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Utility and Morality: Adam Smith's Critique of Hume

Marie A. Martin

Reading Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* one cannot help but note that, in spite of the obvious similarities between Smith and Hume and the equally obvious borrowings and adaptations Smith makes of portions of Hume's theory, the two differ substantially on the role of utility in morality. The difference is, in fact, practically diametrical opposition. Hume believed that utility was the "foundation of the chief part of morals."¹ Smith, on the other hand, believed that, while utility may contribute an additional beauty to virtue, it is never the source of their virtue and rarely the source of moral approbation. Given their agreement in so many other respects, why the difference regarding utility? To answer this question I shall examine both Smith's specific criticisms of Hume regarding the role of utility in morals and his more general objections to any theory that makes an appeal to utility a foundation of moral approval. I shall show that, while Smith does raise a number of genuine difficulties for Hume's theory, he does not succeed in his most serious criticism, that is, that Hume's theory does not adequately capture the essentially social nature of morality.

Hume's View of the Role of Utility

According to Hume, the sentiment of moral approbation arises from the perception of qualities of character or mind which are either useful or agreeable to ourselves or others. Examples of qualities agreeable to ourselves include cheerfulness, confidence, self-respect, and taste. Examples of qualities agreeable to others include manners, wit, eloquence, and modesty. But the majority of our moral sentiments arise from the perception of the usefulness of qualities, that is, "from reflexions on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons."²

Utility or usefulness is nothing but a tendency to a certain end. But, Hume claims, "it is a contradiction in terms, that any thing pleases as means to an end, where the end itself no wise affects us" (E 219). Thus, if we approve of those qualities that have a tendency to promote the happiness or well-being of either the possessor or others, it must be either because we value their happiness in itself or because we value it as a means to our own interests.

Hume rejects the second alternative as contrary to experienced fact. The "selfish systems" which attempt to reduce all moral approbation to self-interest cannot account for our praise and admiration of the courage and fortitude of our enemies even when their consequences thwart our own interests. Neither can such systems account for the fact that "[w]e frequently bestow praise on virtuous actions, performed in very distant ages and remote countries; where the utmost subtilty of imagination would not discover any appearance of self-interest" (E 215-16).

If it is not self-interest that leads us to approve useful qualities, then it is clear that "[w]e must adopt a more public affection, and allow, that the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us" (E 219). We approve of qualities that promote the well-being of others because we have a natural concern for their welfare.

In general, it is certain, that, wherever we go, whatever we reflect on or converse about, every thing still presents us with the view of human happiness or misery, and excites in our breast a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness. (E 221)

Thus, our approval of useful qualities rests on their tendency to promote the happiness of those who possess or are affected by them, and this, in turn, rests on sympathy, the communication of passions, whereby we "feel" for others—happiness for their joys, sorrow for their miseries.

So, although the utility of qualities of character is not the sole cause of our approbation, it is the most extensive and important one.

It appears to be matter of fact, that the circumstance of *utility*, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That it is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions: That it is the *sole* source of that high regard paid to justice, fidelity, honour, allegiance, and chastity: That it is inseparable from all the other social virtues, humanity, generosity, charity, affability, lenity, mercy, and moderation: And, in a word, that it is the foundation of the chief part of morals, which has a reference to mankind and our fellow-creatures. (E 231)

Smith's Specific Criticisms

Smith has no quarrel with Hume's claim that utility is universally approved of:

Nature, indeed, seems to have so happily adjusted our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, to the conveniency both of the individual and of society, that after the strictest examination it will be found ... that this is universally true.³

But he denies that utility is "either the first or principal source of our approbation or disapprobation" (Smith, 310).

He has two direct objections to Hume. First:

It seems impossible that the approbation of virtue should be a sentiment of the same kind with that by which we approve of a convenient and well-contrived building; or, that we should have no other reason for praising a man than that for which we commend a chest of drawers. (Smith, 310)

Inanimate objects can promote the happiness of individuals or society as well as qualities of character or mind. If the source of moral approbation is the tendency to promote such ends, combined with our sympathy with the happiness of those affected, then, Smith argues, we should feel *moral* approbations towards "well-contrived buildings" as well towards human beings.

Second, "the usefulness of any disposition is seldom the first ground of our approbation; and ... the sentiment of approbation always involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility" (Smith, 310). In general, the utility of any quality of character is merely an "afterthought," appealed to only in cases where it is evident that someone does not feel the usual sentiment of approbation upon perceiving a given quality. If, for instance, someone asks why he should not be hateful, he reveals by the very question that he does not feel the natural and immediate aversion to hatefulness felt by the majority of mankind. In these cases,

We must show them ... that it ought to be so for the sake of something else. Upon this account we generally cast about for other arguments, and the consideration which first occurs to us is the disorder and confusion of society which would result from the universal prevalence of such practices. (Smith, 70-71)

Using one of Hume's examples, Smith examines our admiration of "superior understanding":

Originally ... we approve of another man's judgement, not as something useful, but as right, as accurate, as agreeable to

truth and reality. ... The idea of the utility of all qualities of this kind is plainly an afterthought, and not what first recommends them to our approbation. (Smith, 65)

We admire the superior reason found in the practice of the "abstruser sciences" such as mathematics, yet few actually understand the subject and fewer still are aware of any beneficial application of its discoveries. Utility is "chiefly perceived by men of reflection and speculation, and is by no means the quality which first recommends ... actions to the natural sentiments of the bulk of mankind" (Smith, 315).

Hume has fairly obvious replies to these two specific criticisms. In the following passage Hume directly addresses the point made in Smith's first criticism:

We ought not to imagine, because an inanimate object may be useful as well as a man, that therefore it ought also, according to this system, to merit the appellation of *virtuous*. The sentiments, excited by utility, are, in the two cases, very different; and the one is mixed with affection, esteem, approbation, &c. and not the other. In like manner, an inanimate object may have good colour and proportions as well as a human figure. But can we ever be in love with the former? There are a numerous set of passions and sentiments, of which thinking rational beings are, by the original constitution of nature, the only proper objects. (E 213n)⁴

According to Hume, the perception of a useful quality produces a sentiment of approval whether it be a quality of an inanimate object or a quality of mind. The perception of utility in the construction of a building, for example, arouses our "sense of beauty." But, while we can thereby admire a building, we cannot be in love with it, and in the same manner we can approve it, but such approval is not the same feeling as moral approval.

In his discussions of utility Hume does, admittedly, leave himself open to Smith's second criticism. Hume often speaks as though it is the recognition of utility in each particular case that prompts our approval. But Smith is right that, in fact, we seldom reflect on the utility of a given quality before approving it. Moral approval in the majority of simple cases is more immediate. When we witness an act of benevolence, justice, courage, etc., we do not think of its utility to either the possessor or society before approving. Smith is here employing a favourite device of Hume's against him in pointing out that it is primarily "men of speculation" who discern the utility of qualities and not the vast majority of mankind.

But Hume can easily concede Smith's point without abandoning his view. Consider, for instance, Hume's treatment of our approbation of justice. He acknowledges that,

men, in the ordinary conduct of life, look not so far as the public interest, when they pay their creditors, perform their promises, and abstain from theft, and robbery, and injustice of every kind. That is a motive too remote and too sublime to affect the generality of mankind. (T 481)

In other words, Hume here agrees with Smith that few people bother to reflect on the utility of the quality they approve. But this is true only within an established social and moral order, where general rules govern the majority of our moral judgements. These rules have been established over time by experience of the utility of certain qualities or forms of behaviour.

It is, Hume thinks, proof that utility is the foundation of our moral approbation of justice, that, if you remove the utility, you eliminate the approbation. We do not approve of respect for property rights by shipwreck survivors, people within a besieged city, or where "society is ready to perish from extreme necessity" (E 186). Nor do we find any virtue in being honest when in "the society of ruffians, remote from the protection of laws and government" (E 187). When the benefit or utility is either eliminated or outweighed by some greater utility, moral approbation ceases.

The same can be said of something like superior understanding. It is true that we approve it because it is "just, right, or accurate." But why do we approve of reasoning that is just, right, and accurate? If accurate thinking ceased to have any utility, if it no longer were of any advantage to those capable of it or others, there would seem to be little reason to suppose it would long continue to be approved.

While it is possible that Smith was simply unaware of Hume's position, it is unlikely. For anyone familiar with Hume's moral theory, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* reveals unmistakable signs of the profound influence of Hume, not only in the views expressed, but in the examples used, the descriptions of sentiments and in the criticisms of rival theories. This obvious evidence of Smith's familiarity with Hume's theory, combined with the close friendship between the two, render it highly implausible to suppose that Smith was simply unaware of how Hume would respond to the objections. Why, then, did Smith present them? The answer, I believe, is that Smith's direct criticisms were based on two more general, yet more fundamental objections to Hume's view: first, it mistakes the role of reason in morality, and, second, it fails to make morality essentially social. To understand these

objections it will be necessary to examine some of the more essential elements of Smith's own moral theory.

Smith's Moral Theory

According to Smith, there are two questions that any moral theory must answer: (1) What is the nature or source of virtue? and, (2) What is the nature or source of moral approbation? To the first question Smith's answer is "propriety":

In the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion, which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it, consists the propriety or impropriety ... of the consequent action. (Smith, 61)

The standard of propriety or impropriety is found in the sympathetic response of the impartial spectator. Thus, Smith's answer to the second question, what is the source of moral approbation, is closely related to his answer to the first. Moral approbation consists in sympathy.

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. To approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them. (Smith, 58)

The approval is not the actual sympathetic sentiment felt by the observer, but rather, the felt concord or agreement in sentiments between the observer and agent. For Smith, morality is irreducibly social. If, for example, by sympathy I feel indignation at a wrong done to another, it is not my feeling of indignation which constitutes my approval of his indignation, but rather, the feeling of our agreement in sentiment. Morality cannot be reduced to individual sentiment, but must always refer, at least implicitly, to the sentiments of others.

We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man, according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and

sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it. And, in the same manner, we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it. ... Whatever judgement we can form concerning them, accordingly, must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon certain conditions would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgement of others. (Smith, 203-4)⁵

Smith's theory must also be seen within the wider context of his providential world view. According to Smith, the natural world is ordered into a system of final causes by a benevolent Providence. All principles of nature, including human nature, have some end or purpose. If we suppose Providence to be benevolent (as Smith claims we cannot help but believe), then it is clear that any principle of man's nature must be given him to promote his happiness or welfare. Nature's "economy" is such that we are endowed with no principles of thought or action with any tendency to conflict with our welfare unless the same principle has an even greater tendency to promote it. "This benevolent and all-wise Being can admit into the system of his government no partial evil which is not necessary for the universal good" (Smith, 384). Smith's famous economic doctrine of the hidden hand, the beneficial but unintended consequences of individuals pursuing their private interests, is merely one instance of his more general theory of final causes.

Smith's Fundamental Objections

I. The Role of Reason

As I explained above, Smith believed that we are endowed by Providence with certain natural principles necessary for our well-being. These principles operate whether or not we are aware of them and whether or not we recognize their beneficial tendencies. Our approval of punishment is a good example:

The very existence of society requires that unmerited and unprovoked malice should be restrained by proper punishment; and consequently, that to inflict those punishments should be regarded as a proper and laudable action. Though man, therefore, be naturally endowed with a desire of the welfare and preservation of society, yet the Author of nature has not entrusted it to his reason to find out

that a certain application of punishments is the proper means of attaining this end; but has endowed him with an immediate and instinctive approbation of that very application which is most proper to attain it. (Smith, 152n)

The principle Smith appeals to in the case of our approval of punishment is a general one: "Nature" does not leave it to the uncertain operations of reason to guide those sentiments which are necessary for our well-being.

The economy of nature is in this respect exactly of a piece with what it is upon many other occasions. With regard to those ends which, upon account of their peculiar importance, may be regarded ... as the favourite ends of nature, she has constantly in this manner not only endowed mankind with an appetite for the end she proposes, but likewise with an appetite for the means by which alone this end can be brought about, for their own sakes, and independent from their tendency to produce it. ... It has not been entrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason, to find out the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us in the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts. (Smith, 152n)

To anyone familiar with Hume's epistemology this should sound familiar. What Smith is doing here is extending Hume's theory of natural judgements to the moral realm. Compare, for instance, the above quotes from Smith with the following quote from Hume:

as this operation of the mind, by which we infer like effects from like causes, and *vice versa*, is so essential to the subsistence of all human creatures, it is not probable, that it could be trusted to the fallacious deductions of our reason, which is slow in its operations; appears not, in any degree, during the first years of infancy; and at best is, in every age and period of human life, extremely liable to error and mistake. It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations, may discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding. (E 55)

For Smith, there are certain moral dispositions which are just as necessary for our preservation as our disposition to infer like causes from like effects. If, as Hume claims, something so important to our survival as causal inferences must be based, not on the slow and uncertain operations of reason, but on the immediate and sure operations of instinct, then, Smith believes, the same must be true of the equally important moral dispositions. But, rather than recognizing the immediacy of our approval of certain moral qualities for what it is—an instinct necessary for our well-being—Hume instead traces our approval to an operation of *reason*, that is, the recognition of utility or what constitutes the best means to a desired end.

Thus, Smith's specific criticism discussed above, that we do not actually perceive the utility of a quality before approving it, turns out to be based on the more fundamental and formidable objection that Hume attributes to reason what is really the role of instinct. And it is not at all clear that Hume has any satisfactory reply.

II. The Essentially Social Nature of Morality

Like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, Smith was intent on rebutting the "licentious" or egoistic systems of Hobbes and Mandeville and emphasizing the "social affections" over the "selfish affections." Smith was particularly concerned with what he believed to be the irreducibly and essentially social nature of morality, and it is just this aspect of morality which, I believe, Smith thought Hume's appeal to utility did not capture.

Hume placed the major source of virtue in utility; but, Hume claimed, utility is merely a means to an end and it is impossible to suppose that we value the means unless we value the end. Therefore, the source of our approbation must be either the individualistic and self-centred sentiments which are aroused upon our recognition of a quality's usefulness to ourselves, or the social and other-centred sentiments aroused upon our recognition of a quality's usefulness to others. As I explained above, Hume rejected the first alternative as contrary to our moral experience and instead adopted the second alternative which makes sympathy with others the source of our approbation. If, as Hume claims, utility is the "foundation of the chief part of morals," and our approval of utility necessarily presupposes sympathy or sharing in the sentiments of others, then it would follow that, according to Hume, at least the chief part of morality is essentially social.

Smith believed that, contrary to what Hume claimed, sympathy is not at all essential to his account of approbation and, thus, his theory fails to make even the chief part of morality essentially social. Hume claimed that it is a contradiction to suppose that we can value or admire

a means without valuing or admiring the end it is supposed to achieve. Smith simply denies this. It may often be true that we value the means only insofar as we value the ends, but there are numerous examples where this is not true. We often admire the "harmony and order" displayed by the "exact adjustment of means to ends," even when the ends are not particularly valued or admired in themselves.

Unless we suppose that we are endowed by nature with a natural love of system and order⁶ we cannot explain why people are so fond of so-called 'labour-saving' devices which are generally "more troublesome to the person who carries them about with him than all the advantages they can afford him are commodious" (Smith, 301). Nor can we explain why a person seeks wealth and fortune, purportedly for the ease and convenience it affords, yet, "submits in the first year, nay, in the first month of his application, to more fatigue of body and more uneasiness of mind, than he could have suffered through the whole of his life from want of them" (Smith, 300). A spectator often admires the condition of the rich not so much from any sympathy with their supposed superior ease and pleasure, nor even because he supposes that "they are really happier than other people"; but, because he "imagines that they possess more means of happiness" (Smith, 302).

Smith also believed that this love of system and order explained what he called the "man of system," that particular brand of social reformer who designs grand schemes for eliminating all of society's ills, yet becomes so enamoured of his system that he relentlessly pursues its implementation in spite of its failure to achieve any such results or, all too commonly, in spite of its outright pernicious effects on the very people it was purportedly designed to help. In this case as in those cited above it is the "ingenious and artful adjustment of the means to the end for which they were intended, that is the principal source of his admiration" (Smith, 302).

Smith's point is that Hume is incorrect in supposing that our approval of useful qualities in others can only be explained by appeal to sympathy with their happiness. We need not be at all concerned with someone's happiness to admire how well suited their disposition is for achieving happiness. But, if there is no essential connection between our admiration or approval of utility and our concern for others, then it would seem that Hume's theory is not essentially social at all.

Furthermore, Smith believed that, even if we were to accept Hume's claim that we must value the end if we are to value the means, sympathy would still not be an essential feature of morality because on Hume's account there is no sympathy required for moral *self-approbation* based on utility. Approval of a useful quality in ourselves would, Smith believes, be a matter of mere prudence or taste with no reference to the sentiments of others.

It is to be observed, that so far as the sentiment of approbation arises from the perception of this beauty of utility, it has no reference of any kind to the sentiments of others. If it were possible ... that a person should grow up to manhood without any communication with society, his own actions might, notwithstanding, be agreeable or disagreeable to him on account of their tendency to his happiness or disadvantage. He might perceive a beauty of this kind in prudence, temperance, and good conduct, and a deformity in the opposite behavior; he might view his own temper and character with the sort of satisfaction with which we consider a well-contrived machine in the one case; or with that sort of distaste and dissatisfaction with which we regard a very awkward and clumsy contrivance in the other. As these perceptions, however, are merely a matter of taste ... they probably would not be much attended to by one in his solitary and miserable condition. (Smith, 315-16)

Here Smith repeats the specific criticism discussed above, that approval of utility is the sort of approval we feel towards a well-contrived machine. But his point here is not that it does not distinguish moral from non-moral approval. It is the far more challenging objection that there is nothing essentially *social* in such approval and, therefore, nothing essentially social in Hume's moral theory.

Smith is correct, I believe, in rejecting Hume's claim that we must suppose sympathy with the welfare of others to explain our admiration of their useful qualities. In addition to Smith's own examples mentioned above, one might note that we can admire the skill of a talented con artist without any such sympathy, and we can admire the tactical genius of a great general without any such sympathy. Smith is also correct in claiming that, even if we did need the appeal to sympathy to explain our admiration of utility in the qualities of *others*, *self-approval* requires no such appeal. But is Smith correct in supposing that, if sympathy is not really essential in the way Hume believed, then Hume's theory does not reflect the social nature of morality? I think not. Although Hume's principle of sympathy is an important part of his theory, it is by no means the only, or even the major social element. Smith goes astray by concentrating on what Hume has to say about the *source* of approbation without considering what he has to say about the *standard* of approbation. But it is exactly in this standard of approbation that the crucial social element of Hume's theory is to be found.

Neither Hume nor Smith believed that mere individual sentiment is the standard of moral approbation. For Smith, moral approbation consists in the agreement in sentiment between that agent or "person principally concerned" and the observers. If the agent is partial, that is, influenced by his private and particular situation, observers will not be able to "enter into" and "share" his sentiments and will disapprove. If an observer is partial, other observers will not be able to enter into his sentiments and will disapprove. It is only when we consider people from an impartial viewpoint that we can obtain a concord of sentiments. Our view of the greater part of mankind is from a position of natural impartiality. Their actions have no particular relation to us and are indifferent to our particular interests. When, however, our natural view is partial, either because the agent bears some particular relation to us, or our own interests are involved, or when we view our own actions, the moral viewpoint becomes that of the "ideal spectator." We adopt the view of the greater part of mankind—impartiality. We are able to do so by forming general rules from our experience of cases where we are naturally impartial. Conscience is nothing but this set of general rules which guides us by the awareness of how we would feel if we were impartial.

According to Hume, because each person has his own private and peculiar point of view, there could be little agreement in sentiment if each person were to employ his own viewpoint as a standard. In order to avoid "continual contradictions," not only between ourselves and others, but even in our own sentiments at different times, we adopt a standard whereby we can all agree. This is possible because there are certain qualities of character which cause a certain kind of sentiment in all normal human beings when considered from the same point of view.⁷ Hume compares moral qualities to secondary qualities like colour and sound; the appearances vary according to the situation of the observer, but the true colour or sound is discovered by adopting a certain common viewpoint. Like and dislike are akin to an appearance of colour to an observer from his private viewpoint. Virtue and vice are akin to the true colour of an object discovered by how it appears to everyone when viewed in normal light from nearby.

Like Smith (who seems simply to follow Hume here), Hume held that the point of view which produces natural agreement is impartiality, and this impartiality is the moral viewpoint. And again, like Smith, Hume believed we can adopt this viewpoint from our experience of cases where we are naturally impartial. We then formulate general rules which guide us by informing us how we would feel were we impartial.⁸

Thus, Smith and Hume actually agree on the intersubjective and, thereby, essentially social nature of the standards of moral

approbation. What of Smith's claim that Hume cannot account for the social element in self-approbation? Given Hume's view of the moral viewpoint, a person "grown to manhood" in isolation would have no need or means to develop a distinction between his individual and personal sentiments of like and dislike and moral sentiments which arise from recognizing those qualities which cause a certain kind of sentiment in all human beings. To feel moral approval is to feel the sentiment which arises when we view a quality from an intersubjective viewpoint. Thus, moral self-approbation would be ruled out because he could not have had any means for identifying the intersubjective standards necessary for moral judgement. We can feel moral self-approbation only when we view ourselves as others view us, and this is exactly what Smith claims. Thus, while Smith may be correct that Hume's principle of sympathy does not capture the necessary social element of morality, he is incorrect in supposing that Hume's theory is, therefore, not essentially social.

Because of the predominant place given to the discussion of utility in the works of Smith and Hume, both have been interpreted by many as either utilitarians or precursors of utilitarianism. Although false in both cases, such readings make more sense applied to Hume than to Smith. Hume was by no means a utilitarian. It is not the fact that something brings about the greatest good, is in the public interest, or promotes the greatest happiness, that makes it morally good. What makes something morally good is that it causes a certain kind of sentiment in human beings, and utility is simply one of the qualities that produces such sentiments. Yet Hume's emphasis on the importance of utility, and especially his argument that the moral merit of justice arises from its utility, was certainly conducive to the development of utilitarian thinking.

On the other hand, Smith's theory, which consistently attacked appeals to utility as a source of moral merit, and adamantly denied that the moral merit of justice was in any way related to its utility, cannot reasonably be viewed as contributing to the utilitarian tradition. But, ironically, the predominant contemporary perception of Smith is that he was both the originator of the utilitarian defense of free market economies and its most eloquent spokesman. Not only is he supposed to have argued that free markets are morally justified by their social utility, but even that this utility *outweighs* any injustices that might attend such economies. It should be clear that this perception is fundamentally mistaken.

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1. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 231. Further references ("E") are given in parentheses within the text and notes.
2. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978), 589. Further references ("T") are given in parentheses within the text and notes.
3. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, 1976), 310. Further references ("Smith") are given in parentheses within the text and notes.
4. See also T 617, 331.
5. Smith clearly rejects a Humean account of the operation of sympathy. According to Hume we approve the means, viz., certain qualities of character, because we approve the ends, viz., the pleasure or happiness of others. Our approval of the ends rests on sympathy—the communication of the passions—whereby we *feel* the pleasures (or pains) of others. According to Smith, this cannot account for why we approve of certain dispositions even when they produce pain or uneasiness. For example, self-respect gives rise to indignation, an unpleasant sentiment, at a perceived wrong. By sympathy we come to share the victim's unhappiness. Yet we *approve* of their indignation. If, as Hume contends, "Every quality of the mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain, is call'd vicious" (T 591), then, according to Smith, it would be impossible to explain why we approve of such righteous indignation or the self-respect that gives rise to it. It is only if moral approval of disapproval arises from our ability or inability to "go along with" the sentiments of others, and not from the particular pleasurable or painful sentiment communicated, that we can explain our approval of certain unpleasant sentiments and disapproval of certain pleasant sentiments. (Cf. Smith, 106n.)
6. This love of system and order is something that Hume himself acknowledges in a different context. Cf. T 504n.
7. Cf. T 581-82, 591.
8. Cf. Smith, 59-60.