

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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FROM PARTIAL PASSIONS TO MORAL SENTIMENTS: TAKING UP ADAM SMITH'S IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR PERSPECTIVE

Adam Smith is most commonly thought of as an economist, or as a political economist, not as a moral philosopher. But Smith was as much of a moral philosopher as he was a political economist. His study of the principles of morality, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), was first published in 1759, and Smith continued to revise and refine this work until the 6th edition was published shortly before his death in 1790 (before, during, and after his more enduringly well known work, *The Wealth of Nations*). For those scholars who have recognized Smith's valuable contribution to moral philosophy, the predominant approach to interpreting Smith's moral theory involves focusing on Smith as describing morality as an unintentional and spontaneous order (not unlike the market). As I see it, these scholars read the TMS through a methodological lens adopted from and more suitable to Adam Smith's writings in political economy. While there are certain merits to this standard approach, I maintain that its emphasis on reading Smith as only or primarily describing the development of moral judgment and moral communities, fails to provide a complete account of Smith's moral theory. In particular, it fails to account adequately for the irreducibly normative perspective of the persons who make moral judgments and make up moral communities, namely what Smith calls the Impartial Spectator Perspective. The distinctive contribution of my dissertation is to offer and to defend an interpretation of Smith's impartial spectator account of moral judgment. For Smith, the impartial spectator perspective is the moral point of view, from which we form and make our moral judgments (both of ourselves and of others). But, what are the contours of this perspective? How do persons take up this perspective? I answer these questions by offering what I call a 'normative reconstruction' of the impartial spectator perspective. This involves specifying norms or requirements to which persons must conform in order to make impartial, and thereby moral, judgments. Amongst contemporary moral philosophers, impartiality is a controversial and often ill-understood feature of morality. In reconstructing Smith's theory of moral judgment, I clarify the concept of impartiality as a moral requirement and defend Smith's complexly nuanced account of moral impartiality against a battery of those objections made by contemporary moral philosophers. This dissertation also reconstructs David Hume's theory of moral judgment and argues that Smith's theory is more explanatorily and normatively adequate than Hume's account. Additionally, in developing and defending Smith's theory of moral judgment, I appeal to moral psychological resources from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account of *Amour-Propre* (the drive for recognition) in order to explain the possibility of moral convergence and to expose the values that undergird our moral practices.