is our aversion to pain and attraction to pleasure. When sympathizing with other individuals these appear as an aversion to sorrow (a type of mental pain) and an attraction to joy (mental pleasure).²⁴³ Subsequently, we try to avoid sympathizing with anyone experiencing any kind of pain or sorrow, while we actively sympathize with pleasure and joy (unless we are envious of the other person). This ensures we will not needlessly make ourselves miserable by absorbing every bit of pain we encounter throughout our lives. Without this natural limitation our tranquility—especially peace of mind—

²⁴² Paradoxically, Smith argues that “kings are the servants of the people, to be obeyed, resisted, deposed, or punished, as the public conveniency may require, is the doctrine of reason and philosophy; but it is not the doctrine of Nature” (TMS, 65-66).

²⁴³ Griswold has highlighted the joy we are apt to feel when we sympathize with the rich and famous and how this pleasure contributes to corruption (p.127). Conversely, Hanley discusses the pain we may feel when sympathizing with the poor, going so far as to argue that the “blessings of tranquility pale in comparison to the ignominy suffered by those the world has forgotten” (p.37). Consequently, we become indifferent to the poor so we do not share in their anguish.

would be impossible. Our attraction to joy helps us to more readily sympathize with other people's joy which enlivens both their pleasure and our own. The joy we share with a person helps to partly explain why we may act benevolently. We contribute to the well-being of another in part because we get to share in any joy that follows. This pleasure/pain principle is fundamental to Smith's moral theory. It helps explain why we desire mutual sympathy and, in part, why we adhere to the standards of propriety. However, in the context of the 6th edition this pleasure/pain principle becomes significant to Smith's theory of moral corruption.²⁴⁴ Our attraction to joy/pleasure inspires us to sympathize and subsequently admire the rich and great while simultaneously our aversion to pain causes us to become apathetic towards the poor.

Our aversion to sorrow not only restricts our sympathy with those who are suffering it can also cause us to ignore them. In commercial society the group that tends to suffer most routinely is the poor and thus, we imagine, do not suffer at all. Our indifference to the poor motivates us to more eagerly sympathize and identify with the rich and great and the joys they experience—or at least the joys we *imagine* they experience. Thus, we admire the rich and emulate them in large part because they are not poor. We subsequently come to associate everything good and worthy with the rich and become blind to any possible benefits attached to the condition of the poor. We erroneously associate everything the poor experience with misery. Simultaneously we not only exaggerate the benefits of wealth, we also ignore any potential disadvantages attached to it. Though our aversion to sorrow and attraction to joy are necessary to our happiness they also play a role in deceiving us about its true nature. By giving us the illusion that happiness and wealth are synonymous our attraction to pleasure (and aversion to pain) contributes to our adoption of a false *telos*. With a more balanced sympathy we may not imagine that the rich *and only* the rich were truly happy and we may not be so repulsed by the condition of the poor. Our attraction to joy and aversion to sorrow also carries significance for any possible resolution to corruption. To restore our authoritative conscience and redirect it back towards the Author of Nature's plan we see and appreciate the pleasure in living a life of virtue and the potential pain inherent to a life of vanity.

²⁴⁴ In the 6th edition of TMS Smith argues that our hatred and neglect of the poor is necessary to the distinction of ranks and order of society but that it also contributes to the corruption of our sentiments (TMS, 73).

In TMS Smith represents humans as conflicted creatures. On the one hand, we were designed purposefully by Nature so that we could live together peacefully in societies where we can generate prosperity and happiness. It is within these societies that we build families, cultivate friendships and develop into citizens. In short, in society we are able to identify, pursue, and attain our *telos* and become truly happy. Conversely, our natural attraction to pleasure, aversion to pain, and deference to superiors make moral corruption possible. This corruption diverts us away from our intended *telos* and consequently makes us miserable and potentially vicious. Smith provides no substantial or convincing argument as to why Nature created such imperfect and conflicted creatures.. Regardless, what seems to be apparent is that Smith was not a determinist. Though we were created with a purpose—and the means to fulfill this purpose—we must play an active role in its fulfillment. To attain our *telos* we must actively overcome our imperfections and consciously pursue tranquility *via* praiseworthiness and the golden rule. The imperfections of our nature that potentially contribute to our corruption listed here is not exhaustive. For example, the desire to better our condition—largely discussed by Smith in WN—may also, when misdirected, contribute to our corruption. However, the components discussed here are the ones that are most directly relevant to the specific changes Smith made to TMS’ final edition and the particular theory of moral corruption found therein. The imperfections Smith assigned to humans can be found in the first five editions of TMS. However, how these combine to direct us away from the happiness Nature has designed us to attain, and how we might overcome these flaws, only becomes clear in the 6th edition. Moreover, none of these components of our nature necessarily contribute to corruption on their own. More often than not there are social forces that push us in the direction of corruption. Thus, in order to understand what causes individuals to adopt and pursue a false *telos* we need to examine exactly what it is about commercial society that makes admiring and emulating the rich so inviting.

The specific element of commercial society that contributes to corruption is inequality. Without an unequal distribution of wealth our attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain would not be divided along the lines of rich v poor. The inequality in wealth found within commercial societies is what leads us into temptation and facilitates our admiration of the rich and indifference to the poor. Inequality contributes to our corruption by pushing certain aspects of our nature (i.e. the ones outlined above) in the direction of a false *telos*. By separating society

into economic classes inequality makes it possible to distinguish one class, and corresponding lifestyle, as superior to another. In doing so, inequality helps us misidentify the rich as necessarily happy and the poor as necessarily miserable. If the ultimate benefit of commerce is, as Smith suggests in WN, the creation and distribution of wealth (i.e. universal opulence) then it would seem plausible that the people who have successfully attained the most wealth are, somehow, superior to others.²⁴⁵ In other words, if commerce were a game it would certainly seem that the rich were its winners. Unlike the kings of past societies who could boast great conquests or wise legislation, what places the rich atop commercial society's social hierarchy is the mere possession of wealth. In reality this possession of wealth may be as trite an accomplishment as any of the frivolous accomplishments of Louis XIV. If our imagination were perhaps less limited we might see wealth as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Smith characterizes wealth as a tool useful for attaining our natural *telos* (TMS, 213).²⁴⁶ However, because of our difficulty distinguishing appearance from reality it is easy for us to imagine that being wealthy and being happy is the same thing. Having society divided into haves and have-nots explains why the rich make such inviting targets for our admiration and emulation.

Commercial society's inequality directs our natural aversion to pain and attraction to pleasure away from the poor and towards the rich respectively. This inequality explains why we would consider the rich happy and the poor miserable. In a society of equal wealth distribution it would be difficult for individuals to imagine that being rich would bring them the happiness nature designed them to pursue. Additionally, in an equal society we would have to admire and emulate others for entirely different reasons. Likewise, our superiors would no longer be individuals who merely possessed wealth. However, Smith argues that inequality is a *necessary* feature of commercial society.²⁴⁷ Consequently, abolishing inequality would simultaneously mean abandoning all of the moral and material benefits of commercial society. The costs of engineering economic equality would outweigh the benefits. The freedom, dignity and *relative* wealth commercial society provides make it superior to all other societies. Moreover, abolishing

²⁴⁵ See WN I.I.10.

²⁴⁶ More critically, Smith describes mere "wealth and greatness" as "trinkets of frivolous utility, no more adapted for procuring ease of body or tranquility of mind than [...] tweezer-cases" (TMS, 212).

²⁴⁷ In WN Smith argues that the universal equality of other societies is premised upon their "universal poverty" (WN, V.1.2.7). Hont and Ignatieff refer to universal equality as "egalitarian barbarism" in "Needs and Justice," (p.10).

inequality would only eliminate one particular form of corruption; given our imperfections there is no guarantee that another form of corruption would not surface and similarly obstruct our pursuit of happiness. Regardless of its flaws commercial society may provide the best *opportunity* for everyone to pursue and attain tranquility. The opulence commercial society is capable of creating—combined with the freedom from dependency and the softening of the virtues—makes happiness more attainable and accessible. However, given flaws in both our nature and society itself, commercial society cannot guarantee this happiness. While commercial society may make the path to tranquility available to individuals they must actively choose to pursue it rather than riches and greatness. Smith does not consider equality as a precondition for happiness, but the creation and distribution of wealth (*via* the invisible hand) is.²⁴⁸ Abolishing commercial society’s fundamental flaw (i.e. inequality) might mean trading away our chance at happiness for the sake of equality. However, though our pursuit of tranquility is ultimately better served in commercial society this does not mean we should not take steps to soften the effects of inequality.²⁴⁹

3.3 Vanity

The most immediate effect of corruption is vanity. Smith characterizes vanity as a love of undeserved praise, arguing that “what is properly called vanity” is “to be pleased with [...] groundless applause is a proof of the most superficial levity and weakness” (TMS, 138).²⁵⁰ This love of praise is a derivative of our natural desire to be praiseworthy. Recall that we admire and emulate the rich and great largely because of the attention and recognition they receive. The desire for similar attention and recognition (i.e. praise) is what inspires us to pursue greatness and fortune for ourselves. Additionally, emulating the rich and great may cause us to adopt specific vain behaviors and characteristics such as the love of luxury, fashion, and pettiness.²⁵¹ By distorting our desire to be praiseworthy into a love of praise corruption impairs our moral

²⁴⁸ Recall that Smith believes the “wages of the meanest labourer” can provide the necessities of life and happiness (TMS, 62).

²⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion on Smith and distributive justice see Fleischacker (2004) p.203-228. See also Fleischacker (2004) *A Short History of Distributive Justice*

²⁵⁰ Hanley characterizes vanity as an “unregulated” desire for praise partially caused by our “untutored self-love” (100-102).

²⁵¹ Macfie (1967) notes that Smith always describes vanity as the “basest” motivation (p.54-56). Consequently, it is not hard to see how vanity would lead us down a path of pettiness and frivolity.

judgment and makes us incapable of recognizing—and appreciating—the differences between these two desires. This transformation is not necessarily a conscious change. Corruption does not force us to choose one (praise) over the other (praiseworthiness). Rather, our admiration and emulation of the rich and great impairs our judgment by replacing our intended *telos* with a false *telos*. This change in *telos* effectively alters the judgment of our conscience. Consequently, our conscience (i.e. our impartial spectator) values whatever is praised, as if it were truly praiseworthy, because we believe the former will make us happy.

The conflation of praise and praiseworthiness is what makes us vain; we develop vain behaviors not out of malice but out of ignorance and confusion.²⁵² It is a deception or delusion in our imagination that makes us vain, not an inherent dislike for truly good things. Because it blurs the distinction between praise and praiseworthiness corrupted people may not truly recognize they have strayed from their intended teleological path. This moral impairment may make corruption a difficult problem to overcome. This may be especially problematic if corruption becomes widespread. If corruption were to become commonplace—as Smith seems to suggest it might—the vain desire for praise and any subsequent behaviors may become a part of propriety. This further distances corrupted individuals from virtue and true happiness while simultaneously erasing any appreciation they might have for praiseworthiness, the golden rule, and tranquility. Because of their vanity, morally corrupted individuals may be unaware that they have been diverted away from tranquility and, over time, may come to believe that they are actually happy.²⁵³ Any potential remedy for moral corruption must somehow account for the possibility that corrupted individuals do not—or cannot—understand and appreciate how miserable they may be or how happy they could be.²⁵⁴

To understand why emulating the rich and great makes us vain it is useful to examine Smith’s criticism of these people. Throughout TMS and WN Smith treats the rich and great with a combination of mockery and contempt. Smith’s disdain for these elites not only explains why

²⁵² Smith makes it clear that, despite any resemblance, our love of praiseworthiness is not a derivative of a love of praise (TMS, 139). Additionally, Smith adds that “to desire, or even to accept praise, where no praise is due, can be the effect only of the most contemptible vanity” (TMS, 141).

²⁵³ This is a product of being confused about what actually constitutes happiness. Simply because we believe our current state is a happy one does not make it so, especially if it is antithetical to actual happiness (i.e. tranquility).

²⁵⁴ Griswold notes that there is a difference in TMS between *feeling* happy and actually *being* happy (p.219).

they are such poor targets for our admiration and emulation but also what our ensuing behaviors and character might be. For instance, Smith's discussion and criticism of the so-called "men of fashion" characterizes commercial society's elites as frivolous and vain individuals preoccupied with empty pursuits (TMS, 76-77). By emulating these individuals we too become concerned with hollow pursuits. Rather than focusing on developing the behaviors and character that bring us ease of body and peace of mind, we focus on our appearance and we dress becomes more important than how we act. Similarly, instead of developing the relations that provide us with mutual sympathy we rely on the exchange of empty flatteries. These are only two of the various vain behaviors we might adopt after emulating the rich and great. These adopted behaviors are antithetical to the pursuit of tranquility. This is largely, though not entirely, because vanity may be inherently undignified. Whereas the pursuit of praiseworthiness relies only on the approval of our own conscience (i.e. our impartial spectator) speaking to us with the voice of Nature, the vain desire for undeserved praise is completely reliant on the approval of others.²⁵⁵ Thus, by making us vain moral corruption makes us dependent on the opinions of other people. This dependence is not in accordance with a truly dignified life nor is it capable of directing us towards our natural, intended, *telos*.

Moral corruption alters our moral judgment by tempting us with a more enticing, more glamorous, version of happiness. Though this happiness is only a delusion of our imagination it is enough to direct our conscience away from praiseworthiness and towards a love of praise. Consequently, our impartial spectator stops telling us how to attain tranquility and instead tells us how to attain other peoples' praise. The latter occurs without any proper consideration of merit. Consequently, moral corruption causes us to seek praise without properly considering whether or not we actually deserve it. The path we take towards this false *telos* may include whatever behaviors and characteristics are necessary for the attainment of riches and greatness including viciousness. The three vices linked to Smith's theory of moral corruption are avarice, vain-glory, and ambition (TMS, 172).²⁵⁶ All three of these vices are rooted in corrupt and selfish desire for praise and all are based upon confusion about the true nature of happiness. Avarice,

²⁵⁵ This highlights the similarity between Smith's theory of vanity and Rousseau's *amour-propre*.

²⁵⁶ Smith describes vain-glory as a type of pride based on a misunderstanding of the difference between "obscurity and extensive reputation" (TMS, 172),

vain-glory, and ambition can thus all be understood as inevitable consequences of vanity. Furthermore, because corruption impairs our judgment all three of these vices will be approved by our conscience insofar as they help us attain greatness and fortune.

By impairing our moral judgment and making us vain, moral corruption transforms our conscience from a semi-divine guide responsible for directing us towards tranquility and into a mere means for satisfying our selfish desire for praise at the expense of merit. As a result of this transformation we risk becoming vicious. Additionally, the pursuit of greatness and fortune may make us miserable by diverting us away from the true sources of happiness. I believe the most serious consequence of vanity is that it denies us the ease of body and peace of mind required for happiness and replaces them with anxiety and loneliness. Consequently, moral corruption not only makes us vain and potentially vicious, it also makes us anxious, lonely, and miserable.

3.4 Anxiety, Loneliness, and Misery

Commercial society provides the best possible conditions for the *pursuit* of tranquility. Similarly, it provides us with the opportunity to cultivate meaningful bonds of affection with family, friends, and other citizens. Paradoxically, by enabling vanity and vice, commercial society also facilitates anxiety and loneliness. This anxiety and loneliness is how moral corruption makes us miserable. The vain pursuit of greatness and fortune engineered by this corruption ends in either failure or disappointment which in turn makes us anxious.²⁵⁷ Likewise, the selfishness inherent in this corruption prevents us from cultivating the relationships required for mutual sympathy and happiness. The anxiety and loneliness created by corruption prevents us from attaining the ease of body and peace of mind we were designed by Nature to pursue. Moreover, even when we successfully attain greatness and fortune the anxiety and loneliness we develop along the way makes us miserable even in success. More likely we will continually fail to attain our false *telos* and in the process live a miserable life of anxious solitude.

The anxiety created by pursuing greatness and fortune is best captured in Smith's parable of the poor man's son (TMS, 211-212). In this parable Smith describes a young man who sacrifices all present goals in order to attain wealth and greatness. However, Smith claims that in

²⁵⁷ Forman-Barzilai argues that emulating the rich and famous leads to "perpetual disappointment at best, failure and poverty at worst" (p.33).

his pursuit of riches the poor man's son "sacrifices a real tranquility that is at all times in his power" (TMS, 211-212). This parable concisely captures the moral and psychological costs of emulating the rich and great. Clearly the son would have been better off pursuing a set of completely different goals (i.e. ease of body and peace of mind). However, because the desire to be rich and great has impaired his moral judgment the poor man's son is doomed to a life of anxiety. Even if the son were someday successful and became a rich and great individual it would not make up for the time spent toiling away in anxious pursuit of this goal. Additionally, this hypothetical young man may find that mere greatness and fortune are insufficient for providing him with happiness. The perpetual anxiety the poor man's son feels in his pursuit of greatness and fortune—both in success and failure—captures what all corrupted individuals feel. However, the vanity that impairs our judgment prevents us from seeing this false *telos* for what it is and pursuing tranquility as the Author of Nature intended.

Anxiety is the direct opposite of peace of mind and is thus contradictory to the tranquility we naturally desire. Smith offers a few different potential cures to an anxious mind.²⁵⁸ The first is a clear conscience.²⁵⁹ Attaining the approval and/or praise of our impartial spectators and knowing we truly deserve it rids us of anxiety and puts our mind at ease. For most people most of the time, a clear conscience is attained by consistently adhering to the standards of propriety. Most individuals, Smith suggests, pay no attention to whether or not these standards are truly worthy of praise and/or approval.²⁶⁰ However, given the potential problems with these standards and the possibility of them becoming corrupted adhering to them may not sufficiently clear everyone's conscience. In fact, should corruption become widespread (and thus a part of propriety) it is possible that an entire society may become vain, anxious, and miserable. The deserved approval of our impartial spectators is a salve capable of restoring almost any trouble mind to a peaceful state. However, vanity prevents us from ever truly and properly clearing our

²⁵⁸ The only direct reference Smith makes to curing vanity is through an education that aims to "direct vanity to proper objects" (TMS, 304). However, his virtue ethics (also an addition to TMS' 6th edition) provide a more comprehensive remedy for moral corruption.

²⁵⁹ "Society and conversation" Smith claims are effective ways to restore our peace of mind and clear our conscience (TMS, 30).

²⁶⁰ Smith refers to two standards for judging our own character. The first is "the idea of exact propriety and perfection" which is utilized solely by the wise and virtuous few (TMS, 291). The second, relied on by the vast bulk of humanity is "the degree of approximation" of perfection "which is commonly attained in the world" (Ibid.)

conscience because it inhibits proper mutual sympathy, especially from our own impartial spectators.

In TMS Smith argues that our sense of merit can be warped but never completely annihilated. Although corruption makes the praise of others essential to us it does not erase our natural sense of worthiness and as a result we will always know that the approval we receive from other people, and our impartial spectators, is truly undeserved. Accordingly, Smith argues that our natural judgments on right and wrong, approbation and disapprobation, may be “somewhat warped” but they “cannot be entirely perverted” (TMS, 234). Furthermore, he suggests that the pleasure we feel when we are praised by others is weaker in comparison to the pleasure associated with praiseworthiness arguing that:

it often gives us real comfort to reflect, that though no praise should actually be bestowed upon us, our conduct, however, has been such as to deserve it, and has been in every respect suitable to those measures and rules by which praise and approbation are *naturally* and commonly bestowed [...] We are pleased to think that we have rendered ourselves the natural objects of approbation, though no approbation should ever actually be bestowed upon us (TMS, 138).

It appears as though the pleasure we feel when our impartial spectators acknowledge our praiseworthiness is enough to bring peace of mind regardless of whether or not we receive any praise. Smith may be guilty of ignoring the degree to which we can deceive ourselves about our own behavior. However, his point here is that we always have some connection to the voice of Nature, even if we choose to ignore it, and that the praise from this voice surpasses all other approval. The pleasure we feel when we maintain our praiseworthiness is capable of holding up against almost any adversity. The love of praise, on the other hand, is only capable of providing us with momentary, fleeting, pleasure. In order to satisfy our vanity we must perpetually pursue the praise of others.²⁶¹ This perpetual pursuit is the path to narcissism, not tranquility. The narcissistic need for praise robs us of our liberty and dignity by making us dependent on the opinions of others. This loss of liberty perpetuates and deepens our anxiety and contributes to our miserable.

²⁶¹ In Smith’s estimation all individuals are born with a conscience capable of hearing the voice of Nature. Though he was a firm believer in class structure he gave no indication whatsoever that one class had better access to moral truths than another. Indeed, should they be aware of the merits of their station in life the poor would live as happily as the rich. The idea that all individuals have access to praiseworthiness is essential to Smith’s understanding of conscience; without this sense, praiseworthiness becomes indistinguishable from praise.

The anxiety brought on by our vanity may also contribute to our misery by potentially making us reckless. In our vain desire to become rich and great we may opt to take shortcuts. This recklessness is detrimental to both our ease of body and peace of mind. Our potentially reckless desire to be rich and great—to the exclusion of other goods—poses a significant threat to our existing material well-being. Thus, in our reckless and anxious state we may gamble with everything we have for the chance to attain greatness and fortune. However, should we fail—which is the most likely outcome—we run the risk of becoming worse off than we were before and possibly impoverished. The disappointment we would feel in either case would certainly increase our level of anxiety. Moreover, if our recklessness actually does impoverish us we would end up in a condition more detrimental to our pursuit of happiness than any other condition, namely, poverty. In this condition it is impossible to attain tranquility unless we possessed some heroic characteristics. It is possible that our pursuit of greatness and fortune will be successful and we will avoid the miserable detriments of poverty. However, what is more likely is that our anxious desire to be praised by others will make us reckless and poor. Either way, so long as we remain corrupted and vain we will remain anxious which cannot coexist with tranquility. However, even if corruption did not make us reckless, we would still anxiously toil away under the false impression that being happy means being rich and great, ignoring the true sources and conditions for happiness.

In addition to making us anxious moral corruption contributes to our misery by making us lonely. The disproportionately self-interested nature of the vain pursuit of greatness and fortune prevents us from properly exercising our natural benevolence and developing the bonds of affection necessary for tranquility.²⁶² The love of praise developed as a result of corruption transforms our natural (and potentially virtuous) self-interest into selfishness. Ideally, our self-interest is balanced out by our natural benevolence *via* the golden rule and our conscience. However, under the influence of corruption we become disproportionately self-interested to the

²⁶² The connection between self-interest and corruption is made throughout the secondary literature. Griswold argues that it is the self-interested desire to better our condition that deceives us and leads to our corruption (p.262). Hanley adds to this characterization, claiming that our self-interested desire to be recognized (i.e. approved of) by improving our condition leads us to corruption (p.33).

point of becoming selfish.²⁶³ This is a result of the inherently selfish goals corruption directs us towards. We pursue greatness and fortune so that others will pay attention to us and lavish us with (undeserved) praise; any acts of benevolence perpetrated by the corrupted individual are merely a pretense for acquiring more praise rather than a genuine interest in contributing to the happiness of other.. The selfishness produced by corruption distances us from our *telos* as well as other people. Our pursuit of tranquility requires us to cultivate strong relationships with family, friends, and society as a whole. These relationships are essential to both our ease of body and peace of mind. Clearing and easing our conscience requires mutual sympathy and the most potent source of this is those people with whom we share affection (i.e. family, friends, and fellow citizens). In order to develop this affection we must be capable of consistently placing the needs and well-being of others ahead of our own. Failing to do so not only affects our own happiness it also affects the happiness of other people. Using other people so we may attain greatness and fortune for the sake of praise may jeopardize their pursuit of tranquility. By pushing us towards selfish goals, vanity inevitably makes us bad family members, friends, and citizens and in doing so may help to create a culture of loneliness and misery. Without bonds of affection our benevolence diminishes and all of the “ornaments” that make society desirable begin to disappear (TMS, 104). What we may be left with is a society that merely functions and fails to deliver anything more to us than mere survival.

It is possible for our vain pursuit of greatness and fortune to end in success. However, even if the poor man’s son were to become rich and great this would only bring them disappointment. Smith is adamant that wealth and greatness are not synonymous with happiness. Moreover, merely attaining these things does not alleviate a person’s anxiety or loneliness. When a vain person acquires both greatness and fortune their anxiety is likely to persist—and perhaps increase—when they discover that this does not end their misery and bring them happiness. However, instead of abandoning the pursuit of a false *telos* the vain person is likely to continue their quest by acquiring more riches and more greatness and receiving nothing but perpetual dissatisfaction. Additionally, wealth and greatness do nothing to cure a person of loneliness.

²⁶³ Self-interest refers to the goals and pursuits that concern our well-being. Selfishness refers to a quality of character characterized by an excessive (i.e. lacking benevolence) and exclusive focus on oneself. After a certain degree, we might expect self-interest to transform into selfishness.

Without the bonds of affection attained through benevolence corrupted individuals such as the poor man's son will be alone and miserable even when they are successful. Worse yet, this vain person's lack of benevolence may make other, uncorrupted, individuals similarly miserable.

By directing our conscience away from Nature's providential plan moral corruption prevents us from developing a truly authoritative conscience and living a tranquil life. According to Smith the vanity created by this corruption impairs our judgment and warps our moral sentiments. This not only prevents us from pursuing tranquility he believes Nature has prescribed for us, it may also make us miserable. I believe the two main symptoms associated with moral corruption are anxiety and loneliness.²⁶⁴ The belief that *only* wealth and greatness can make us happy (and their lack will make us miserable) makes us anxious while the disproportionately selfish nature of this pursuit distances us from others and makes us lonely. Consequently, because these are incompatible with tranquility, vanity and happiness cannot coexist. Unfortunately, because corruption impairs our judgment we may not see or appreciate its miserable effects. By transforming our desire to be praiseworthy into a desire for praise corruption blinds us to the true source of happiness and may lead us down a path of misery.

Conclusion

The temptations of greatness and fortune distract us from our natural teleological path and lead us to anxiety, loneliness, and misery. These temptations alter our conscience by quieting the voice of Nature and diverting us away from the golden rule. This diversion transforms our authoritative conscience from a tool meant to guide us to self-perfection and into a means for satisfying our vanity. Subsequently, our natural desire to be worthy of praise is replaced with a vain love of praise. We attempt to satisfy this desire by becoming rich and great. The vain pursuit of greatness and wealth is done without regard for the actual merit of these goals, or the means by which we acquire them. Consequently, vanity also threatens to transform us into vicious individuals. This corruption—and subsequent misery—affects all members of society regardless of class. However, Smith indicates that the middle class is the *least likely* to be

²⁶⁴ Though the literature discusses a variety of symptoms, loneliness is neglected. My claim is that disproportionate selfishness places a necessary distance between individuals. Close relationships—and happiness—require the benevolent side of our nature.

infected by corruption and thus potentially more likely to successfully pursue tranquility. Furthermore, corruption would be impossible if not for our natural frailty and the inequality inherent in commercial society. It is the intersection of these two variables which makes the life of greatness and fortune so tempting and ultimately what confuses us about the true nature of happiness. However, because inequality is essential to commercial society, and since frailty cannot be overcome, moral corruption may be an inescapable part of human existence. The path to tranquility thus becomes more challenging than Smith may have initially suspected.

Smith's theory of moral corruption begins as a psychological problem. Although commercial society's inequality plays a crucial role in tempting us away from our intended *telos* the initial effects of corruption occur in the individual's conscience. Over time these effects are likely to spread. The flaws in propriety make it likely that, given enough time, the vain pursuit of greatness and fortune would become a normal and necessary part of everyday life. Eventually everyone in commercial society may be expected to pursue these goals rather than pursuing ease of body and peace of mind *via* praiseworthiness. Individuals who fail to acquire wealth and greatness may even be looked at as failures by the rest of society. However, corrupted propriety poses a more serious threat to society than the misery of its members. Widespread corruption may have political consequences which jeopardize the health of society itself. Any potential solution to moral corruption ought to account for these possible political consequences and not just the misery of individuals.

Smith's theory of moral corruption highlights a potential tension within both TMS and his philosophy as a whole. The belief that commercial society can so readily transform our natural desire to be praiseworthy into a love of praise calls Smith's appraisal of it into question. The inclusion of this theory of corruption in TMS' final edition changes Smith's cautiously optimistic appraisal of commercial society into something more critical and pessimistic. Whereas prior to the 6th edition Smith was seemingly confident that commercial society made happiness more attainable and accessible his diagnosis of corruption in this edition shows that it may actively work against its pursuit. This would suggest Smith changed his opinion about commercial society at some point between the 5th and 6th editions of TMS. This pessimistic change in attitude plays a vital role in transforming TMS into a discourse on the link between virtue and happiness and the pursuit of self-perfection. The view that society itself is the source

of our moral ills plays a fundamental role in shaping the content of this perfection Smith provides later in TMS.

Nature's Conflicting Ends

4.0 Introduction

Smith's view of commercial society's impact on morality and the pursuit of happiness is a largely optimistic one. Specifically, Smith praises commercial society because the opulence, security, order, and liberty generated in it render happiness more accessible and attainable.²⁶⁵ However, his faith in the benefits of commercial society was never naïve; he recognized its potential flaws while still championing its benefits.²⁶⁶ Despite acknowledging its flaws, Smith saw commercial society as the teleological endpoint of history.²⁶⁷ Prior to the final edition of TMS, commercial society was represented as the perfect environment for the pursuit of our *telos*.²⁶⁸ Commercial society provides individuals with the opportunity to use their authoritative conscience to discover and pursue what is truly praiseworthy.²⁶⁹ However, the theory of moral corruption added to final edition of TMS reveals a softening of Smith's enthusiasm towards commerce. Underpinning his theory of corruption is the belief that pursuing wealth and greatness can be hazardous to one's moral well-being. This introduces a more pessimistic outlook on commercial society and creates a potential conflict between Nature's two final causes. This bifurcation of final causes demonstrates that commercial society is more deeply flawed than Smith initially supposed. Rather than seeing commercial society solely as an ideal condition for

²⁶⁵ This is accomplished largely through the abolishment of abject poverty. According to Smith, this reduces the misery of the masses and puts true happiness (i.e. tranquility) within their reach (WN I.viii.36). See Hanley (2009) p.18. Muller (1993) adds that commercial society makes happiness more attainable and accessible by abolishing the undignified direct dependence of past societies (p.72).

²⁶⁶ Smith's reservations about the moral consequences of commerce anticipates contemporary studies on the subject. See Benjamin Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York: Knopf, 2005); John C. Bogle, *The Battle for the Soul of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); and Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998).

²⁶⁷ For analyses of Smith's historical teleology see Kleer, R.A. (2000) 'The Role of Teleology in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations', *History of Economics Review* 31: 14-29; Justman, S. (1993) *The Autonomous Male of Adam Smith*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; and Shapiro, M.J. (1993) *Reading 'Adam Smith'*. Newbury Park: Sage.

²⁶⁸ Muller (1995) goes a step further and argues that "For Smith, the greatest benefit of commercial society was that it created incentives for people to develop what he called the 'imperfect, but attainable virtues'" (p.8).

²⁶⁹ This is largely a product of the liberty established by commercial society. No longer directly dependent on anyone else, individuals can follow the demands of their conscience. They can (and should) take advantage of this liberty by identifying the Author of Nature's plan and discerning the standards of praiseworthiness we were designed to follow. This makes the conscience truly authoritative, capable of evaluating the merits of existing propriety and guiding us towards our *telos*.

the pursuit of happiness, Smith now also sees it as a potential source of misery.²⁷⁰ The vanity created and perpetuated by commercial society actively diverts individuals away from the Author of Nature's providential plan and the golden rule. This diversion may jeopardize the fabric of society itself. However, Smith argues that vanity is an essential component of commercial society.²⁷¹ By encouraging vanity commercial society increases the tension between our self-interested and benevolent desires and may make the desire to act on the latter less common. Without the vain pursuit of wealth and greatness commercial society might not exist and certainly could not function properly.²⁷² To generate opulence (and by extension liberty) commercial society requires the vain pursuit of wealth and greatness.²⁷³ In other words, not only does commercial society create anxiety, loneliness, and misery it may also *depend* on these. Without these moral ills commercial society could not create the opulence required for the pursuit of happiness. Thus, paradoxically, commercial society creates the ideal conditions for pursuing and attaining happiness, while simultaneously undermining this pursuit by encouraging vanity. However, it is possible for the middle class to avoid the conflict between Nature's two ends and become praiseworthy individuals.

In the second chapter I argued Smith's endorsement of commercial society was predicated on his belief that it made the successful pursuit of our *telos* more attainable and more accessible. It is in the context of commercial society where most people have the legitimate option of developing and following their authoritative conscience and becoming truly praiseworthy. However, Smith's identification of commercial society as the source of our misery

²⁷⁰ Hanley (2009) claims that the "commercial passions are more likely to bring misery and anxiety than happiness and tranquility" (p.39). Hanley refers to Smith's repeated allusions to the "tumult and bustle" and/or "scramble" that seems inherent in commercial life. Similarly, Alvey claims that the vice of ambition—which leads us away from happiness—is necessary for the creation of opulence (p.198). In TMS Smith argues that the pursuit of greatness necessarily involves toil and anxiety and comes at the expense of "all that leisure, all that ease, all that careless security, which are forfeited forever by the acquisition" of society's admiration (TMS, 62).

²⁷¹ Because of this Alvey (2003) argues that commercial is a necessary but not sufficient condition for happiness (p.207).

²⁷² Fleischacker (2004) disputes the necessary role vanity plays in commercial society. He argues that "economics would not collapse if people came to their moral senses, and began to seek praiseworthiness rather than mere praise" (p.115). However, he does admit that the more opulent society becomes the more people demand luxuries and vanities,

²⁷³ According to Winch (1978), industry is created by the corrupt desire to be rich and great (p.91). Alvey (2003) adds that without the delusion about happiness (i.e. corruption) human beings would be "indolent" and unable to "enoble human life" (p.199). Alvey adds that the deluded pursuit of wealth and greatness "[rules] out personal happiness, which requires leisure" (Ibid.).

alters this relationship. The inclusion of his theory of moral corruption in the 6th edition of TMS indicates an apparent conflict between our natural end and commercial society.²⁷⁴ Attempts to reconcile the optimistic reading with the pessimistic have given way to what might be called a “new” or “second” Adam Smith Problem.²⁷⁵ Although Smith did not change his mind about the benefits of commercial society he may have changed his attitude towards it. Though pessimistic about commercial society’s moral impact Smith remains cautiously optimistic about its material benefits. Consequently, though Smith may be guilty of ignoring the potentially serious political symptoms of corruption he cannot be accused of Pollyannaism in his defense of commercial society.²⁷⁶ He appropriately recognizes the “dark side” of commercial society without giving into despair.²⁷⁷ This measured pessimism has implications for Smith’s approach to treating corruption and therefore is a crucial point in understanding how the changes to the 6th edition fit together as a whole.

Smith’s enthusiasm is necessarily blunted by the pessimistic acceptance of what this society does to our potential pursuit of tranquility.²⁷⁸ However, despite its propensity to make us vain and miserable he still endorses commercial society. There are several reasons for this enduring endorsement. Smith believes that the material gains offered by commercial society outweigh its moral shortcomings. In other words, commercial society will continue to generate opulence even if it makes some individuals unhappy in the process. Smith is not being overly cynical here; he is prioritizing the relief of the single greatest source of misery in history (i.e. poverty) over the pursuit of self-perfection. In addition to its more obvious material benefits, Smith believes commercial society will continue to offer its members the conditions that make tranquility more attainable and accessible. In short, despite the perpetuation of vanity and misery, commercial society should continue to create the conditions necessary for the pursuit of

²⁷⁴ Hill (2006) argues that corruption is caused by a lack of progress (p.647). This assessment ignores both the specific cause of corruption and the role it plays in founding and improving society.

²⁷⁵ Alvey (2003) draws attention to this problem and attempts to resolve it in his influential work. My own approach focuses on Smith’s virtue ethics as a partial solution to the moral ills of commercial society.

²⁷⁶ See Hanley (2009) p.31.

²⁷⁷ Literature focusing on Smith’s more nuanced assessment of commercial society includes Hanley (2009), Evensky (2005), Pack (1991), Rasmussen (2008), and Muller (1993). All agree that Smith held deep and serious reservations about commercial society’s influence on human well-being but that its benefits outweighed its problems.

²⁷⁸ Ignatieff argues that, similar to Rousseau, Smith agreed with the Stoic claim that corruption (which diverts us away from happiness) was created by conventional morality. See “Smith, Rousseau, and the Republic of Needs,” in *Scotland and Europe 1200-1850*, ed. T.C.Smout (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986) p.201-202.

happiness should people choose to exercise their authoritative (i.e. *natural*) consciences. Additionally, the 6th edition of TMS is skeptical about how commercial society can be replaced.²⁷⁹ Commercial society is entrenched enough, in Smith's mind, that it could not be abandoned without causing more harm than good.²⁸⁰ Despite requiring vanity and misery in order to function properly, commercial society is still the best possible society for the successful pursuit of our *telos*. Commercial society is the only society capable of fully satisfying the necessary preconditions for ease of body and peace of mind. Consequently, though it may direct us away from tranquility, commercial society still provides the opulence, peace, order, and security required for happiness.

The political wisdom within both TMS and WN is at times overlooked in the literature.²⁸¹ Treating these as pure works on morality and economics respectively neglects the important role politics and, more specifically, the legislator plays in promoting the successful pursuit of tranquility.²⁸² However, though political intervention plays a crucial role in facilitating our pursuit of happiness it would be extreme to extrapolate from this and characterize Smith as a republican.²⁸³ Regardless of where he is placed along the political spectrum, focusing on Smith's political arguments highlights the important role the legislator serves in ensuring the peace, security, order, liberty, and opulence of commercial society. The two primary means by which

²⁷⁹ Smith's warnings about the "man of system" highlight the dangers associated with reorganizing society in the hope of repairing all of its problems (TMS, 275-276).

²⁸⁰ See Hanley (2009) p.15.

²⁸¹ Obvious and important exceptions to this include Haakonssen (1981), Skinner (1979), Winch (1978) and Muller (1995).

²⁸² Muller (1995) argues that commercial society can only thrive with institutions that cultivates "prudence, self-control, respect for life and property and, among some at least, concern for the common good" (p.6). Evensky (2005) stresses the legislator's role in protecting private property rights as a means of ensuring that the poor pursue wealth the same way the rich did (p.64). In doing so, the legislator helps to ensure the continued growth and distribution of wealth, a prerequisite for tranquility.

²⁸³ Characterizing Smith as a republican obscures the psychological effects of corruption and the need for a psychological solution. Hill, in "Smith and Corruption" provides an analysis of Smith's theory of moral corruption that distinguishes it from both republican and Marxist readings. Hill characterizes Smith's theory of corruption as both "eccentric" and a "hybrid" that cannot (p.646). However, Hill concludes that Smith's primary concern in discussing corruption was its effect on politics (p.636.). Harpham, in "Liberalism, Civic Humanism, and the Case of Adam Smith," *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984): 764-74 emphasizes the psychological causes and consequences of corruption. Hanley (2009) also provides a through psychological analysis of corruption and its potential solution. Finally, though he offers a republican reading of Smith, Winch (1978) admits that the productivity commercial society requires is based on a psychological deception about the ends of Nature (p.91).

political intervention can support and promote happiness is through the proper administration of justice and the preservation of free markets.

There is a substantial amount of secondary literature that focuses on Smith's understanding of justice and his natural jurisprudence.²⁸⁴ Smith outlines his conception of justice within TMS, arguing it is an individual virtue while simultaneously claiming it is responsible for holding society together. Smith's theory of natural jurisprudence is implicit in both TMS and WN. However, works concerned with this theory have typically chosen to focus on Smith's LJ. Smith had initially promised to complete and publish a work on the history and application of natural jurisprudence yet, for whatever reason, failed to complete this intended project.²⁸⁵ Within TMS Smith provides a clear enough picture of justice to determine how it serves the pursuit of Nature's ends.

The pessimistic tone in TMS' 6th edition redefines who is most likely to successfully pursue praiseworthiness and tranquility. Although commercial society still provides the ideal conditions for the pursuit of these, the individuals who are most likely to engage in this pursuit are from the so-called "middling" class. The rich and poor members of society appear to be the most affected by the temptations of greatness and fortune. The vulgarity of the rich—frequently commented on by Smith—makes it clear that their morals are unlikely to deliver lasting tranquility. On the other hand, the poor are forced to suffer through both anonymity and the contempt of society. Additionally, the parable of the poor man's son helps to illustrate how difficult it might be for the poor to see the true path to happiness. Consequently, it is the rich and poor who are the least likely to listen to the voice of Nature and the golden rule. However, Smith's optimism persists in his belief that there can be some immunity to these temptations.

²⁸⁴ Jurisprudential readings of Smith typically cast him as a natural law theorist. The most influential of these is Haakonssen's *Science of a Legislator*. See also Forbes (1975), Stein (1979, 1980), and Evensky (1992).

²⁸⁵ As a collection of posthumously published lectures given to his students, LJ may contain much of Smith's more developed understandings of natural jurisprudence. However, given his failure to complete the intended *Science of Jurisprudence* we may surmise that Smith never arrived at any mature theory. This conclusion may be further supported by Smith's deathbed wish to have his unfinished works burned. This creates a specific problem for authors who choose to focus on LJ in order to arrive at solid conclusions about his theories of justice and natural jurisprudence. Ultimately, jurisprudential readings attempt to complete a philosophical project on Smith's behalf, and by doing they might reimagine Smith would have said if he had had the time and inclination to say it.

Accordingly, in this chapter I do not focus on LJ, even for points of clarification. Instead, I focus entirely on the theory of justice articulated by Smith in TMS. Doing so should yield enough information to determine what justice is, why it is necessary, and how it can be properly maintained.

Spared both the undeserved praise lavished upon the rich, and the anonymity of the poor, the middling class should be better positioned to listen to the voice of Nature and thus more likely to pursue their *telos*. Consequently, the middling classes of commercial society are the inevitable target of Smith's proposed solution to corruption. Though the rich and poor may be fortunate enough to avoid the temptations of wealth and greatness it may be difficult to coax them back to the life of Nature once they have become vain. The middling class, on the other hand, may never stray too far from the golden rule and thus should be more likely to listen to the voice of Nature.

4.1 The Teleological View of Commercial Society

According to Smith, commercial society is more than merely the best possible society humans have thus far established. Instead, commercial society is more properly understood by Smith to be the teleological endpoint of history.²⁸⁶ Our natural motivations, moral faculties, and even imperfections all contribute to guide the species through different stages of history until we finally establish a commercial society. Moreover, by making tranquility more easily attainable and widely accessible commercial society can establish the ideal conditions for the pursuit of our individual *telos*. However, Smith's pessimistic turn in the 6th edition of TMS suggests a potential conflict between Nature's two ends.²⁸⁷ Thus, Griswold (1999) argues "Smith is recommending a society devoted to the improvement of the human lot but governed by a systemic self-deception about its own ends. Such a society is therefore inclined to private, though not necessarily public, unhappiness" (p.263). The widespread vanity created by moral corruption (and subsequent misery) impedes the pursuit of tranquility. Likewise, our individual *telos* may be incompatible with the ends of history; the life of tranquility is anathema to the constant production of wealth required to maintain commercial society.²⁸⁸ Consequently, it is possible to have a commercial

²⁸⁶ Alvey (2003) and Evensky (2005) both agree that the opulence created by commercial society indicates it is history's *telos*. Accordingly, Alvey argues that opulence facilitates the reproduction and preservation of the species (p.84). Similarly, Evensky argues that opulence increases the well-being of even "the least among the working class" (p.11).

²⁸⁷ Despite this conflict in ends Smith's teleological understanding of commercial society endures. Commercial society remains the best possible society and it is still brought about through the harmonious design of Nature.

²⁸⁸ Fleischacker (2004) disputes the necessary role vanity plays in generating opulence, claiming that "economics would not collapse if people came to their senses, and began to seek praiseworthiness rather than mere praise" (p.115). However, he does admit that an increase in wealth leads to an increase in the demand for vanities. Fleischacker appears to be guilty of ignoring much of what Smith had to say about the role of vanity, especially within the parable of the poor man's son.

society without any tranquility whatsoever. This conflict in ends suggests the possibility that Smith changed his mind about the ends of either history or human nature. However, Smith maintains his support for commercial society and other changes made to the 6th edition of TMS indicate he still firmly believes that humans ought to live a tranquil and praiseworthy life. However, because the conflict between the two ends of Nature is unavoidable some people must be vain and miserable in order for others to be happy.

The teleological nature of history is encapsulated in Smith's "conjectural history".²⁸⁹ Smith presents this conjectural history in its basic form in WN.²⁹⁰ In WN Smith presents the bookend stages of history, focusing on the hunter/gatherer stage and the commercial stage. Smith labels these as the "savage" and "civilised" (WN, intro.4).²⁹¹ Later in Book V of WN Smith mentions the other intervening stages of history. The progression from the barbaric stage to the civilized is facilitated by the teleological pursuit of general opulence (made possible *via* the division of labor).²⁹² Additionally, the efficient cause that pushes us towards this historical *telos* is our self-interested first principle.²⁹³ Similarly, the imperfections of our species help to create the conditions required to pass from one stage to the next. However, it is the self-interested desire to continuously better our condition that transforms one stage of society into another and eventually into commercial society. Smith not only outlines this in specific and precise detail in WN, he reaffirms it in TMS when he argues that our condition is improved by our selfish desire to "be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us" (TMS, 63). As Smith's theory of corruption

²⁸⁹ Some authors, such as Shapiro (1993) and Rashid (1992), have argued that Smith has misrepresented history. Such an argument mistakes the intent of Smith's Four Stages theory of history which claims that "human history can be seen as comprising four epochs through which all societies eventually pass" (Alvey, 2003, p.82). These epochs are broad generalizations of different economic stages, rather than comprehensive analyses of history. For a similar argument see Muller (1995, p.112).

²⁹⁰ Smith formulates this theory in WN (see V.I.a). This theory appears again in the posthumously published LJ (see LJ(A) i.27 and LJ(B) 25, 27, 149, 233).

²⁹¹ Alvey provides a useful distinction between "savage" and "civilised" societies. According to Alvey the former requires "fierce discipline", and most individuals are anxious and unhappy while the latter allows us to develop and indulge our faculties and desires (p.85).

²⁹² Alvey (2003) argues that it is commerce (i.e. our "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange") that drives history forward (p.79). See WN I.i.9.

²⁹³ More specifically, it is the self-interest desire to improve our condition that forwards history. See Paek (1991) p.96. This argument is encapsulated within Smith's famous claim about the butcher, brewer, and baker (WN I.ii.2). We improve our condition, and the condition of everyone else, by pursuing and satisfying self-interest.

illustrates, we pursue wealth largely to satisfy these vain desires. The pursuit of self-interest is an essential component of the Author of Nature's harmonious design and, when pursued properly, ensures and promotes the generation of opulence.

Although the continuous pursuit of self-interest leads us to commercial society, Smith does not characterize the progress of history as linear or inevitable.²⁹⁴ The progression from one stage to the next can be delayed or diverted.²⁹⁵ More importantly, society may regress from one "higher" stage to a lower one. This regression is outlined by Smith in his analysis of ancient Greece and Rome. Although they differ greatly from 18th century Europe, Smith considers both Greece and Rome to be commercial societies. This poses an essential question about how and why these societies failed to endure. The cause(s) of these collapses indicates what is required to not only create, but sustain, commercial society. Although the natural pursuit of self-interest necessarily leads to commercial society, certain conditions must be met for this pursuit to occur unimpeded. According to Smith, it was the lack of external security that caused the Greek and Roman commercial societies to collapse.²⁹⁶ Subsequently, we can expect the most enduring and successful commercial societies to be exceptionally secure against external threats. One of the advantages modern commercial societies have over their ancient counterparts, Smith argues, is the invention of gunpowder.²⁹⁷ With gunpowder commercial societies are capable of repelling much larger barbarian armies.²⁹⁸ This, combined with a standing army, ought to make modern commercial societies less susceptible to regression *via* conquest. External security is only one example of the conditions required for the achievement of history's *telos*. As noted in Chapter Two, internal security, order, and liberty are also prerequisites to the generation of opulence. It is the entire species' pursuit of self-interest—aided by the harmonic order of the universe—that

²⁹⁴ Evensky (2005) claims that human frailty interferes with this progress thus making it neither linear nor fluid (p.28).

²⁹⁵ In WN Smith focuses on the distorting effect mercantile interests can have on commercial society, claiming they are "unnatural". See (WN IV.ii.11-5; IV.iii.c.9; IV.vii.b.44). Additionally, Smith admits that there may be circumstances in which commercial society will not emerge. According to Smith, much of Africa, Asia, and Russia have remained "savage" or "barbaric" because of their climate and geography (WN I.iii.8).

²⁹⁶ Smith argues that Greek republics collapsed because their militias could not resist the power of Alexander's standing army (WN V.i.a.29). Rome, though it had a standing army, was unable to resist the might and numbers of the Germanic tribes. Additionally, Alvey (2003) argues that "inappropriate human institutions" also interfere with the teleological progress towards commercial society (p.89).

²⁹⁷ See Alvey (2003) p.106-107 and Haakonssen (1981) p.179.

²⁹⁸ What Smith fails to note is the possibility that gunpowder may have contributed to greater wars between commercial societies and thus a continued threat to security.

produces and sustains these conditions. Unfortunately, it is also the pursuit of self-interest which jeopardizes this harmonic order and these essential conditions.

For the vast majority of people the conflict between Nature's final causes is likely irreconcilable. For the majority of individuals to be happy they require the security, order, liberty, and opulence of society. Thus, any pursuit of happiness outside of commercial society is likely to fail for all but the very elite (or perhaps the very fortunate). On the other hand, because of the anxiety it produces (and depends upon) the generation of opulence and the pursuit of tranquility may be mutually exclusive. Commercial society requires individuals to pursue their self-interest at the expense of benevolence, praiseworthiness, and ultimately tranquility. Smith sees the greatest source of production and wealth in society as the "anxious" desire to improve our condition. It is our vain desire to "be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" that drives us to better our condition through the pursuit of riches (TMS, 63). Without this restlessness it is possible commercial society's production—and subsequent opulence—could potentially grind to a halt.²⁹⁹ Consequently, all of the benefits associated with this opulence would disappear and humanity's chances of successfully pursuing tranquility would diminish. Paradoxically, to create the opulence necessary to the pursuit of tranquility, vanity simultaneously contributes to the creation of misery. The anxiety (and loneliness) created by our vanity may serve a larger social purpose but at the individual level it diverts us away from our teleological path. This paradox reveals the tragedy underpinning Smith's endorsement of commercial society; though it is by far the best society and capable of satisfying the conditions required for tranquility, it can only accomplish this by making people vain and miserable.

4.2 The Necessity of Vanity

The necessary connection between vanity and opulence is most provocatively made by Smith in his parable of the poor man's son;

The poor man's son, whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition, when he begins to look around him, admires the condition of the rich. He finds the cottage of his father too small for his accommodation, and fancies he should be lodged more at his ease in a palace. He is displeas'd with being oblig'd to walk a-foot, or to endure the fatigue of riding on

²⁹⁹ Accordingly, Alvey (2003) argues that "Without nature's deception people would be indolent and would not ennoble human life. The delusion produces constant striving and industry, ruling out personal happiness, which requires leisure" p.199.

horseback. He sees his superiors carried about in machines, and imagines that in one of these he could travel with less inconveniency. He feels himself naturally indolent, and willing to serve himself with his own hands as little as possible; and judges, that a numerous retinue of servants would save him from a great deal of trouble. He thinks if he had attained all these, he would sit still contentedly, and be quiet, enjoying himself in the thought of the happiness and tranquility of his situation (TMS, 211).

This parable begins with an explanation for how the desire to be rich corrupts our sentiments. This poor man's son, Smith claims, ultimately ends up dissatisfied and miserable by the pursuit of wealth and greatness. However, at the end of this parable Smith makes a darker, more surprising, statement about this unfortunate son's misery, arguing that;

it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life (Ibid).

According to Smith, this pursuit of greatness and fortune is not only necessary to commercial society's generation of wealth, it is also a part of The Author of Nature's design. However, reading this parable makes it clear that the poor man's son would have been much happier if he had not been "visited with ambition" and had chosen instead to see the merits of his condition and pursue the true sources of tranquility. In other words, Nature seems to have designed humans to pursue and attain happiness while simultaneously promoting a regime that actively undermines this pursuit. This conflict between the teleological ends of human nature and the best (possible) society affects both the poor and the rich, albeit in different ways. However, though they are affected in different ways by the corruption imposed by commercial society the end result (i.e. misery) is the same.

Commercial society is not utopian; throughout TMS Smith makes it a point to highlight this society's various imperfections. One of these imperfections is the persistence of poverty.³⁰⁰ Smith's lament for the condition of the poor is a recurring theme throughout TMS' six editions. The poor suffer from more than a lack of resources. Accordingly, Smith claims that;

The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. He is mortified upon both accounts. For though to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things

³⁰⁰ Hanley (2009) provides an insightful analysis of Smith's concern over the affects of poverty and his interests in alleviating it (p.15-24). See also; Muller (1993), Evensky (2005), and Pack (1991). All these authors seem to agree that Smith's advocacy of commercial society focuses on what opulence can do for the disadvantaged.

entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the daylight of honour and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps the most agreeable hope, and disappoints the most ardent desire, of human nature. The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. Those humble cares and painful attentions which occupy those in his situation, afford no amusement to the dissipated and the gay. They turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them. The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness (TMS, 63).

This obscurity reinforces moral corruption which in turn worsens the condition of the poor who will be despised and neglected by other members of society (TMS, 73). Ultimately, in commercial society the poor are treated with contempt which, Smith claims, is more difficult to bare than “all other external evils” (TMS, 73).³⁰¹ Even if they are lucky enough to avoid being corrupted, the obscurity and shame the poor experience may prevent them from ever attaining tranquility.. In addition to all of this the poor are given the illusion that they will be happy if they work their way out of this condition and become rich and famous. The only means the poor have to attain this false *telos* is by working jobs that make them stupid, useless, and—above all else—miserable.³⁰² In order to improve their condition and live what they *believe* to be a happy life the poor are forced to create and perpetuate their own misery. If they were not made vain by the illusion of happiness the poor might be spared this misery and they might see the moral benefits of a humble, modest, station in life and spend their lives pursuing the types of things that bring about real ease of body and peace of mind. However, as Smith points out in the aforementioned parable, it is better for commercial society that the poor become vain and anxious to be rich and famous. This vanity is what spurs them to produce more and more wealth for society as a whole and is what ultimately ennobles and embellishes human life (TMS, 211). Without this there would be little chance of anyone in society being happy, least of all the poor.³⁰³

³⁰¹ It thus seems impossible for the anonymous poor to ever attain happiness. Hanley (2009) argues that “the blessings of tranquility pale in comparison to the ignominy suffered by those the world has forgotten” p.37.

³⁰² As a result of the division of labor, which forces them to concentrate on one small task, workers become “as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become” (WN, V.II.2).

³⁰³ Though concerned with the alleviation of abject poverty, Smith never committed to economic equality. In reference to the equality found in earlier historical stages Smith reminds the reader that what established this “universal equality” was their “universal poverty” (WN, V.1.2). See Hanley (2009) p.17.

The production of luxury goods, which Smith calls “trinkets and baubles”, is what appears to drive the generation of opulence of commercial society. Due to the distribution of the invisible hand, the rich’s perpetual need for luxuries and “gratification of [...] vain and insatiable desires” inevitably provides the poor with some wealth (TMS, 215).³⁰⁴ Luxuries are produced by the poor for the consumption of the rich. While the anxious laboring to produce these contributes to the poor’s misery, it is the anxious desire to own them that makes the rich unhappy. The covetousness of the rich and great, who desperately seek the praise from all of society, inspires them to consume as many luxury items as they possibly can. Owning the trinkets and baubles produced by their laboring counterparts is the primary way the rich and great display their wealth and draw the attention of society. It is the enjoyment of these luxury goods that helps convince everyone (themselves included) that the rich and great are truly happy. In short, the luxury goods so anxiously produced by the poor give the rich and great the appearance of happiness. As I have maintained in earlier chapters, mere fortune and greatness is not synonymous with happiness, nor is the consumption of trinkets and baubles. However, it is good and necessary that the rich *believe* this to be true because the desire to own and consume luxuries drives production and creates opulence. Consequently, the misery of the rich is as essential to the proper functioning of commercial society as the misery of their impoverished counterparts.

Although commercial society depends on the anxious misery of both the poor and rich it should not be assumed that every single person in each condition is necessarily miserable. Smith admits that they can choose to live lives of tranquility. By abolishing direct dependence, commercial society provides individuals with the liberty and opportunity to discover the standards of praiseworthiness and exercise their authoritative conscience. Thus, individuals can abandon the corrupted standards of propriety and—if they choose to—pursue ease of body and peace of mind. The path to tranquility will be different for the poor than it will be for the rich. Aside from the specter of corruption, the main obstacle to the poor’s pursuit of happiness is their state of deprivation and anonymity. The internalization of anonymity is by far the most difficult obstacle for the poor to overcome. While the meanest laborer has access to the material needs required for happiness this does not necessarily help them overcome any psychological problems

³⁰⁴ This distribution of wealth (though not equal) also liberates workers from the dependency they would have endured within a feudal system. See Hanley (2009), p.19-22.

linked to anonymity. The most serious psychological effect is shame, which threatens our dignity and may lead to self-loathing. Smith does believe the poor can overcome their oppressive anonymity, without abandoning the pursuit of wealth and greatness; however, this typically requires opportunities for greatness such as war (TMS, 68-69). Additionally, Smith suggests that, in their impatient desire to capture the “attention and admiration of mankind” anonymous individuals may become vicious (TMS, 69).³⁰⁵ On the other hand, the rich only have to parade their wealth to capture the favorable attention of society (TMS, 69). For the poor it will always *appear* easier to overcome their anonymity by pursuing riches and greatness. Subsequently, though it will always fail to bring them happiness, the pursuit of a false *telos* will always seem like the path of least resistance. On the other hand, the rich are confronted with both the distractions of their wealth and the fleeting pleasure of the praise and attention they receive. These superficial obstacles reaffirm the advantages the rich have over the poor and though they are as susceptible to corruption as the poor, the rich get to experience this much differently. Nevertheless, both rich and poor individuals in commercial society may be more likely to become vain, anxious, and miserable even when the path to ease of body and peace of mind remains open to them.

Vanity cannot be extricated from commercial society because it creates the motivation for continuous production and consumption of goods and is thus essential to the generation of opulence. Furthermore, Smith views this tension as a part of the Author of Nature’s providential plan. This calls into question the compatibility between humanity’s natural ends and the best possible society for attaining these ends. On the surface it would seem plausible to suggest that we abandon a society that relies on our misery in order to operate and thrive. However, despite developing a more pessimistic attitude towards commercial society Smith continues to endorse it. Although he still envisions commercial society as a Natural end, Smith no longer considers it to be perfect. Discouraged by this society’s influence on morality he reimagines it as the best possible society. Despite being antagonistic to the pursuit of tranquility commercial society still provides the best conditions for this pursuit. Smith’s waning enthusiasm for commercial society may provide a better means to evaluate its successes and failures. Commercial society can (and

³⁰⁵ Smith claims that individuals who are anxious to capture the attention of others may ignore the “confusion and bloodshed” caused by war and civil strife in the hopes of achieving greatness (TMS, 69).

should) be praised for its ability to solve practical problems like poverty and direct dependence, and not as a utopian society capable of making everyone happy.

4.3 Smith's Pessimistic Defense

Smith's enthusiasm for commercial society had waned by TMS' 6th edition. Though Smith still considers it to be history's *telos*, commercial society is no longer perfectly compatible with the tranquility we were intended to pursue. Subsequently, the nature of Smith's endorsement of commercial society changes in this final edition. His pessimistic shift in attitude (facilitated by his theory of corruption) changes the criteria by which he praises commercial society and although he recognizes the negative influence it has on our morality Smith still champions its merits. Smith believes that even though it requires and encourages misery, commercial society is still capable of satisfying the necessary preconditions for happiness. Additionally, any attempt to replace commercial society would only do more harm than good. Thus, we should maintain commercial society because it is less imperfect than all of the other possible societies.³⁰⁶

According to Smith, previous, "barbaric", stages of history are mere steps towards this ideal society which (when ordered and governed properly) would bring about the greatest wealth and greatest happiness.³⁰⁷ The imperfections of both human nature and society were, prior to the 6th edition of TMS, natural mechanisms for creating the greatest good for the entire species. However, the substantial changes made to the 6th edition of TMS indicate a shift in this belief. Given the inclusion of moral corruption, commercial society no longer necessarily produces the best possible results for everyone. Many people will have to become vain and miserable so some can pursue tranquility.

With the changes to TMS' final edition Smith's support becomes more conditional and relative. Commercial society is still ideal, but only in relation to all other existing types of society and only so long as it continues to provide us with wealth, liberty, security, and order.

³⁰⁶ See Hanley (2009) p.15.

³⁰⁷ According to Alvey (2003) the majority of individuals in past societies were miserable (p.85). Additionally, Griswold (1999) argues that even if most people in commercial society will never be *perfectly* happy they can still live a decent life (p.225).

Though the corruption essential to commercial society may leave us morally impoverished this is preferable to the abject material poverty common to all other types of societies. This is largely a consequence of commercial society's capacity for abolishing poverty. However, the other benefits provided should not be dismissed. The liberty, security, order etc. offered by commercial society all make even a miserable life within it superior to other "barbaric" societies which are characterized by poverty, dependency, and a lack of security. For instance, unlike past iterations of society, commercial societies should not have to live in perpetual fear of their neighbors. Thus, despite being vain and subsequently miserable the people of a commercial society at least get to experience this in (relative) peace. Additionally, liberty (i.e. mutual interdependence) allows us to live a more dignified life, even if it is spent in pursuit of a false *telos*, because it does not require dependency upon the benevolence of masters.³⁰⁸ Ultimately, though commercial society may require a divergence from our *telos* it at least provides us with the illusion of happiness, which is preferable to the palpable misery of all other societies.

Smith's second defense of commercial society is contained within his criticism of the *spirit of system*.³⁰⁹ Recognizing the imperfections of commercial society, Smith cautions us against attempting to replace it with a new type of society intended to repair each and every flaw. Smith's criticism of the spirit of system is itself an addition to the 6th edition of TMS. Smith argues that, in response to the sufferings of their fellows, people of system offer a "plan of reformation which, they pretend, will not only remove the inconveniences and relieve the distresses immediately complained of, but will prevent, in all time coming, any return of the like inconveniences and distresses" (TMS, 274). Accordingly, the individuals inspired by the spirit of system offer radical new changes to the constitution and existing order. Smith has harsh words for such individuals and claims that they are "intoxicated with the imaginary beauty of [their] ideal system, of which they have no experience, but which has been represented to them in all the most dazzling colours" (Ibid). Smith goes on to call these individuals "the dupes of their own sophistry" (Ibid). Here the influence of the French Revolution and subsequent Reign of Terror on

³⁰⁸ Smith's concern over the detrimental influence of dependence is captured in his criticism of feudalism, (WN II.iii.9; WN III.ii.9). The dependency present in feudal society is so absolute, Smith likens it to slavery. See also, Hanley (2009) p.19-20.

³⁰⁹ Alvey (2003) claims that public ambition (i.e. political ambition) may also be an important part of commercial society. However, I believe he has ignored the dangers of this vice, especially where it concerns the spirit of system.

Smith's thought is clear. People inspired by the spirit of system inevitably use violence and extremism to fix the problems of society.³¹⁰ However, not only do these problems continue to endure but they are "left altogether without remedy" (TMS, 275). In other words, by imposing an abstract system upon society (often with violence) the people of system make the distresses and inconveniences of society intractable. Additionally, Smith argues that had these same people acted with moderation they could have "removed or relieved" the bulk of society's ills (Ibid).³¹¹ A second, potentially more serious, danger associated with the spirit of system is tyranny. Smith argues that the person of system "insist[s] upon establishing, and establishing all at once, and in spite of all opposition, everything which that idea may seem to require" and in the process "erect[s] [their] own judgment into the supreme standard of right and wrong" (TMS, 276). Thus, by having individuals impose their view of perfection upon society, often violently, the spirit of system turns a genuine and benevolent love of humanity into a desire to tyrannize. Smith's warnings about the dangerous desire to establish a perfect society reaffirm his commitment to commercial society. Although it may be irredeemably flawed, it would create more misery than happiness to try and replace commercial society with something brand new. It would be far superior to direct the same benevolence that gives rise to the spirit of system towards actually improving the conditions of the poor than trying to replace society with an ill-conceived utopia.

Smith's belief that the material benefits of commercial society outweigh any of its moral shortcomings reframes his support for it in a more pessimistic light. Although the flaws inherent in commercial society do not prevent it from creating the opulence, liberty, security, and order necessary to living a happy, dignified life it generates these at the expense of people's ease of body and peace of mind by making them vain, anxious, lonely, and miserable. However, although these material conditions necessitate the perpetuation of misery, people are able to live a superior life than their counterparts in any preexisting "barbaric" society and are free to pursue praiseworthiness and tranquility rather than wealth and greatness. Additionally, any attempts to repair its flaws or replace commercial society with a new one will only end up making people

³¹⁰ Smith criticizes men of system for imposing their extreme idealism on people with violence claiming that "the violence of the party, refusing all palliatives, all temperaments, all reasonable accommodations, by requiring too much frequently obtains nothing" (TMS, 275).

³¹¹ Hanley (2008) points out that Smith's legislator "must temper his commitment to idealism with an appreciation of the specific contexts in which he serves" in order to avoid succumbing to the spirit of system (p.222).

more miserable than they already are. Consequently, though we might say that the majority of people within commercial society are unhappy we should still consider them to be better off than if they lived in any other possible society. Smith's more pessimistic defense of commercial society presumes that individuals would (and perhaps should) opt for survival and misery at the expense of any pursuit of self-perfection and tranquility. Opting for the best possible society rather than the perfect will not guarantee or even promote self-perfection and tranquility. However, this will help to avoid the real, most tangible, sources of human misery (i.e. poverty and civil war).

4.4 Hope for the Middle Class

Rather than giving into despair, TMS' 6th edition offers hope that some individuals will have a degree of immunity to corruption and thus remain capable of self-perfecting and attaining ease of body and peace of mind. The people most likely to accomplish this are those in the middle class. Because they do not experience the sufferings of the poor or the vulgarity of the rich, the middle class is best positioned to successfully pursue a life of praiseworthiness and tranquility. Furthermore, these middle class individuals can pursue tranquility without jeopardizing the production of opulence. In short, commercial society does not appear to depend on the vanity of the middle class. Thus, if they can avoid corruption and choose to self-perfect, members of the middle class can attain both ease of body and peace of mind. There is, however, no guarantee that they will accomplish this; being in the middle class does not mean you necessarily listen to the voice of Nature and become tranquil. However, due to their station in life, away from the extremes of poverty and riches, the people within the middle class are most likely to successfully follow the golden rule and become happy.

With regards to their pursuit of tranquility, the middle class holds several distinct advantages over the poor. Obviously the middle class holds an economic advantage over the poor that allows them to avoid the material obstacles associated with poverty. Individuals within this class need not struggle to acquire and maintain the basic necessities of life. However, this advantage is not purely materialistic. Individuals in the middle class are also immune to the psychological problems the poor endure because of their condition. Unlike the poor, members of the middle class will not experience the anonymity, shame, and impatience that the poor do. The

inequality fundamental to commercial society is largely responsible for psychological problems. Economic inequality directs people's aversion to pain and attraction to pleasure towards wealth and greatness. Accordingly, Smith argues that "[it] is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow, that we make a parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty" (TMS, 62).³¹² Because it is painful to be pitied we seek to attain wealth and the sympathetic joy attached with this. This, Smith argues, is the origin of ambition (TMS, 62-63). Simultaneously, Smith argues that it is painful to feel pity for others and, for our own happiness, it is best if we ignored sympathizing with the sorrows of other people (TMS, 59). Consequently, we ignore the sufferings of the poor and their miserable condition while they hide themselves from our sight out of shame. The aversion to pain and sorrow also leads the poor's impatient desire to capture the attention of society (TMS, 68-69). This might inevitably lead to moral corruption as the poor become convinced that the only way to attain happiness is to become rich and great.

Members of the middle class are not necessarily immune to the delusions of the imagination that cause moral corruption. However, because of their relative wealth these individuals may be less likely to erroneously associate happiness with riches and greatness. The middle class' material condition does not elicit any pity and as a result they do not have to experience the same psychological effects the poor do. Though they may never be as beloved as the rich and great are, the middle class is in a position to garner enough attention and approval to satisfy their need for mutual sympathy. The mere fact that they are not the objects of society's contempt or apathy means that the middle class is better situated to pursue ease of body and peace of mind. Similarly, it is possible for the people in this class to be loved and admired without giving into the impatience that the anonymous and despised poor do. As a result, the middle class may have less reason to give into the vain desire for riches and greatness and more likely than the poor to see them as the delusions that they really are. Though being a member of the middle class cannot guarantee our happiness it is far easier to identify and pursue our *telos* from this position than it would be if we were poor.

³¹² Recall that Smith characterizes sorrow and joy as types of pain and pleasure (TMS, 56).

By avoiding the anonymity that plagues the poor the middle class is already more likely to avoid vanity and acquire tranquility. However, the middle class is also uniquely positioned to avoid the things which divert the rich away from the voice of Nature. Smith's repeated ridicule of the rich and great provides insight into their lifestyle and reveals why they may be as anxious and miserable as the poor. When referencing the rich and great Smith frequently characterizes them as vulgar and vain and uses denigrating terms such as selfish, rapacious, and insatiable (TMS, 215).³¹³ Additionally, Smith mocks the rich and great's foppish ways and preference for appearance and affectation over substance and virtue (TMS, 66-68). The rich and great, Smith argues, are ignorant of the "easy price at which they may acquire [...] public admiration" and believe that they have accomplished something worthy of recognition (TMS, 66). By merely having wealth and displaying it the rich and great are able to attain the admiration of society and satisfy their need for attention and recognition. However, this attention and recognition do little to provide the rich and great with ease of mind. In the 6th edition of TMS' chapter on moral corruption, Smith argues that the vain and vulgar rich and great "desire to be praised for what they themselves do not think praise-worthy" and that these "hypocrites of wealth and greatness" are often "ashamed of the unfashionable virtues which they sometimes practice in secret, and for which they have secretly some degree of real veneration" (TMS, 76-77). Finally, in his harshest condemnation of the rich and great, Smith claims that, to enjoy their attention and admiration, they "[invoke] in vain the dark and dismal powers of forgetfulness and oblivion" but, even in the midst of the "gaudy pomp of the most ostentatious greatness", these individuals are "pursued by the avenging furies of shame and remorse" (TMS, 78). Smith's criticism of the rich and great—especially in the final edition—leaves us with a singular picture; these individuals are not as happy as they appear to be. The happiness the rich and great appear to enjoy is in actuality a dependence on the attention and admiration of others, which comes with a heavy price.³¹⁴

The middle class' modest station in life is not attached to any vulgar or vain attention seeking behaviors. Unlike the foppish dilettantes mocked by Smith, members of the middle class are not bound to fashionable displays of wealth or peculiar affectations. Consequently,

³¹³ See Hanley (2009) p.16.

³¹⁴ Smith does admit that the rich and great have a greater *means* to happiness. However, this appears to be wasted on their perpetual satisfaction of vanity (TMS, 213).

individuals in the middle class are not necessarily exposed to constant shame or remorse. This may leave the middle class in an economic condition Smith terms as the “natural and ordinary state of mankind” that consists of being healthy, debt-free, and having a clear conscience (TMS, 57). From this condition an individual may be better suited to attaining the attention and admiration of others by pursuing the path of “wisdom and virtue” referenced by Smith in his chapter on moral corruption (TMS, 74). Such a path may include the development of the “important virtues”:

He must cultivate these therefore: he must acquire superior knowledge in his profession, and superior industry in the exercise of it. He must be patient in labour, resolute in danger, and firm in distress. These talents he must bring into public view, by the difficulty, importance, and, at the same time, good judgment of his undertakings, and by the severe and unrelenting application with which he pursues them. Probity and prudence, generosity and frankness, must characterize his behaviour upon all ordinary occasions; and he must, at the same time, be forward to engage in all those situations, in which it requires the greatest talents and virtues to act with propriety, but in which the greatest applause is to be acquired by those who can acquit themselves with honour (TMS, 68).³¹⁵

These virtues allow an individual to distinguish themselves and attain admiration without succumbing to either the impatience the poor experience or the vulgarity and vanity of the rich. Hanley (2009) argues that, in outlining this path, Smith is “recommending the prudent path as a surer means to distinction than either aristocratic dilettantism or unrestrained political ambition”.³¹⁶ Though the rich and poor are both capable of developing these virtues, it is the members of the middle class who are most likely to become virtuous and attain tranquility.

Although they may be more susceptible to corruption, the rich and poor are still capable of becoming praiseworthy and attaining ease of body and peace of mind. However, given the trappings of their economic condition, both the rich and poor are more likely to be corrupted and pursue the false *telos* of riches and greatness. Because of their position between these two extremes, the middle class may be capable of avoiding the obstacles that divert the rich and poor away from praiseworthiness and tranquility. Though they are still capable of being corrupted, individuals in the middle class will have a greater chance of properly following the golden rule and achieving self-perfection. Furthermore, the middle class can become praiseworthy without

³¹⁵ In TMS’ 6th edition these virtues are all subsumed under the cardinal virtue of prudence (TMS, 250-256).

³¹⁶ See Hanley (2009) p.111. Hanley also adds that Smith’s students may have been the target of this list of virtues.

affecting the opulence of society. However, accomplishing this depends upon political conditions that may lie outside of the middle class' control.

4.5 The Limits of Political Intervention

Although the two ends of Nature are at odds with each other politics can play a necessary and vital role in ameliorating this tension.³¹⁷ However, commercial society's reliance on vanity poses a problem for any potential remedy to moral corruption. Because it relies on the anxiety (and thus misery) of the rich and poor any solution to corruption in commercial society must allow vanity to persist in some way. Accordingly, any political attempt to resolve the problems of corruption will be necessarily limited. However, Smith does argue that politics plays a fundamental, albeit partial, role in guiding people back towards the voice of Nature and the life of praiseworthiness. It is the responsibility of the legislator to protect and preserve commercial society and all of its benefits.³¹⁸ This involves protecting commercial society from the potentially harmful influence of moral corruption and its symptoms. In doing so, the legislator can ensure that self-perfection will remain both widely accessible and attainable should individuals choose to pursue praiseworthiness rather than mere praise. However, because praiseworthiness requires benevolence it cannot be imposed on anyone without becoming inconsistent. Thus, a legislator may encourage the pursuit of praiseworthiness and development of virtue through policy and legislation, but it cannot be enforced.³¹⁹

Commercial society is largely preserved through the maintenance of the rules of justice and the liberty of markets. This maintenance helps to guarantee the liberty, security, and opulence of society and as a result sustains the conditions required for the successful pursuit of tranquility. This may be especially important if the vain pursuit of wealth and greatness were to become a part of propriety and an intractable feature of everyday life. If it were to become a part of propriety the disproportionately self-interested pursuit of fame and greatness, combined with

³¹⁷ For the role positive law plays in inculcating values see Muller (1995) p.112, Alvey (2003) p.156. Evensky (2005) contends that, for Smith, "positive law serves as an active tool for the inculcation of values" p.62.

³¹⁸ Smith tasks legislators with abolishing mercantilism and instituting a "natural system of perfect liberty" (WN IV.vii.c.44). In TMS Smith claims that legislators are responsible for "preserving the public peace by restraining injustice [and] promoting the prosperity of the commonwealth" (TMS, 96).

³¹⁹ Attempting to mandate and enforce benevolence and praiseworthiness would be giving in to the spirit of system that breeds tyranny.

the love and admiration of the rich and great, may threaten to undermine the rules of justice and liberty of markets by disproportionately favoring one group (the rich) over another (the poor).³²⁰ Consequently, the legislator must preserve these, without eradicating the vanity that jeopardizes them in the first place. The legislator is thus burdened with protecting a society which appears determined to destroy itself.

In addition to requiring a *laissez-faire* type of approach to vanity the legislator is confronted with another major obstacle. An essential means for remedying corruption, and directing individuals back towards praiseworthiness, would be to develop the benevolence of individuals so they would be better able to perceive, appreciate, and pursue the golden mean. This benevolence would, ideally, counteract the selfishness of the corrupted individual and help push them away from vanity and towards praiseworthiness and tranquility. However, according to Smith “benevolence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force” (TMS, 95). Consequently, the legislator is severely limited in how they might encourage corrupted individuals to develop and act upon their more benevolent nature. Smith’s pessimistic attitude towards commercial society limits the legislator’s ability to intervene and redirect individuals back towards Nature’s providential plan. However, any political intervention will be limited by the need to maintain some level of vanity and the inability to compel benevolence. The legislator’s most important role in commercial society is the fair and proper administration of the rules of justice.³²¹

The most effective means the legislator has in ensuring the proper administration of (and respect for) the rules of justice is through the fair and balanced execution of punishment. Punishment is essential to justice because it satisfies the sentiments of individuals who have experienced injustice and confirms that we live in a fair, secure, society.³²² Without punishment it is doubtful that the laws of justice would be “tolerably observed” and thus society would cease

³²⁰ Though he advocates legislative intervention to maintain the benefits of commercial society, Smith does not adequately acknowledge the risks corruption may pose for justice and commerce.

³²¹ Griswold (1999) points out that trying to generate more benevolence may place too much of a burden on individuals. Consequently, the legislator should focus their efforts on the maintenance of justice (p.235). Otteson (2002) highlights the essential role justice plays in supporting society, reminding us that other things (i.e. acts of benevolence) are ornaments that make society agreeable (p.228).

³²² Punishment resolves the resentment felt over injustice by making violators of justice feel a pain similar to what they inflicted on others (TMS, 115). I agree with Haakonssen (1981) argues that justice and punishment focuses on the individual but has a distinct social utility (p.88-89). Similarly, Fleischacker (2004) claims that this utility is an unintended, albeit beneficial, outcome of treating individuals justly (p.9).

to exist (TMS, 106). Smith goes so far as to argue that “mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent” (TMS, 107). However, preserving justice means punishing people properly. Properly punishing individuals, Smith claims, is the most difficult task assigned to a legislator and neglecting this task “exposes the commonwealth to many gross disorders and shocking enormities” while “too push it too far is destructive of all liberty, security, and justice” (TMS, 98-99). Properly punishing individuals for violating justice presumes some level of equitable treatment. Individuals ought to be punished for what they do rather than who they are and what class they belong to. More importantly, to treat people justly we must “humble the arrogance of [our] self-love” (TMS, 101).³²³ It is when we pursue our happiness over the happiness of others that we are most likely to act unjustly. The selfish and vain desire to be rich and great may interfere with the necessary humbling of our self-love and blind us to the potential injuries we inflict on others. Additionally, in a corrupt society it is possible that punishment may reflect our love and admiration of the rich and great and our apathy and contempt towards the poor. Punishing the poor too severely because we loathe them and the rich too leniently because we love them may fail to satisfy the sentiments of victims (and observers) of injustice which could lead to factionalism, instability, and even civil war. Consequently, it is essential that the legislator protects the sacred rules of justice by properly and equitably punishing its violators and thus ensuring that both the political *and* moral purposes of this “largely negative” virtue are satisfied and fulfilled.

A second, similarly important, task Smith assigns to the legislator is the preservation of markets. The legislator must keep the markets free from interference from corporations (e.g. guilds) and mercantile interests to ensure they operate in a way that creates general opulence.³²⁴ In doing so the legislator promotes guaranteeing distribution of wealth that guarantees everyone has some access to the material wealth required to attain tranquility. Moreover, this distribution helps to preserve the liberty required for ease of body and peace of mind. In essence, the legislator is tasked with ensuring the proper (i.e. natural) functioning of the invisible hand which

³²³ Smith does not represent self-love as either vicious or immoral. When it is proportional to our benevolence and directed by the golden rule self-love can be praiseworthy and virtuous. However, self-love can become excessive and dangerous, especially when we are corrupted or self-deluded.

³²⁴ See WN X.ii for Smith’s criticism of how corporations have reduced competition in employment and thus interfered with the freedom of markets.

ensures the proper distribution of society's wealth (TMS, 215).³²⁵ Although the invisible hand does not work towards creating economic equality it will necessarily ensure that the production of opulence in commercial society raises all boats and eradicates the abject poverty endemic to all non-commercial societies. However, although the legislator is important to the distribution of wealth they are necessarily limited in how they can promote this by the need to preserve some level of vanity, anxiety, loneliness, and misery. Finally, to ensure the continued generation of opulence, the legislator has to resist the influence of powerful particular interests. Evensky (2005) argues that the "powerful self-serving and distorting influences" of particular interests can influence government and the necessary distribution of wealth (p.128).³²⁶

The legislator is largely responsible for preserving the conditions required for the pursuit of tranquility and not for promoting tranquility itself. If justice is properly administered with fair punishment and the liberty of markets is preserved, then everyone in society should be capable of attaining their *telos* if they choose to, even if only a few every do. The vast majority of individuals may likely continue to live vain lives in pursuit of fame and greatness; however, Smith believes this is both good and necessary. The anxious and lonely pursuit of fame and greatness will inevitably contribute to the opulence tranquility requires. Additionally, the legislator's ability to overcome corruption is limited by the difficulty of legislating and enforcing acts of benevolence.³²⁷ If moral corruption indeed makes us disproportionately self-interested to the point of selfishness then encouraging the growth of benevolence may be one way of remedying it. However, though Smith admits that a legislator can enact rules that entice people to behave benevolently this cannot be mandated (TMS, 98). Requiring benevolence, through legislation, would transform the desire to contribute to the well-being and happiness of others into a self-interested need to obey the government. Legislators can, at best, influence people to act benevolently by promoting its benefits but this will have limited effect on people who have been thoroughly corrupted.

³²⁵ For the role the invisible hand plays in Smith's historical teleology see Alvey (2003) p.22. See also no.40

³²⁶ See WN I.iix.13 for an example of how the "clamour" of a particular interest can influence legislation.

³²⁷ It can be added that Smith always prioritized the order and security of society over individual happiness and acts of benevolence. See Alvey (2003) p.186.

Although political intervention cannot (and should not) eradicate moral corruption it is a necessary step in creating the conditions where it is at least possible. Without justice and opulence commercial society cannot endure and it is unlikely that many people could successfully pursue tranquility. Moreover, without some political guidance commercial society may be incapable of providing even the limited benefits that make it superior to every other society, real or imagined. Consequently, the legislator plays a vital role in balancing Nature's two conflicting ends. Punishing the unjust, preserving the freedom of the markets, and promoting acts of benevolence helps to ensure some people will attain ease of body and peace of mind even while most do not. Thus, while the conflict between ends may never disappear it can be softened in order to ensure some individuals (i.e. the middle class) are capable of using their consciences to identify and pursue praiseworthiness rather than adhering to mere propriety and live a life of tranquility.

Conclusion

Smith's theory of moral corruption adds an unavoidable pessimistic component to his characterization of commercial society. Misery is no longer understood as an unfortunate, potentially avoidable, side effect but as a necessary force. This creates a conflict between Nature's two ends. The people most likely to suffer the consequences of this conflict are the rich and poor. Commercial society can only exist and operate if the majority of these people are vain, anxious, and miserable. It is worth noting that this rich and poor will experience this misery differently. However, the miserable condition of the poor might be more worthy of our sympathy than the rich. Nevertheless, Smith continues to support commercial society, albeit on different grounds. No longer convinced that it is entirely compatible with the pursuit of tranquility, Smith supports commercial society on the grounds that it is far superior to any other existing society or any we might construct in our imagination. Smith invariably concludes that it is better to stick with commercial society, despite its flaws, than it would be to try and erect a completely novel, perfect, society. Finally, Smith retains the hope that at least one part of the population will have a clear path to their *telos* despite society's need for the vain pursuit of wealth and greatness. The middle class, Smith argues, are ideally positioned to continue pursuing praiseworthiness even when those around them are necessarily diverted away from this. The middle class' can continue

listening to the voice of Nature without jeopardizing the operation of commercial society and its beneficial consequences.

This pessimism has implications that reach beyond Smith's support for commercial society. Smith's eventual prescription for curing moral corruption and redirecting individuals back towards their natural *telos* reflects the conflict between Nature's two ends. Commercial society is—and should be—too entrenched to replace. Moreover, commercial society depends on the vanity of the rich and poor and thus any solution to corruption cannot be entirely comprehensive. Thus, any potential political attempt to eliminate corruption would be necessarily limited. A more targeted solution to the false teleology created by the gaudy and glittering lifestyle of the rich and great is required. This solution would leave at least some vanity in place so that everyone can continue to enjoy the benefits of commercial society. Smith provides a solution, primarily aimed at the middle class, which seeks to redirect the reader's conscience away from a corrupt love of praise and back towards praiseworthiness. This solution is contained within the most significant addition to TMS; Smith's treatment of virtue ethics.

The Therapy of Nature

5.0 Introduction

The most substantial addition to TMS' final edition is Smith's inclusion of Part VI Of the Character of Virtue. Within this addition Smith explains how an individual can live a life of praiseworthiness and tranquility in a society that perpetuates and profits from vanity and misery. The virtues outlined by Smith in Part VI provide the teleological content to praiseworthiness that allows our consciences to become authoritative and independent of propriety. The three virtues that make up these standards of praiseworthiness are prudence, benevolence, and self-command. These three virtues are the qualities of character we develop when we consistently follow the golden rule and which—when properly developed—bring us lasting tranquility. When an individual successfully develops all three of these qualities of character they will attain the wealth and security required for ease of body and the mutual sympathy that brings peace of mind. Consequently, these virtues represent the completion of Smith's teleology. It is our pursuit of praiseworthiness (i.e. self-perfection) that directs us towards these virtues and ultimately makes us truly happy. Additionally, these virtues are recommended to us by Nature and thus our impartial spectator will direct us to these when it speaks to us with the voice of Nature rather than conventional propriety. Smith's theory of virtue (i.e. his conception of *eudaimonia*) represents a life lived in accordance with Nature. Part VI of TMS contains Smith's attempt to cure the reader of any potential corruption and redirect our consciences back towards the providential plan of the Author of Nature by persuading us to soften our self-interest, develop gratitude, and control our passions. Rather than transforming commercial society, Smith attempts to overcome the problem of corruption by encouraging us to develop the personal virtues that will make us happy while also contributing to the happiness of others. The development of prudence, benevolence, and self-command should soften the effects of vanity without eradicating it, thus allowing commercial society to continue to provide the conditions required for tranquility.

Part VI of TMS completes the 6th edition's theory of self-perfection. The virtues outlined by Smith in this part simultaneously provide our conscience with the standards of

praiseworthiness required to attain tranquility while also providing a remedy for moral corruption. To accomplish these the virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command need to be distinct from (and superior to) the flawed and potentially corrupt standards of conventional propriety. Several authors have linked Smith's virtues to propriety. For instance, Griswold connects the virtues present in Part VI to propriety and argues that Smith saw virtue as the "proper government and direction of all our affections".³²⁸ Later Griswold reasserts the connection between virtue and propriety by arguing that the former is based on the "reasonableness" of a sentiment or action.³²⁹ Otteson echoes Griswold's claims, arguing that the virtues in TMS are a part of propriety.³³⁰ The conflation of virtue with propriety ignores the distinctions made by Smith in TMS. Smith first distinguishes virtue from propriety by arguing the former is "uncommonly great and beautiful" while characterizing the latter as "vulgar and ordinary" (TMS, 32). Smith goes further by adding that the virtues deserve to be "admired and celebrated" while propriety merely deserves "to be approved of" (Ibid). Later, in Part VI, Smith reaffirms this distinction by outlining two standards of judgment. The standards of judgment that lead to virtue are defined as the "perfection", while the second (i.e. propriety) is defined as "that degree of approximation to [perfection] which is commonly attained in the world" (TMS, 291).³³¹ Forman-Barzilai has provided a useful definition of virtue which I believe is more true to Smith's distinction, claiming that it is "an imaginary perfection that [stands] somehow beyond sociology for Smith, outside of history, serving as a transcendent model" for shaping our own character.³³² This definition is consistent with the differences between virtue and propriety as well as the contingent teleology I have outlined in previous chapters.

Prudence, benevolence, and self-command are all essential to our praiseworthy pursuit of tranquility. Outlining what these virtues are and how they contribute to our ease of body and peace of mind is an important step in connecting them to the potential standards of

³²⁸ See Griswold (1999) p.181.

³²⁹ Ibid. p.183.

³³⁰ See Otteson (2002) p.246.

³³¹ Smith attaches the term "exact propriety" to his first standard of perfection and in doing so contributes to the conflation of virtue and propriety. However, the language used here and the context of the argument, I believe, make it clear that Smith is referring to something different than the standards of "mere propriety". Montes (2004) has pointed out the different ways Smith defines propriety in TMS (p.12). Likewise, Macfie (1967) accuses Smith of a "spread of meaning", often changing the meaning of words, or vaguely defining terms to the point of self-contradiction (p.58).

³³² See Forman-Barzilai (2010) p.108.

praiseworthiness. Montes offers a civic humanist reading that emphasizes the virtue of self-command by linking it directly to Machiavellian *virtù*.³³³ According to Montes self-command is the only character trait that is inherently virtuous and is entirely responsible for making prudence and benevolence truly virtuous. However, Montes' interpretation is based upon a misunderstanding of self-command. Although this self-command is always admirable, Smith is clear that it is not always virtuous. Some of the "greatest criminals" are capable of great self-command, but Smith argues that this does not make their horrible accomplishments worthy of the term "virtuous" (TMS, 282).³³⁴ Furthermore, although there are definitive political components to Smith's virtues I do not believe he should be understood as a civic republican. Instead I agree with Hanley that the virtues correspond to our role as human beings and not specifically as citizens.³³⁵ Such a reading is consistent with my argument from the previous chapter that the ends of society and the ends of humanity are not necessarily aligned. Brown echoes the apolitical nature of Smith's virtue ethics, concluding that Smith's virtues are derived "from the intensely private and internalized morality of the Stoics".³³⁶ Brown subsequently divides the virtues into the "truly moral virtues" of self-command and benevolence and the "lower-order virtues" of prudence and justice.³³⁷ Although the latter have an identifiable political dimension to them Brown argues that benevolence and self-command lack a "participatory dimension" and thus should not be considered political or civic.³³⁸ Brown characterizes benevolence and self-command as "truly virtuous" because of their reliance the dialogic conscience.³³⁹ Other readings of TMS' Part VI focus on the other cardinal virtues. For instance, McCloskey labels Smith's virtues as "bourgeois" because of their specific economic elements, especially those contained within prudence.³⁴⁰ It is possible to have one (or even two) of the virtues without the others. A prudent, benevolent, or self-commanding person may be worthy of

³³³ See Montes (2004) p.111.

³³⁴ Montes also divorces Machiavellian *virtù* from its role in providing security and glory for the *patria*.

³³⁵ See Hanley (2009) p.25.

³³⁶ See Brown (1994) p.184.

³³⁷ Brown p.4.

³³⁸ Brown p.184.

³³⁹ Brown, p.29.

³⁴⁰ McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006); p.307-307.

respect and some level of admiration. However, to be praiseworthy and attain tranquility all three virtues should coexist and complement each other.

Unlike propriety, the main impetus for pursuing virtue is not to attain the approval of others but to satisfy the conditions of tranquility. Smith establishes this in the Introduction to Part VI when he states that that “When we consider the character of any individual, we naturally view it under two aspects; first, as it may affect his own happiness; and secondly, as it may affect that of other people” (TMS, Part VI, Intro). This reflects our self-interested and benevolent first principles, discussed at length in Chapter Two. Later in the Conclusion, Smith reinforces introductory claim by arguing that “concern for our own happiness recommends to us the virtue of prudence: concern for that of other people, the virtues of justice and benevolence; of which, the one restrains us from hurting, the other prompts us to promote that happiness [of others]” (TMS, 308). Thus, the goal of the virtues outlined by Smith is to help individuals reach their natural *telos* (i.e. tranquility). Accordingly, prudence, benevolence, and self-command are recommended to us by the Author of Nature. We discover and develop these virtues when we adhere to the golden rule, spoken to us by the voice of Nature.

In addition to being a means for attaining our *telos*, Part VI of TMS’ 6th edition is also a remedy for the moral corruption created by our admiration and emulation of the rich and great. Accordingly, in addition to outlining what prudence, benevolence, and self-command are, Smith also attempts to persuade us to develop them. Accordingly, Griswold argues that Smith’s use of the “protreptic ‘we’” is his attempt to convince the reader to adopt the virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command.³⁴¹ Similarly, Hanley argues that Smith utilizes an “ennobling rhetoric” to relieve the reader of corruption and redirect them towards virtue and happiness.³⁴² Throughout his discussion of the virtues Smith emphasizes the material and psychological rewards of a virtuous life. However, to successfully develop the virtues (and thus to become truly praiseworthy and tranquil) we must first be cured of our vanity and subsequent love of praise. Smith spends a significant portion of Part VI criticizing vanity, at one point accusing vain

³⁴¹ Griswold himself is critical of dialogic readings of TMS, arguing that they rely on too many assumptions about authorial intent (p.27-28). However, his reliance on the “protreptic ‘we’” presupposes Smith is speaking directly with the reader in an effort to change their moral attitudes and understandings. Consequently, Griswold accepts some form of dialogue between Smith and the reader.

³⁴² See esp p.86-99 for Hanley’s analysis of how rhetoric can ennoble self-love.

individuals of being incapable of sincerity (TMS, 300). Smith later reminds us that vain people are perpetually dissatisfied due to their “continual dread of shame” (TMS, 307). The criticism of vanity found in Part VI may potentially be a part of Smith’s attempt to cure the reader of their love of praise. Whether or not this is an effective tactic at discouraging vanity is disputable. However, that Smith saw fit to include his most detailed criticism of vanity alongside his discussion of virtue may suggest that Smith recognized the conflict between corruption and virtue and saw a need to redirect our conscience back towards praiseworthiness.

The purpose of the golden rule is to perfect our moral faculties by softening and moderating our self-interest while simultaneously increasing our benevolence.³⁴³ When we adhere to the demands of the golden rule we follow the Author of Nature’s providential plan and become praiseworthy individuals. Smith’s treatment of the three virtues in Part VI of TMS’ 6th edition reflects the approach to self-perfection. Prudence moderates our self-interested sentiments and by doing so helps us pursue and attain the wealth required for what Smith refers to as “secure tranquility” (TMS, 254). Unlike the poor man’s son, who anxiously pursues great wealth, the prudent individual is capable of pursuing and attaining wealth, and the attention that comes with this, without sacrificing any present ease, enjoyment, or happiness (TMS, 253-254). Consequently, prudence is a viable alternative to the anxious desire to be rich and great. Cultivating prudence is the necessary first step in redirecting individuals away from corrupted propriety and towards their natural *telos*. Only after our self-interest has been reconditioned to appreciate what truly makes us happy can we begin to conform to the Author of Nature’s providential plan.

The next necessary step in redirecting our conscience back to praiseworthiness and the golden rule is the cultivation of our benevolent sentiments and the subsequent contribution to the happiness of other people. As expressed at the very beginning of TMS, benevolence requires us to contribute to the happiness of others with no necessary expectation of reward (TMS, 13). To encourage the proper cultivation of our benevolent sentiments Smith recommends developing bonds of affections with others so we can properly contribute to their well-being. By building strong bonds of affection with family, friends, and fellow citizens we can properly contribute to

³⁴³ See Muller (1993) p.111.

the happiness of others and to our own praiseworthy pursuit of tranquility (TMS, 258-273). To cultivate these benevolent relationships Smith encourages us to cultivate our sentiment of gratitude. A properly gracious person contributes to the happiness of others through acts of kindness (i.e. acts of benevolence) (TMS, 266). By promoting and perpetuating acts of kindness gratitude contributes to our own pursuit of tranquility while also eliminating any loneliness caused by corruption. Increasing our benevolent *via* gratitude brings our consciences back in line with the golden rule and the Author of Nature's plan. Consequently, the development of gratitude (and the relationships it fosters) is essential to our pursuit of praiseworthiness and tranquility.

Self-command is the final virtue in Smith's natural therapy. Self-command is the character trait responsible for controlling the passions and ensuring we consistently and continuously adhere to the golden rule. Unlike the other virtues self-command is not directly connected to our nature (i.e. our first principles). Instead, Smith represents self-command as an artificial virtue, difficult to learn yet essential to our pursuit of tranquility (TMS, 282). Self-command contributes to our teleological pursuit by arming us against the temptations to veer away from the golden rule. An individual with self-command is capable of consistently controlling their passions and thus able to place long-term happiness and success ahead of short term pleasures. This helps to ensure the individual's adherence to prudence. Similarly, self-command helps us maintain our benevolence when we are tempted to indulge our self-interest. Moreover, self-command may act as a bulwark against corruption; helping us determine true happiness from its mere appearance and preventing our passions from leading us astray. Consequently, self-command completes our teleological pursuit of praiseworthiness and tranquility therapy by helping our prudence and benevolence endure the many temptations inherent in (and necessary to) commercial society.

Part VI of TMS' 6th edition contains Smith's attempts to redirect our authoritative conscience away from the corruptive conventions of society and towards our natural *telos*. Smith encourages us to moderate our self-interest by developing prudence and increase our benevolence by becoming properly gracious. If commercial society is properly ordered and secure these virtues should provide individuals with ease of body and peace of mind that Nature designed us to pursue. Furthermore, when a person possesses self-command they should be able

to maintain their prudence and benevolence, and resist the temptations of a gaudy and glittering lifestyle. In commercial society everyone should be capable of pursuing and attaining tranquility.³⁴⁴ However, although everyone in commercial society is capable of attaining tranquility, it seems more likely that only a few exceptional individuals (i.e. the wise) ever will.³⁴⁵ The successful pursuit of tranquility may rely more on good fortune than Smith is willing to admit. The individuals Smith believes are most likely to become virtuous and happy are the so-called “inferior and middling stations” of commercial society (TMS, 75). Here Smith appears to be referring to the people within commercial society who are neither very poor nor very rich. These individuals have sufficient wealth and opportunity the poor are lacking while also avoiding the distractions and trappings that keep the rich from becoming virtuous (Ibid). The three cardinal virtues discussed by Smith all contribute to our tranquility in their own ways. Each of these virtues plays a necessary role in securing the pre-conditions for ease of body and peace of mind. Moreover, to properly attain and sustain tranquility we need to develop and exercise all three of these virtues. Though it is possible to be prudent without being benevolent (or *vice versa*) or to be self-commanding without being prudent none of these virtues, on their own, will bring us happiness (i.e. tranquility). Thus it is essential to demonstrate how these virtues bring about the conditions of tranquility but also how they work with—and in support of—each other. Consequently, giving priority to one virtue over the others will not adequately explain what happiness is or how it is properly attained.

5.1 Proper Self-interest

Prudence is the first virtue Smith discusses in Part VI of TMS. Prudence is the virtue developed when we cultivate proper self-interest through adherence to the golden rule.³⁴⁶ In defining this self-interested virtue Smith claims that

³⁴⁴ Fleischacker (2005) argues that everyone in commercial society is capable of attaining virtue but only very few will actually do so (p.78).

³⁴⁵ Although it is only a special few may ever develop the virtues this is not predetermined by social class. Forman-Barzilai (2010) argues that, like Cicero, Smith believed even the “vulgar” could “approximate” virtue and live a happy, tranquil, life (p.108). Additionally, Otteson (2002) argues that most people can reach the very basics for human happiness without ever attaining virtue (p.235). This may be true in principle, but in practice the morally corrupt may find happiness more elusive.

³⁴⁶ Fleischacker (2005) characterizes prudence as *phronesis* arguing that it is the “intellectual virtue by which one judges well of the appropriate means to action” (p.66). This is an exaggerated claim that neglects Smith’s

The care of the health, of the fortune, of the rank and reputation of the individual, the objects upon which his comfort and happiness in this life are supposed principally to depend, is considered as the proper business of that virtue which is commonly called Prudence (TMS, 251).³⁴⁷

Prudence thus deals with both the material and psychological goods necessary for happiness.³⁴⁸ However, the first principle of prudence is security which ensures that we properly avoid any unnecessary hazards while trying to acquire these goods (Ibid). Smith demonstrates how prudence supplies these necessary material and psychological goods and avoids hazards by providing a sketch of the “prudent man”.³⁴⁹ Among other things the prudent man is primarily wise, honest, modest and respectful (TMS, 251-254). It is through qualities such as these that the prudent man is capable of bettering their condition and satisfying their self-interest. Finally, what ultimately directs us towards prudence is Nature. Nature has designed us so that we might recognize and pursue prudence from an early age. Consequently, we develop prudence when we consistently listen to the voice of Nature and adhere to the golden rule.

In the opening passage of TMS’s section on prudence Smith argues that “[the] preservation and healthful state of the body seem to be the objects which Nature first recommends to the care of every individual” (TMS, 250). It is this first natural recommendation that drives us towards prudence. Accordingly, we have “appetites of hunger and thirst, the agreeable or disagreeable sensations of pleasure and pain, of heat and cold &c” (Ibid). Smith adds that these are “lessons delivered by the voice of Nature herself, directing him what he ought to chuse, and what he ought to avoid for this purpose” (Ibid). Nature has thus given us these fundamental appetites and sensations so that can perceive what will satisfy or dissatisfy this first recommended principle and ultimately so that we may know what is prudent. Our first experiences with the fundamentals of prudence are as children. During this stage of our lives we are held in the immediacy of the appetites and sensations and we preserve and maintain

introduction of prudence as a virtue. While prudence may obviously require phronesis Smith makes it clear that this virtue deals specifically with self-interest.

³⁴⁷ Because it targets happiness prudence (i.e. self-love) is not incompatible with virtue. Thus, Fleischacker argues that “self-betterment and vanity are not the same thing” (p.113). Accordingly, Griswold (1999) argues that prudence is what bridges WN and TMS (p.203).

³⁴⁸ Griswold splits prudence’s objectives into two. The first goal of prudence is security while the second aim is fortune and reputation (p.205).

³⁴⁹ Griswold describes this prudent man as “cautious, frugal, parsimonious, polite, decent, capable of friendship, not particularly passionate, reliable” (Ibid).

ourselves and our health by reacting to them. Consequently, Smith argues that “The first lessons which he is taught by those whom his childhood is entrusted, tend, the greater part of them, to the same purpose. Their principal object is to teach him how to keep out of harm’s way” (Ibid). In other words, parents are tasked with properly directing their children’s initial, nascent prudence away from what is harmful and (perhaps indirectly) towards what is pleasurable.

As we grow older, Smith argues, our ability to act prudently changes. Eventually we mature and gain the ability of foresight and this foresight allows us to accomplish with prudence than merely avoiding harm from moment to moment. As young children we were locked into the immediacy of these appetites and sensations, capable of satisfying or avoiding them only as opportunities presented themselves. However, with the capacity of foresight we not only recognize what satisfies our appetite and sensations we can also make a plan for how to satisfy them over time. Moreover, foresight allows us to maximize the satisfaction of our appetites and sensations over time. Smith argues that foresight, combined with care, transforms prudence into “the art of preserving and increasing what is called [...] external fortune” (TMS, 250). Foresight thus expands the goal of prudence and changes it from a concern with immediate satisfaction and into one of continuous and perpetual satisfaction. It is through this transition that prudence begins to take the shape of a virtue. However, before our prudence can become completely virtuous it needs to be applied to more specifically psychological needs. Even after being transformed by foresight Smith argues that prudence is still focused on supplying the “necessities and conveniences of the body” so that we might effectively satisfy our appetites and sensations (Ibid). However, we inevitably develop a desire to attain the respect and esteem of others. Accordingly, Smith argues that “[the] desire of becoming the proper objects of this respect, of deserving and obtaining this credit and rank among our equals” is the psychological desire ultimately animates our prudence and pushes us beyond merely acquiring the basic necessities and conveniences of life and towards acquiring fortune (TMS, 250-251). This fully transforms prudence into a virtue that secures our self-interested well-being in the present while also maximizing it over time.

To act prudently an individual requires a specific type of wisdom. In his discussion of prudence, Smith engages with the reader in an attempt to cultivate this wisdom. The wisdom he persuades us to develop is a potential cure for the anxious—and potentially reckless—desire to

be rich and great. The prudent person is wise enough to live within their income, slowly accumulating more and more wealth without sacrificing ease of body (TMS, 253). As a result this individual has “no anxiety to change so comfortable a situation” and is actually capable of enjoying the “secure tranquility” that wealth affords us (TMS, 254). Smith’s discussion of prudence attempts guide us back to the things which will contribute to real and lasting happiness while also assuring them they will increase their fortune and reputation in the process, albeit gradually. Accordingly, the wisdom associated with prudence is economic in nature. Prudential wisdom focuses on providing and securing the materials necessary for ease of body and by doing so also contributes to the prudent person’s peace of mind by securing reputation, esteem, and respect.

To successfully encourage the reader to develop the wisdom required of prudence Smith encourages us to be honest and sincere in their pursuit of knowledge. The “prudent man”, explains Smith, “always studies seriously and earnestly to understand whatever he professes to understand, and not merely to persuade other people that he understands it” (TMS, 251). The prudent individual thus seeks to truly know what they claim to know regardless of how unpersuasive and unspectacular this knowledge may be. Smith argues that the prudent individual “may not always appear very brilliant” but, because their approach to knowledge is genuine, they always avoid being an “artful imposter”, “assuming pedant”, or a “superficial and impudent pretender” (Ibid). This modesty and humility may act as a counterweight to the vain love of praise encouraged by commercial society, helping the prudent person recognize and pursue praiseworthiness. Although the prudent individual may have limited and modest knowledge and understanding, they are never a fraud and they never pretend to know something they do not understand. Instead a prudent person focuses wholeheartedly on what they do (and can) understand. As a consequence this individual is not easily led astray and into unfamiliar enterprises that could potentially jeopardize their security. Instead they focus their attention and understanding (however modest) on pursuits they are capable of truly grasping and in doing so are capable of properly securing (and increasing) their material well-being and reputation.

The specific wisdom inherent in prudence thus helps to remedy corruption by giving the individual a means to determine what will contribute to their self-interested desire to improve their condition and what will be hazardous to it. This includes avoiding the political games the

rich and great frequently engage in. Smith stresses that the prudent individual wisely avoids any and all affairs and responsibilities that do not concern them by arguing that the prudent individual refuses to “subject [them]self to any responsibility which [their] duty does not impose on [them]” and adds that this person is “averse to enter into any party disputes, hates faction, and [are] not always very forward to listen to the voice even of noble and great ambition” (TMS, 254). The prudent person is not tempted by greatness and does not seek to involve themselves in any affairs which do not immediately concern them or only serve to satisfy ambition. However, this does not mean that prudence is entirely apolitical; a prudent person readily accepts their political duties when called upon but, Smith argues, refuses to “force [them]self” into politics merely to satisfy the “vain splendour of successful ambition” (Ibid). The prudent person may thus be less likely to pursue greatness merely for the sake of gratifying a vain desire for groundless praise. Though praiseworthiness may demand some political engagement and obligation, these will not be pursued out of pure self-interest.

By encouraging us to develop prudence, Smith aims to direct our conscience away from the anxious and vain pursuit of wealth and greatness. Simultaneously he attempts to direct us towards the real sources of secure tranquility. In doing so Smith does not try to ignore or erase our self-interested nature. Rather, his goal is to soften and moderate our self-interest so we can more successfully satisfy the requirements of tranquility. Furthermore, by redirecting and moderating our self-interest we may be more apt to obey the benevolent commands of our impartial spectator and thus more likely to adhere to the golden rule. However, mere wisdom may not be enough to rid us of the vain desire for wealth and greatness. Smith furthers his remedy for corruption by rounding out his sketch of the prudent individual. As well as being wise the prudent individual is also honest, frugal, respectful, modest, and disposed to contentment. The prudent individual, Smith argues, is “always sincere, and feels horror at the very thought of exposing himself to the disgrace which attends upon the detection of falsehood” (TMS, 252).³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ However, although the prudent individual is always honest they are not always forthcoming. According to Smith prudence requires that we keep some things to ourselves unless we are called upon to offer the whole truth (TMS, 252). What this conditional truth-telling implies about the relationship between commercial society and honesty may be worthy of discussion elsewhere. For the moment I would suggest that the prudent person is only honest and forthcoming insofar as these do not hinder the pursuit of tranquility. Should the full truth threaten either our ease of body or peace of mind then it is prudent to keep to ourselves unless we find ourselves in a situation which demands

The final piece of Smith's sketch of the prudent individual is the ability to live within ones means. To accomplish this we develop and exercise frugality. The goal of frugality is to ensure both our short term and long term happiness by ensuring we do not live outside our present means nor try to anxiously change our fortune. Accordingly, Smith argues that prudent individual should be "steadily sacrificing the ease and enjoyment of the present moment for the probable expectation of the still greater ease and enjoyment of a more distant but more lasting period of time" (TMS, 253). In other words, the prudent person is frugal so that they might acquire greater fortune in the future and improve their ease of body and peace of mind. However, in sacrificing present ease and enjoyment for future gains the prudent individual does not forego present happiness. The prudent person is still able to be happy in the present because, Smith claims, this person sees the present and the future through the same lens (Ibid.). The prudent individual secures increased ease and enjoyment in the future by making sacrifices in the present while simultaneously acquiring ease and enjoyment in the present from the knowledge of this (TMS, 253). Additionally, Smith believes frugality helps the prudent person live entirely within their means by giving them the "double satisfaction" of living at ease while also knowing that their situation is gradually improving over time (Ibid.). Due to this double satisfaction, the prudent person should not develop the anxiety attributed to the poor man's son. Prudence and its associated characteristics all contribute to the moderation and proper direction of our desire to better our condition and thus all play a role in securing tranquility. By encouraging us to become prudent, Smith hopes to keep our desire to improve our condition from becoming anxious. Prudence, Smith contends, can more reliably satisfy our self-interested pursuits than vanity and is thus far more likely to lead us to happiness than the pursuit of riches and greatness.

Self-interest is essential to the survival of the individual and the human species. Consequently, we cannot hope to attain tranquility without some measure of self-interest. The goal of prudence is not to eliminate self-interest but to soften it and direct it towards proper things. In the final edition of TMS Smith attempts to direct the reader's conscience away from

full honest disclosure. Smith is not clear on what circumstances require full disclosure of the truth but we can easily speculate about this and ideally the prudent individual would know such situations when confronted with them. What is clear is that the prudent person should use the truth instrumentally to aid in their pursuit of happiness, even if they have to lie by omission.

the anxious desire to be rich and great and back towards the golden rule and the voice of Nature. Smith contends that the careful and consistent exercise of prudence will fulfill our self-interest in a safe and dignified way. Thus, the prudent individual avoids anxiety and the subsequent misery this creates. Furthermore, Smith characterizes prudence as a simple virtue anyone can develop. Prudence is both an accessible virtue and an attainable one. In commercial society even the “meanest labourers” should have access to enough wealth to develop the prudence required for tranquility. Consequently, the reader of TMS can be confident in their ability to develop prudence regardless of the status, class, or natural abilities. More importantly, prudence paves the way for the development of benevolence and the subsequent perfection of our nature. Whereas a corrupted individual may be consumed by the selfish pursuit of wealth and greatness a prudent person may be more willing and able to hear and obey the benevolent commands of their impartial spectator. A prudent person may be more likely to hear the voice of Nature clearly and thus more likely to know and adhere to the dictates of the golden rule.

3.2 Circles of Benevolence

The second virtue included in TMS’ path of self-perfection is benevolence. Benevolence is produced (and defined) by our natural propensity to contribute to the well-being and happiness of others. The development of benevolence is essential to our adherence to the golden rule and pursuit of tranquility. The key to this development is gratitude. Gratitude allows us to develop the relationships of affection necessary to our exercise of benevolence. Thus, a properly gracious person will develop the benevolence required for recognizing and adhering to the golden rule and living a life of praiseworthiness and tranquility.³⁵¹ Similarly, benevolence may also be a remedy for the loneliness caused by moral corruption. Whereas Smith’s discussion of prudence intends to moderate the reader’s self-interest his discussion of benevolence aims at increasing our second first principle.³⁵² According to Smith, benevolence deals specifically with how the “character of every individual, so far as it can affect the happiness of other people” (TMS, 257). Put another way, the virtue of benevolence outlines when we are required to help someone else by

³⁵¹ Muller (1993) argues that we perfect our nature and become morally superior when we promote our benevolence and use it to restrain our selfishness (p.111). Hanley (2009) makes a similar argument. It is important to note that benevolence does not eclipse our self-interest. Instead, the development of benevolence helps balance our self-interest and directs it towards proper things.

³⁵² See TMS, 13 and Chapter Two of this work.

contributing to their happiness. The proper care for, and contribution to, the happiness and well-being of others supports our pursuit of tranquility by promoting mutual sympathy and thus peace of mind.

We develop proper benevolence when we cultivate and express our gratitude.³⁵³ The more gracious we are the more we will contribute to the happiness and well-being of other people. Smith divides his treatment of benevolence into three different parts, all of which depend on the gracious desire to improve the lives of others. Smith's discussion focuses on different "spheres" of benevolence determined by degrees of appropriate affection for others. Smith defines affection as "nothing but habitual sympathy" and goes on to explain that "[our] concern for the happiness or misery of those who are the objects of our affections; our desire to promote the one, and prevent the other; are either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy, or the necessary consequences of that feeling" (TMS, 260). Affection plays some role in determining who receives our gratitude and subsequently our benevolence, and is most commonly produced by proximity but also includes dependency and efficacy. Consequently, Smith outlines how our character affects the happiness of the people who are naturally closest to us (i.e. our family). After the members of our family our benevolence reaches our friends. Finally, Smith argues that our benevolence extends to "[our] state or sovereignty" (TMS, 268). These three spheres of benevolence encompass three different roles the virtuous individual ought to develop; family member, friend, and citizen.³⁵⁴ By encouraging the reader to adopt these roles Smith helps to relieve us of our loneliness and redirect our conscience back towards the voice of Nature. Similar to his analysis of prudence Smith demonstrates the natural origin, development, and progression of benevolence. The Author of Nature has made us benevolent so that we can successfully attain our *telos*.

Cultivating our benevolence within the three spheres outlined by Smith is essential to overcoming the loneliness created by our pursuit of wealth and greatness and consequently to our

³⁵³ Muller (1993) argues that we perfect our nature and become morally superior when we promote our benevolence and use it to restrain our selfishness (p.111). Hanley (2009) makes a similar argument. It is important to note that benevolence does not eclipse our self-interest. Instead, the development of benevolence helps balance our self-interest and directs it towards proper (i.e. praiseworthy) things.

³⁵⁴ Forman-Barzilai (2010) associates the Stoic concept of *oikeiōsis* with Smith's understanding of benevolence. Thus, she argues that, for Smith, "human affection is spatially oriented concentrically around the self" p.37.

successful pursuit of tranquility. Without benevolence we are unlikely to acknowledge and adhere to the golden rule and become praiseworthy individuals. Furthermore, contributing to the happiness of others is a necessary component of our own happiness and our own peace of mind requires mutual sympathy. Receiving gratitude when we have acted benevolently satisfies our desire for mutual sympathy, confirms we are worthy of praise, and contributes to our ease of mind. To receive gratitude we must develop the bonds of affection that allow us to act benevolently. According to Smith:

to deserve love and to deserve reward, are the great characters of virtue [...]Virtue is not said to be amiable, or to be meritorious, because it is the object of its own love, or of its own gratitude; but because it excites those sentiments in other men. The consciousness that it [i.e. virtue] is the object of such favourable regards, is the source of that inward tranquillity and self-satisfaction with which it is naturally attended, as the suspicion of the contrary gives occasion to the torments of vice. What so great happiness as to be beloved, and to know that we deserve to be beloved? (TMS, 136)

Gratitude is thus essential to our development of virtue and successful pursuit of tranquility. To be a truly praiseworthy person one must earn and deserve the gratitude of others. Additionally, though gratitude is not necessary to the survival of the species, it does play a role in making our continued survival bearable and desirable. The “ornaments” of society are all products of gracious behavior.

Gratitude is defined as the desire to reward actions that have contributed to the happiness and well-being of other people. Within the final edition of TMS Smith presents gratitude as necessary to our successful pursuit of our *telos*. Gratitude, Smith explains, is one of our most powerful and necessary sentiments and without it we could not hope to develop and exercise proper benevolence. He claims that “[of] all persons [...] whom nature points out for our peculiar benevolence, there are none to whom it seems more properly directed than to those whose benevolence we have ourselves already experienced” (TMS, 266). Smith goes on to add that “Nature, which formed men for that mutual kindness, so necessary for their happiness, renders every man the peculiar object of kindness, to the persons to whom he himself has been kind” (Ibid). However, Smith also notes that people who have been kind to others also deserve our gratitude, stating that “[when] we see one man assisted, protected, relieved, by another, our sympathy with the joy of the persons who receives the benefit [animates] our fellow-feeling with his gratitude towards him who bestows it” (TMS, 85). We owe our gratitude to anyone who has

intentionally contributed to our happiness (TMS, 82). Smith further adds that, when someone has acted benevolently towards us, “it does not content our gratitude [...] till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting [their] happiness” and until we reciprocate we will “feel ourselves still loaded with the debt of past services laid upon us” (TMS, 82-83). Failing to return kindness with kindness—or benevolence with benevolence—thus conflicts with ease of mind by loading us with a perceived debt of gratitude. Even though the person who has been kind to us cannot demand that we return the favor our conscience (so long as it has not been entirely corrupted) will urge us to repay them with some form of benevolence. Smith adds that we owe a debt of gratitude our sovereignty since it has contributed the most to our happiness and well-being. Smith claims that “[all] constitutions of government [...] are valued only in proportion as they tend to promote the happiness of those who live under them” (TMS, 216). We repay this debt of gratitude by promoting the public good and becoming a good citizen.

Gratitude is also an important motivation for benevolence. Smith argues that “[k]indness is the parent of kindness; and if to be beloved by our brethren be the great object of our ambition, the surest way of obtaining it is, by our conduct to show that we really love them” (TMS, 266). The very expectation of receiving gratitude is enough to be kind without ever having received it. Smith goes so far as to claim that even if we do not expect gratitude from the particular person we have been kind to we can expect to receive it “with a tenfold increase” from all other spectators (Ibid). As an expression of benevolence gratitude is essential for producing acts of kindness. This kindness is essential for the family, friendships and society to flourish. Gratitude—and subsequent kindness—strengthens and improves the bonds of affection between families and friends, making these relationships more worthwhile and enduring. Additionally, gratitude can compel us to contribute to the public good through the “real improvements” of society such as “the cultivation of its lands, the advancements of its manufactures, the increase of its commerce, the security and number of its ports and harbours, its proficiency in all the liberal arts and sciences” (TMS, 269). This “public benevolence” is an acknowledgment of how our society has helped our own pursuit of happiness (TMS, 271). Similarly, Smith’s encourages the development of gratitude towards friends and family by assuring the reader that their kindness will be returned—in some form—with exponential praise. By being kind to our family, friends, strangers in need, and our society we can expect to be rewarded without having to bear the

burden of loneliness. Acts of kindness build the relationships of affection required for mutual sympathy and thus contribute directly to our peace of mind and tranquility. More importantly, this kindness allows us to love others as we love ourselves.

Smith's opening discussion of benevolence highlights this virtue's natural origin. The title for this chapter makes it clear that Nature recommends certain individuals to "our care and attention" (TMS, 258). However, Smith argues that other individuals come under our care and attention only *after* we have cared for ourselves. This is, in part, a practical concern for Smith. Little benevolence can be expected from people who lack the ability to care for themselves. Accordingly, Smith evokes a specific Stoic maxim at the beginning of this chapter, claiming that, "[e]very man [...] is first principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than any other person" (Ibid). However, Smith continues by explaining that after caring for ourselves, Nature recommends other individuals to our care and attention. Smith argues that "[a]fter himself, the member of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affections" (Ibid). Similar to prudence, benevolence has a familial origin. Smith goes on to explain exactly why Nature has placed family members under our attention and care. First, Smith argues that our family members are "naturally and usually the persons upon whose happiness or misery [our] conduct must have the greatest influence" (Ibid). This first argument is about efficacy. Members of our family, according to Smith, stand to benefit the most from our benevolence and suffer the most from its lack.³⁵⁵ Because we have the greatest possible influence over the happiness and misery of our family members we ought to extend our benevolence to them first. Similarly, Nature recommends family members to our care and attention because we know these individuals better than we know anyone else and thus know better how to affect their happiness. Smith argues that this is because of our "habitual sympathy" with our family members which is "more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people" (Ibid). This stronger sympathy allows us to better understand "how everything is likely to affect" their happiness (Ibid). Nature

³⁵⁵ Because prudence necessarily precedes benevolence it is reasonable to argue that the happiness of our family also depends, in some measure, upon this first virtue as well.

thus recommends family members to our care and attention because we have the requisite expertise on how to best serve their well-being.

Smith argues that this benevolence within the family is ultimately “necessary for its tranquility and happiness” (TMS, 259). Furthermore, Smith argues that this is a product of “the wisdom of nature” (Ibid). Consequently we expect to see great bonds of affection within families and when we see a lack of benevolence, Smith claims, we are horrified (Ibid). Most familial affection is so natural as to require no specific attention from Smith. For example, he points to the near universal affection for children with which Nature has endowed us. This affection is so profound that it is even felt by “the most brutal and hard-hearted” (TMS, 259). An important cause of this near universal sympathy with children is their dependency. Smith argues “the existence of the child, for some time after it comes into the world, depends altogether upon the care of the parent”, however, Smith claims that “the parent does not naturally depend upon the care of the child” (Ibid.) Through this juxtaposition Smith concludes that “[i]n the eye of nature [...] a child is a more important object than an old man; and excites a much more lively, as well as a much more universal sympathy. It ought to do so” (Ibid). Smith goes on to add, somewhat coldly, that children have more to offer and look forward to over the long term, arguing that “[e]verything may be expected, or at least hoped, from the child [...] very little can be either expected or hoped from the old man” (Ibid).³⁵⁶ This dependency, combined with habitual sympathy, ultimately makes the bond from parent to child the strongest bond of benevolence we are capable of forming. This, it would seem, is part of Nature’s plan and an essential part of our teleology. The entire present and future of children seems to depend upon the affection and benevolence of parents. It should be easy to see how difficult the pursuit of tranquility would be if this affection and benevolence did not exist and children were left to fend for themselves during their time of weakness and dependency.

Smith appears to consider much of the affection and benevolence within families to be both inevitable and necessary. Because of the proximity and dependency of our family members

³⁵⁶ This appears problematic at first and seems to suggest we have no natural benevolence towards the elderly. However, Smith is outlining the powerful, instinctual, affection we have for *all* children. We certainly do sympathize with the elderly, and often owe them a great deal of gratitude but not merely for being old.

it may be safe to assume that even the vainest individual could feel the necessary affection for their children, siblings, and spouse. A corrupt love of praise does not necessarily make someone apathetic to the needs of their family. Gratitude, it would seem, plays a very limited role in sustaining *most* familial relationships. However, there is a familial bond which Smith believes gratitude is essential to and encourages the reader to develop this sentiment. The dependency and proximity that once bound parents and children disappears as children grow up. As adults it would be undignified for grown children to remain dependent on their parents. Such a dependency, though different than the “fawning puppy”, would indicate a lack of prudence, which Smith claims can evoke the “neglect or [...] contempt” of others (TMS, 255). However, Smith argues that a bond of affection still exists between parents and their adult children. This bond is maintained through the children’s gratitude. Having their parents to thank for their survival and happiness children ought to pay this kindness back, especially as their parents become less and less independent.³⁵⁷ To be properly benevolent, and live a life of praiseworthiness, Smith encourages us to treat our parents with the love and kindness we expected and required as children. Although this may not bring us the praise and attention lavished upon the rich and great it will contribute to our pursuit of happiness and help us avoid the loneliness caused by corruption.

Despite being an essential component of praiseworthiness and our pursuit of tranquility, familial relationships cannot be our only bonds of affection and benevolence. This is especially true in commercial society. In non-commercial societies the family was the primary source for protection. However, these familial bonds become weaker and less necessary in commercial society (TMS, 263). Consequently, to satisfy our need for mutual sympathy and the desire to contribute to the happiness of others we must establish benevolent relationships with people outside of our family. Friendships provide us with a necessary outlet for our benevolent first principle while also providing us with the mutual sympathy required for peace of mind. Gratitude may be what drives us to develop friendships with others; the continuous and gracious exchange of kindness builds the type of affection required for this relationship. By contributing

³⁵⁷ It may be worth noting that the reverse of this should also hold true. If parents made no attempt to contribute to the happiness of their children then they should expect no gratitude later in life. The children of abusive or neglectful parents have no sentimental duty, obligation, or attachment that requires them to treat these parents any differently.

to each other's happiness two friends can fully and completely satisfy the requirements of the golden rule, which requires us to love others so that we might love ourselves proportionately.

Smith admits to a plurality of friendship types but highlights one—virtue friendship—as the most essential. Though all friendships allow us to develop and foster our gratitude and benevolence, virtue friendship is deeper and more enduring than all others. Smith characterizes virtue friendship as:

that which is founded altogether upon esteem and approbation of his good conduct and behavior, confirmed by experience and long acquaintance, is, by far, the most respectable. Such friendships, arising not from a constrained sympathy [...] but from a natural sympathy, from an involuntary feeling that the persons whom we attach ourselves are the natural and proper objects of esteem and approbation; can only exist among men of virtue [...] The attachment which is founded upon the love of virtue, as it is certainly, of all attachments, the most virtuous; so it is likewise the happiest, as well as the most permanent and secure (TMS, 265)

The affection we develop for virtuous people is ultimately based on a *natural sympathy* with the merits of virtue. It is a natural shared love and respect for virtue that brings virtue friends together and causes them to benevolently contribute to each other's pursuit of happiness.

Additionally, Smith claims that our affection for the virtuous need not be confined to a single person but “may safely embrace all the wise and virtuous” (Ibid). With the possible exceptions of parental bonds with children, the affection we develop for virtuous people is the strongest bond of benevolence we can develop. The same may be true for the significance of these bonds.

According to Smith, virtue friendship plays an important role in helping us develop and maintain virtue. Smith claims that the company we keep has a direct impact on our own character.

According to Smith our:

natural disposition to accommodate and to assimilate, as much as we can, our own sentiments, principles, and feelings, to those which we see fixed and rooted in the persons whom we are obliged to live and converse a great deal with, is the cause of the contiguous effects of both good and bad company (TMS, 265).

In other words, we are naturally inclined to develop the character of those people we spend the majority of our time with. It is this principle of emulation that makes virtue friendship so important to our pursuit and maintenance of virtue.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Griswold (1999) argues that “Given the importance of [...] emulation in the development of the agent's love of virtue—that is, the love of what is praiseworthy as distinguished from praise---it will matter that the agent be surrounded by persons worthy of being emulated” (p.213).

Befriending the right types of people (i.e. the virtuous) is, on its own, likely not enough to cure us of vanity. However, it does play a positive role in relieving us of our loneliness and shaping our character. Smith claims that the person “who associates chiefly with the wise and virtuous, though he may not himself become either wise or virtuous, cannot help conceiving a certain respect at least for wisdom and virtue” (TMS, 265). Alternatively, Smith argues, people who keep company with the “profligate and dissolute” will either develop these same manners or at least lose the “abhorrence” they originally felt for them (Ibid). Consequently, virtue friendship plays a significant role in encouraging and sustaining the development of virtue. Though this type of friendship likely cannot produce virtue on its own it does help to produce the conditions necessary for virtue to develop and thrive.

In addition to family and friends Smith claims our gratitude and benevolence is drawn to strangers who are either “greatly fortunate” or who are “greatly unfortunate” (TMS, 266). The former are the “rich and powerful” and the latter the “poor and wretched”. What draws our benevolence to these individuals is their “extraordinary situation” (Ibid). However, these two situations arouse different sentiments and different obligations. Our sympathy with the rich, and their fortunate circumstances, produces our respect for the “distinction of ranks” and subsequently the “peace and order of society” (Ibid). The sympathy we have for the wretched condition of the poor, on the other hand, produces compassion and a subsequent desire for the “relief and consolation of human misery” (Ibid). The greatly fortunate and greatly unfortunate arouse our benevolent sentiments, despite the absence of gratitude. However, our obligation to act on these sentiments is limited, especially in the case of the unfortunate. Smith makes it clear that the “peace and order of society is of more important than even the relief of miserable” (TMS, 266-267). Thus, somewhat paradoxically, our benevolence causes us to forego compassion for those in need in favor of adulation for the rich and powerful.

After outlining how our benevolence towards individuals is generated and how it operates Smith discusses the third—and perhaps most important—sphere of benevolence. Similar to our benevolence towards individuals our benevolence towards the sovereign is a product of the Author of Nature’s plan. Similarly, it is gratitude that determines and shapes this relationship.

Accordingly, Smith argues that “[t]he same principles that direct the order in which individuals are recommended to our benevolence, direct that likewise in which societies are recommended to it. Those to which it is, or may be of most importance, are first and principally recommended to it” (TMS, 268). It is our natural desire to contribute to the well-being and happiness of others that inspires our benevolent affection for our society. Our benevolence towards our own “state or sovereignty” over any foreign sovereignties appears to be somewhat similar to our benevolence towards children; both are partly determined by dependency and efficacy. The society that depends on and benefits most from our benevolence is our own. Smith argues that our “state or sovereignty in which we have been born and educated, and under the protection of which we continue to live, is [...] the greatest society upon whose happiness or misery our good or bad conduct can have much influence” (Ibid). Here Smith provides the semblance of social contract theory; our own sovereignty is worthy of our benevolence because it has provided for us. In exchange for things like education and protection, we owe the sovereign a debt of gratitude and some measure of benevolence. However, Smith goes on to add that our society is also recommended to our care by Nature (TMS, 269). Because we and “all the objects of our kindest affections” are dependent on the sovereign Nature has seen fit to ensure that we will support our all of society with our benevolence (Ibid). Because society depends on our benevolence, what it means to be a good citizen is important. Consequently, much of Smith’s discussion on benevolence towards societies contains insight into proper citizenship. Citizenship is, according to Smith, a product of our gratitude and thus a necessary step in our pursuit of praiseworthiness and tranquility.

First and foremost, Smith characterizes a good citizen as someone with “public spirit” who contributes to the happiness of other citizens by improving society (TMS, 272-275). This public spirit is caused by both a “a certain respect and reverence for that constitution or form of government which is actually established” and “an earnest desire to render the condition of our fellow-citizens as safe, respectable, and happy as we can” (TMS, 273). Additionally, a good (i.e. a *gracious*) citizen sees the prosperity of their country as a reflection of their own honor and dignity and views all the great people their country has produced (poets, philosophers etc.) with “the most partial admiration” (Ibid.). This public spirit is what animates us to contribute to the tranquility of our fellow citizens. From this Smith concludes that “[he] is not a citizen who is not

disposed to respect the laws and obey the civil magistrate; and he is certainly not a good citizen who does not wish to promote, by every means in his power, the welfare of the whole society of his fellow-citizens” (Ibid). Public spirit thus compels us to respect and adhere to the existing social order while also promoting and improving the well-being of our fellows. Smith argues that during peaceful and quiet times, those two principles generally coincide and lead to the same conduct (TMS, 273, 275-276). However, Smith admits that respecting laws and the existing order can conflict with the well-being of society. In such instances he claims that we require “the highest effort of political wisdom to determine when a real patriot ought to support and endeavour to re-establish the authority of the old system, and when [they] ought to give way to the more daring, but often dangerous spirit of innovation” (TMS, 273). Nevertheless, the support of the established government evidently seems to be the best expedient for maintaining the safe, respectable, and happy situation of our fellow-citizens (TMS, 273). The highest and noblest expression of public spirit—and thus of gratitude and benevolence—is wise and moderate legislation. According to Smith a wise legislator is capable of contributing to the “tranquility and happiness of his fellow citizens for many succeeding generations” (TMS, 274). In the process this leader becomes the “reformer and legislator of a great state” which Smith describes as “the greatest and noblest of all characters” (Ibid). However, for most people merely being a good citizen is enough to ensure their adherence to the golden rule and the subsequent standards of praiseworthiness.

Unlike his discussion of prudence—which seeks to decrease the reader’s self-interest—Smith’s discussion of benevolence aims to increase our tendency and desire to contribute to the well-being and happiness of other people. The key to this—and ultimately to the perfection of our nature and subsequent praiseworthiness—is gratitude. Gratitude helps us build the relationships of affection that allow us to properly express our benevolent sentiments. Furthermore, the expectation of receiving the gratitude of others ought to help compel us to become good family members, good friends, and good citizens. The best way to accomplish this, Smith argues, is to be kind to others and to actively contribute to their pursuit of tranquility. Similarly, graciously rewarding people who have contributed to our happiness helps develop the praiseworthy sentiments of benevolence that inevitably contribute to our peace of mind. Though prudence is essential to our tranquility it is benevolence that allows our conscience to become

truly authoritative and conform to the golden rule. The surest way to become worthy of love and praise is to become a gracious family member, friend, and citizen. However, to ensure that this endures we must take steps to ensure our passions do not lead us astray.

5.3 The Command of the Passions

Self-command is the final cardinal virtue in Smith's vision of *eudaimonia* and the final component to praiseworthiness. Self-command is the strength of character required for controlling our passions.³⁵⁹ Self-command is a disposition to moderate our passions so that we can adhere to the golden rule and continue our pursuit of tranquility. Unlike prudence and benevolence, Smith characterizes self-command as an artificial, learned, virtue. Self-command is learned primarily through enduring hardships. Smith argues "[w]ar is the great school for acquiring and exercising" self-command (TMS, 282). In war, individuals learn to conquer their fear of death and this courage subsequently makes mastering the passions relatively simple. Once an individual has conquered their fear of death the passions that divert us away from virtue seem petty in comparison. Paradoxically, given his belief in the superiority of standing armies, only a very few would have access to the greatest means for acquiring self-command, limiting the development of this virtue to a fraction of the population (WN, V.1.a.29). However, Smith evidently believes that self-command can be developed without enduring incredible hardships like war. In his discussion of this virtue Smith attempts to persuade the reader to develop self-command by championing its merits and rewards. Accordingly he argues that some of the most celebrated "heroes of ancient and modern history" are those who practiced self-command (TMS, 281). Smith goes on to argue that even the "greatest criminals" are respected and admired when they show their ability to control their passions (TMS, 282). When self-command is combined with prudence and benevolence it becomes even more celebrated and worthy of praise. Thus, Smith assures the reader that exercising self-command—especially in combination with the other virtues—will satisfy their desire for admiration and recognition without forcing us into the vain and anxious pursuit of riches and greatness. Self-command completes Smith's theory of self-

³⁵⁹ Several authors have characterized self-command as a motivation. For example, Montes (2004) argues that self-command is the motive that gives all the other virtues their value (p.109). Vivenza (2001) agrees, claiming that self-command gives the other virtues their value. I believe this interpretation is misguided. Although self-command plays an essential role in adding value to the others the motivation for acting virtuously is the desire to be happy which is in turn brought on by our natural desire to be praiseworthy.

perfection by providing a means to avoid backsliding into the vanities of corruption and away from Nature's plan. The purpose of self-command is to condition us against the temptations of fame (i.e. greatness) and fortune so that we can identify, and pursue, our natural *telos*.

Smith opens his discussion of self-command by acknowledging the gap between knowing what is virtuous and acting virtuously. According to Smith:

[t]he [individual] who acts according to the rules of perfect prudence, of strict justice, and of proper benevolence, may be said to be perfectly virtuous. But the most perfect knowledge of those rules will not alone enable [them] to act in this manner: [their] own passions are apt to mislead [them]; sometimes to drive [them] and sometimes to seduce [them] to violate all the rules which [they] [themselves], in all [their] sober and cool hours, approves of (TMS, 280)

By controlling our passions, which divert us away from virtue, self-command bridges the gap between knowledge and action and allows the individual to be truly and consistently virtuous. Thus, Smith argues that “[t]he most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect command, will not always enable [us] to do our duty” (Ibid). Self-command is thus essential to overcoming any weakness of will that may conflict with being praiseworthy. Similarly, by controlling the passions, self-command transform a few scattered acts of virtue into a lifetime of habitual virtue. In addition to helping us put our knowledge of virtue into action, self-command also helps us act virtuously when it truly counts. According to Smith, “[t]o act according to the dictates of prudence, of justice, and proper beneficence, seems to have no great merit where there is no temptation to do otherwise” (TMS, 284). Being prudent, benevolent or just is always respectable; however, they become truly praiseworthy and perfect when we resist the urge to act otherwise. This is how self-command combines with the other virtues to give them their “lustre and beauty” (Ibid). As noted above, the temptations that lead us away from the other virtues are, typically, our passions which “drive” and “seduce” us away from prudence and benevolence (Ibid.). Thus, when we control our passions we can maintain our adherence to the golden rule and continue our pursuit of tranquility.

Smith divides the passions that tempt us away from virtue and praiseworthiness into two classes. The first are the passions that drive us away from virtue. Examples of such passions include anger and fear. Smith argues that these passions are extremely difficult to restrain even for a moment (TMS, 280). As an example, fear may divert us away from the demands of justice

if we are too afraid to punish people who violate it, perhaps out of fear of retribution. Likewise, if we are angry with a friend or family member we may fail to act appropriately benevolent towards them. A great deal of self-command involves properly controlling our anger or fear and, quite often, both of these passions simultaneously. When we successfully control these passions, through self-command and adherence to the golden rule, we develop and demonstrate the minor virtues of “fortitude, manhood, [and] strength of mind” (TMS, 281). However, how we should control our anger is different from how we ought to control our fear. Consequently, how self-command restrains us in situations when we are angry differs from how it restrains us when we are afraid. When our anger and fear are properly controlled, we are more likely to attain our *telos*.

Controlling our anger and fear is essential to our exercise of prudence and benevolence. However, independent of these virtues, our command of these passions remains essential to our pursuit of tranquility. This is especially true of anger. Smith argues that when our anger is “restrained and properly attempered” so that it is agreeable to our conscience it manifests as “just indignation” (TMS, 283). This controlled manifestation of anger is as necessary for the protection of our dignity and security. Accordingly, Smith claims that “to live comfortably in the world” we need to “defend our dignity and rank” (TMS, 287). Furthermore, Smith argues that to we need to be appropriately sensible to our own injuries and misfortunes so that we may respond to them accordingly (TMS, 288). If we are insensible to these we put our ease of body and peace of mind at risk. We must control our anger (and all our passions) with our authoritative conscience and according desire to be praiseworthy. A lack of anger when our station and rank are insulted would, according to Smith, make us cowards. Cowardice is antithetical to tranquility because there is “[n]o character is more contemptible than that of a coward” (TMS, 287). However, Smith also claims that forgiveness is also virtuous. According to Smith, the individual “who can cast away all animosity” towards someone who has “grievously offended” them always “seems justly to merit our highest admiration” (TMS, 283). This is especially true when individuals put aside their hostility towards each other to work for the greater good of society. Ultimately, the proper control of our anger and fear not only supports our own happiness, but contributes to the happiness of society as well and in doing so self-command aids our pursuit of tranquility.

The second class of passions self-command helps us guard against are more directly relevant to moral corruption and the according temptations of wealth and greatness. Smith labels these as the “selfish gratifications” (TMS, 280). According to Smith, these selfish gratifications include the “love of ease, of pleasure, of applause” and other associated indulgences (Ibid).³⁶⁰ Unlike fear and anger, which drive us away from the virtue, the selfish gratifications “seduce” or tempt us away from prudence and benevolence and, most likely, towards the gaudy and glittering appearance of happiness enjoyed by the rich and great (Ibid). Additionally, contrary to our command of fear and anger it can be quite easy to restrain our indulgence in the selfish gratifications. However, these passions persist with us throughout our lives and, Smith argues, giving in to them can “mislead into great deviations” (Ibid). Consequently, though we have an easier time commanding these second passions for a moment, their constant presence in our lives and their potential to cause great deviations makes them as much a threat to our pursuit of virtue as fear and anger. Self-command is responsible for restraining these passions and when we successfully control them we develop “temperance, decency, modesty, and moderation” (TMS, 281). Our command of the selfish gratifications is always for the good. Unlike our command of anger and fear, which can often be used for great and terrible crimes, Smith claims that it is difficult to use our self-command of the selfish gratifications to any ignoble or terrible end. Thus, our command of these passions is more straightforward than our command of anger and fear; restraining our desire for ease, pleasure and applause always contributes to our pursuit of virtue. Furthermore, self-command helps prevent us from veering away from the pursuit of tranquility and towards the empty vanities and luxuries the rich and great enjoy.

By controlling our passions self-command helps us distinguish true happiness from its mere appearance. The passions that drive and seduce us away from our pursuit of tranquility “mislead” us about the true nature of happiness (TMS, 280). Rather than pursuing prudence or benevolence, our passions would convince us to give in to unrestrained anger, fear and perpetually gratify our desire for ease, pleasure and applause. Self-command prevents us from

³⁶⁰ Smith seems to be suggesting that a love of superficial pleasures is a passion. The connection between ease and the passions is only tenuously made. Regardless, self-command is charged with ensuring these gratifications do not divert us away from virtue.

being misled or tempted away from virtue by controlling the passions. Consequently, it helps us recognize the voice of Nature and thus how to properly and consistently follow the golden rule. Additionally, self-command helps to ensure we develop and exercise both prudence and benevolence; especially when there is significant temptation to behave otherwise. On its own self-command does little to alleviate the anxiety and loneliness a corrupted individual may experience. Its role is primarily supportive: preventing us from diverted away by our passions once we have adopted prudence and benevolence. Furthermore, Smith warns us against developing self-command without prudence or benevolence. Without these other virtues to guide it, self-command may make us more vicious than the vain love of praise ever could. However, despite its supportive role, self-command is no less essential to our pursuit of tranquility, especially in a morally corrupt commercial society that admires, celebrates, and promotes the vain and frivolous lifestyle of the rich and great.. The opportunity and desire to satisfy the selfish gratification may be constant and ever-present in a society built on the constant production of luxuries. Regardless of how prudent or benevolent a person becomes, the danger of being lured away by trinkets and baubles will always exist.

Conclusion

The virtues presented in Part VI of TMS fully distinguish praiseworthiness from mere propriety and fully establishes the authority of conscience Smith outlines at the beginning of the book. The voice of Nature, spoken to us through the impartial spectator guides us to prudence, benevolence, and self-command. These three virtues provide an alternative to moral corruption and its symptoms. Prudence offers a means to satisfy our self-interested desire to better our condition and capture the attention of others without giving in to the anxious and potentially reckless desire to be rich and great. Through the gradual accumulation of wealth our self-interested sentiments will be more reliably and stably satisfied. Benevolence aids in alleviating moral corruption by relieving us of our loneliness. The gratitude recommended by Smith ensures we develop bonds of affection with family, friends, and fellow citizens rather than selfishly pursuing a vain desire for praise. Finally, self-command helps this remedy to corruption endure. By controlling the passions, self-command prevents us from being diverted away from the virtues. By curing us of the anxiety and loneliness, prudence, benevolence, and self-command

help to facilitate the exercise of our authoritative conscience and the successful pursuit of our *telos*.

In addition to treating the symptoms of corruption, Smith's virtue ethics provides the means for securing the material and psychological conditions for tranquility. When our self-interest and benevolence are successfully balanced they cease to conflict with each other and become complimentary. This is what Smith refers to as the "perfection" of our nature (TMS, 31). This balance is reached through adherence to the golden rule which subsequently perfects our moral faculties and leads us to a life of tranquility. It is our authoritative conscience that directs us to the golden rule by compelling us to act in a praiseworthy way rather than merely conforming to propriety. Consequently, knowing what the virtuous life consists of provides additional content to our understanding of the standards of praiseworthiness. In effect Smith's concept of praiseworthiness becomes synonymous with virtue and the praiseworthy person can be understood as the individual who is prudent, benevolent, and self-commanding. Added to these standards are the other various characteristics Smith associates with the cardinal virtues including: honesty, frugality, friendship, citizenship, strength of character, and just indignation. All of the virtuous characteristics discussed by Smith in TMS' Part VI are consequences of Natural (i.e. proper) self-love and love of others.³⁶¹ When these two loves are properly guided by our authoritative conscience we will necessarily develop the characteristics that bring us ease of body and peace of mind. Smith connects his cardinal virtues to the Author of Nature's providential plan and argues that their intended function is to provide the individual with all of the internal and external goods required for happiness. Accordingly, Smith's theory of virtue is the culmination of his teleology and fully establishes the authority of conscience by supplying the content necessary for determining praiseworthiness.

³⁶¹ Even self-command, though an artificial virtue, is tasked with controlling our passions for the purpose of developing proper self-love and love for others.

Conclusion

The 6th edition of TMS cannot be understood without a complete analysis and grasp of praiseworthiness. The significant changes Smith made to the final edition of TMS offer an alternative to the morality developed in the previous five editions. These earlier editions focused on a morality that prioritized social cohesion. This social cohesion is made possible by the standards of propriety, produced by the routine operation of our sympathy. However, in the 6th edition Smith supplements this social cohesion with a morality that aims at self-perfection. This self-perfection is facilitated by praiseworthiness. How praiseworthiness facilitates the pursuit of self-perfection is outlined in three significant changes made to the final edition of TMS. The first of these changes is the development of an authoritative conscience. This authoritative conscience is represented by the transition of the impartial spectator from the practical “man within the breast” and into the “demigod”. This transition makes it possible for our conscience to evaluate the standards of propriety and depart from them if necessary. The second significant change is the inclusion of the theory of moral corruption. In the 6th edition Smith argues that moral corruption is created by our undue admiration and emulation of the rich and great. This causes us to become vain and potentially miserable. This addition reveals a possible reason for the inclusion of self-perfection in the 6th edition of TMS. As the sole standard for moral judgment, propriety may be insufficient in ensuring proper moral development. Moreover, the standards of propriety may be an obstacle in our pursuit of happiness. The final addition relevant to the theory of self-perfection is the virtue ethics outlined by Smith in Part VI of TMS. The virtues discussed by Smith in this addition detail the characteristics of a person who has successfully perfected themselves. All three of these changes should be understood in relation to the concept of praiseworthiness. Praiseworthiness is the standard of judgment that motivates and guides our desire to perfect ourselves. Thus, to understand self-perfection—and the 6th edition of TMS—we must understand praiseworthiness and how it differs from mere propriety.

Focusing on praiseworthiness ought to help us understand why Smith made significant changes to the 6th edition of TMS and what effect these changes had on the meaning of the text. The significance of praiseworthiness has not been fully addressed in the secondary literature. Too often treatments of this concept have been perfunctory and have failed to address praiseworthiness’ importance to TMS and the changes made to the final edition. Within these

limited analyses there exists a tendency to link praiseworthiness with propriety and treat it as a mere appendage of the latter.³⁶² This, I believe, has created significant gaps in our understanding of TMS' 6th edition. Most significantly, without a firm and thorough understanding of praiseworthiness, and how it differs from propriety, there exists no reliable explanation for how to identify and pursue self-perfection nor would we have a means to properly evaluate existing moral conventions. Consequently, self-perfection would amount to conforming to the arbitrary (and possible vicious) whims of popular opinion (i.e. propriety). Although this makes social cohesion possible, it does not provide a means to become truly virtuous or truly happy. I have sought to fill in the gaps in our understanding of TMS by disentangling praiseworthiness from propriety and relating it directly to the major changes Smith made to the 6th edition. This, I believe, gives us a better understanding of what self-perfection is, how it is attained, and what problems it can resolve. Furthermore, this more complete understanding of praiseworthiness provides insights into why Smith altered the 6th edition of TMS and what he hoped to accomplish with these alterations. Ultimately, praiseworthiness transforms TMS in to a text that warns us about the limitations of conventional morality and provides a means to transcend this with distinct and superior moral standards.

To pursue the self-perfection Smith outlines in the 6th edition of TMS we need some means to discover what this entails. Smith provides such a means with the development of the authoritative conscience. To understand how our conscience can become authoritative it is necessary to have a complete picture of praiseworthiness and how it relates to the development of conscience. Without this there is no convincing explanation for how our conscience can make judgments about existing moral conventions or why such judgments would be considered superior to popular opinion. Praiseworthiness allows our conscience to become fully authoritative by liberating it from propriety and giving us distinct, superior, standards for moral judgment. Consequently, praiseworthiness ensures that the judgments from our own conscience will not be as arbitrary as popular opinion. Unlike propriety, which only describes morals,

³⁶² Griswold (1999) and Otteson (2002) are guilty of conflating praiseworthiness and propriety. Additionally, because they reject the existence of superior, non-conventional, morals in TMS, empiricist readings also implicitly deny any distinction between propriety and praiseworthiness. See, Haakonssen (1981), Campbell (1971) and Winch (1978). Evensky (2005) and Hanley (2009) appreciate the importance of praiseworthiness but do not provide a reliable means for determining what it entails or requires.

praiseworthiness tells us what morality *should be*. This allows us to identify and pursue self-perfection rather than merely conforming to arbitrary popular opinion. Simultaneously, this provides us with a means of evaluating a society's morals by comparing them to what our conscience determines to be praiseworthy. Smith's use of teleological arguments provides the means for judging what is praiseworthy. We become praiseworthy individuals when we adhere to the Author of Nature's providential plan rather than conforming to the rules of propriety.

In addition to better explaining the development of conscience and its role in directing us towards self-perfection, my focus on praiseworthiness provides a more thorough understanding of Smith's theory of moral corruption. Rather than focusing solely on corruption's psychological symptoms or political consequences I have sought to understand the genesis of this corruption. For moral corruption to be significant there must be some way of living that we are corrupted from. Otherwise the pursuit of riches and greatness for their own sake would be a matter of personal choice worthy of the same approbation as any other component of propriety. However, praiseworthiness helps to explain how corruption occurs and why we should want to avoid it. Moral corruption diverts us away from the pursuit of self-perfection by distorting our natural desire to be praiseworthy into a vain love of praise. This reshapes our conscience and makes us anxious, lonely, and miserable. It is ultimately our very desire to be praiseworthy that makes our corruption possible while also explaining exactly what it is we are corrupted from. Additionally, praiseworthiness provides a potential means of remedying corruption, if it can be redirected back towards the pursuit of self-perfection.

Finally, the focus on praiseworthiness contributes to our understanding of TMS by explaining why prudence, benevolence, and self-command are virtuous, how we develop them, and what they provide for us. These cardinal virtues provide the content to the self-perfection Smith advocates for in the 6th edition of TMS. When we develop and exercise prudence, benevolence, and self-command we will have perfected our character and become truly praiseworthy individuals. Thus, these virtues, recommended to us by Nature, are what our authoritative conscience aims for when it uses praiseworthiness to guide our behavior. These virtues also provide us with a means of evaluating propriety and possibly improving it. In addition to providing the content for praiseworthiness, the virtues also offer an alternative to

moral corruption and a potential means for redirecting our conscience away from the vain love of praise and back towards the desire to be praiseworthy.

A thorough understanding of praiseworthiness offers an interpretation of TMS that fully explains the additions Smith made to the 6th edition and how these fit together. Our authoritative conscience allows us to pursue self-perfection and live a life of virtue and tranquility. However, the temptations of wealth and greatness divert us from this pursuit. Smith attempts to reorient us back towards self-perfection by recommending the virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command. All of this is tied together by praiseworthiness, which allows us to identify and pursue perfection, avoid the temptations of wealth and greatness, and develop the virtues that bring us the tranquility Nature designed us to attain. Furthermore, this interpretation provides a possible explanation for why Smith made significant changes to the final edition of what is arguably his most important work. It suggests dissatisfaction with conventional morality and a recognition that propriety cannot, on its own, generate good morals and happy individuals. Thus, Smith may have altered TMS in order to intervene and persuade people to pursue what is praiseworthy rather than what is merely proper and conventional.

In addition to explaining the changes made to the 6th edition, and Smith's potential motivations behind these changes, praiseworthiness is capable of reconciling a potential conflict within TMS. Smith presents this conflict in the very opening lines of TMS. Smith claims that human beings contain two potentially competing motivations; self-interest and benevolence (TMS, 13). These motivations can pull us in different directions but both are necessary to our well-being and possible pursuit of self-perfection. Self-interest is what makes the survival and propagation of the species possible. Additionally, the satisfaction of our self-interest is what makes society possible. The self-interested respect for justice is the pillar that maintains society by protecting individuals from harm. Furthermore, it is the continuous satisfaction of our self-interest that generates the opulence that helps to define commercial society *and* makes the pursuit of virtue and tranquility more accessible and attainable than in any other society. However, commercial society's reliance on self-interest is not benign. To truly satisfy the conditions required for the pursuit of virtue and tranquility commercial society relies on the delusional belief that wealth and greatness will make people happy. Vanity is the engine that creates the opulence and for commercial society to thrive it requires individuals who, like the

poor man's son, anxiously toil away in the deluded hope that they will be rewarded with tranquility. Despite its reliance on a delusion, commercial society (and any of its potential variants) is still the best possible regime for the pursuit and attainment of self-perfection. Commercial society creates the conditions wherein people can develop the characteristics and behaviors that will lead to a life of tranquility. Though it relies on vain self-interest in order to thrive, commercial society gives us the option of developing our benevolence if we choose to.

Whereas self-interest makes survival and society possible, benevolence makes these *desirable*. Family, friendship, generosity, gratitude, etc. all add value to life that self-interest cannot and are all necessary to the pursuit of happiness (i.e. tranquility). We develop these benevolent qualities by pursuing praiseworthiness. Though we could survive in a society based entirely on self-interest, we would not choose this society unless it gave us the opportunities to express our benevolence in meaningful ways. Though it relies on deluded self-interest, by generating opulence commercial society provides us with these opportunities. We can take advantage of these by becoming virtuous *via* praiseworthiness. The virtues of prudence, benevolence, and self-command allow us to express both our self-interested and benevolent motivations in a way that is consistent and complementary. Thus, we can develop friendships and express our gratitude and generosity in commercial society without infringing upon our self-interested desire to improve our condition. Rather, improving our condition through prudence makes it possible for us to continue to grow and express our benevolence. The more praiseworthy individuals there are in a society, the more benevolence there will be. This will improve commercial society, making it a more desirable regime and more likely to contribute to our happiness.

Praiseworthiness is both a defense of commercial society and an advocacy for benevolence. Smith recognizes that commercial society contains serious imperfections. However, in recognizing its imperfections, Smith is better able to defend commercial society and provide potential improvements. Commercial society should not be solely defended based upon the wealth it creates or the liberty and security it provides. What truly makes commercial society worth pursuing and maintaining is the opportunity it provides for everyone to pursue praiseworthiness. Unlike past societies characterized by poverty and direct dependence, commercial society allows everyone to choose the pursuit of praiseworthiness over adherence to

mere propriety. To take advantage of this opportunity Smith encourages us to develop and promote benevolence. Though it cannot be institutionalized or mandated, benevolence will improve people's lives within commercial society. Though its imperfections cannot be eradicated, they can be ameliorated and the benefits of commercial society can outweigh the costs.

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