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September 15, 2011

Capitalism and the Human Future:
Reclaiming Smith for the Humanist Traditions¹

Abstract: The economic crisis has provoked the need to reevaluate our economic practices; however, any attempt to do so will require a set of criteria that can form the basis for judgment. Since Adam Smith is often regarded as the “founder of capitalism,” I engage Smith’s thought in the attempt to clarify the standards by which economic practice ought to be judged. Using Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of humanism as containing belief in the *autonomy of the I*, the *finality of the you*, and the *universality of the they*, I argue that Smith ought to be considered a humanist. Using Charles Taylor’s distinction between devout and exclusive humanists, I note that Smith has aspects of both types of humanism, but that he leans toward the latter. This then allows me to comment on the implications that following Smith’s example might have for the evaluation of late capitalism according to standards derived from a humanist inquiry, especially regarding the way in which religion relates to that inquiry.

Traumatic experiences often create the context for a stronger reevaluation of cultural values. We may choose to reaffirm our previously-held beliefs and practices with a renewed understanding of how they relate to our experience, or we may revise or jettison them in light of new information. An example of this is the economic instability

of the last several years, which has raised questions about the ways in which economic practices are ordered. Some of these questions tend to revolve around the relationship between ethics and economics: Is our suffering the result of systemic injustice or merely the result of a few personal moral failures? On the other hand, there are voices that reaffirm our current practices and that describe our problems as the result of technical problems that can be overcome without a revision of values. One pressing need is to discern the proper criteria for judging systems of economic practice, and for this, a natural place to turn is to the thought of Adam Smith, who provided one of the earliest and most influential justifications for capitalism (albeit a form of capitalism that differs from our own).

Much work has been done recently in order to recover Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the book on ethics that has largely been overshadowed by his *Wealth of Nations* (Blosser, 2011b; McCloskey, 2006; Muller, 1995). In the following paper, I want to build upon this work by considering the implications of reading Smith not only as an ethicist, but as a humanist in particular. The argument has three components, each of which builds upon the previous one. In the first, I locate Smith within the broad bounds of humanism in general. At the same time that I am doing this, I complete the second component, which addresses the question of what type of humanist Adam Smith is. In demonstrating that Smith is a humanist, I elucidate the type of humanist that he is. These first two components have between them two goals: 1) to better understand Smith's overall project, including the connection between his views on ethics, economics and religion, and 2) perhaps most significantly, to propose a set of conversation partners that might not otherwise be suggested, namely, contemporary humanist thinkers. The third component is the most constructive one, and it involves an examination of the implications of Smith's humanism for the structuring of a dialogue concerning the criteria that ought to be utilized for an evaluation of the various practices that compose late capitalism.

In my paper, I do not defend the principles of humanism, which are at least assented to, if not followed consistently, by the majority of persons in our society. Nevertheless, there is a rhetorical strategy employed, insofar as the people least likely to derive their criteria for evaluating economic practice from humanist principles are most

likely to view Adam Smith as an epistemic authority on the ordering of business. For them, the exegetical argument is intended to provide support for these principles. For others, the exegetical argument is meant to suffice as a case study of the application of humanist principles to the evaluation of economic practices. Having observed these principles at work in Adam Smith's thought, I am able to explore how these principles require a much broader scope for the evaluation of economic practice than is typically addressed.

Asking the question of whether Smith can be considered a humanist requires a definition of humanism. Broadly construed, a system of thought can be considered to be humanist if it proposes that the goal of action and typically, of thought itself, is to promote human flourishing. It can also be said that humanist thought requires an anthropology that emphasizes human freedom, such that humans are free to pursue the flourishing that they seek. Relying on Tzvetan Todorov, then, I will suggest that humanism "refers to the doctrines according to which man is the point of departure and the point of reference for human actions" (2002, p. 6).

Todorov further specifies his definition of humanism with a list of three features of humanism: "the *autonomy of the I*, the *finality of the you*, and the *universality of the they*." The autonomy of the I denotes the freedom of the individual to determine her actions; humans are not enslaved to nature or God. The finality of the you refers to the notion that individual humans are the goal of human action. The sense of a shared humanity set apart from all else that compels us to work for the flourishing of all humanity is embodied in the universality of the they (2002, p. 30). In Todorov's estimation, these three features are antithetical to theism. Notions of divine sovereignty entail a denial of human freedom, the worship of God undermines true love of our fellow humans, and belief in God threatens to displace the flourishing of the human family as our central concern.

Todorov's account highlights one of the primary divisions within humanism, that between what Charles Taylor refers to as devout humanists and exclusive humanists (2002; 2007). The former value human freedom and flourishing but see them in relation to the divine; the latter see these goods as being unconnected to, or threatened by, God. In using Todorov, I abstract those elements of exclusive humanism from his definition,

and then allow the question of God to return as an intra-humanist argument later in the essay.

In my recovery of Smith's humanism, I will highlight concepts within Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that correspond to Todorov's three features of humanism, and then demonstrate how Smith's economic and religious views can be located within this humanistic project. In order to do this, however, I will briefly situate Smith's work within his historical context.

Humanism and the Setting of Smith's Project

There are many important aspects to Smith's historical setting, but I will concentrate on three important contributions to his project. I will necessarily be leaving many elements out, but the ones that I address here are essential to the humanist reading of Smith.

Smith is first of all heavily influenced by a tension between what William Bouwsma refers to as two poles in Renaissance Humanism. Bouwsma complicates the received story of Renaissance humanism as a singular movement by emphasizing distinct intellectual disagreements between various humanists. Specifically, he suggests two poles or streams within humanist thought, the one Augustinian and the other Stoic, that struggle against each other (1990). Renaissance humanists can be seen to gravitate toward one pole or the other, and many hold aspects of each. Precise definition of each is elusive and is further hindered by the influence of Stoicism on Augustine himself, but distinguishing them is helpful not only for understanding the Renaissance humanists, but also for interpreting the diverse influences upon Smith.

The Stoic stream is characterized by an emphasis on the harmony of nature, of which humanity is a part. A high view of human rationality suggests that the laws of nature are capable of being known, and a belief in the union between knowing the good and doing the good results in the emphasis on rational control of the body. Having discerned the natural order, one conforms to it in order to achieve happiness. This emphasis on reason has the unintended consequence that happiness is for the enlightened few, which tends to result in a decreased motivation for social improvement. (Bouwsma, 1990, p. 31-42).

In contrast, the Augustinian stream begins not with nature, but with the human. The world and the self escape human understanding, and the weakness of the will is the greatest moral problem. Unlike the Stoics, Augustinians were committed to social action because of their world-affirming tendencies and their refusal to reserve happiness for a few. Lastly, the Augustinian emphasis on the transcendence of God and the fallen nature of the world suggests a “pragmatic secularism” in which one engages in the affairs of the City of Man to promote earthly flourishing (Bouwsma, 1990, p. 43-58).

Both of these streams of thought combine to have a profound influence upon Smith.² On the one hand, the Stoic emphasis on natural law and the self-control that is necessary to live in accordance with nature provides the general structure of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. On the other hand, the Augustinian influence led to a reflection upon intentionality that resulted in unmasking the less noble motivations behind what appeared to be virtuous action. As will become evident below, both of these are united in a moral psychology which builds upon less noble motives in order to cultivate genuine virtue.³

Secondly, it is important to note a lively debate about the wellbeing of the poor in Smith’s day and in the preceding century. As Gertrude Himmelfarb explains, debates about how best to solve the “problem of poverty” abounded in the century prior to Smith. This debate ranged from theoretical discussions about the source of poverty, with answers reaching from moral to material causes, to practical deliberations about what programs would best serve as a remedy. Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* proclaimed that vice actually functioned for the benefit of the common good, while moralists decried the book for its delegitimization of morality. Both sides of the debate influenced Smith, who sought to improve the morality of a society while at the same time asserting that laws built into human nature provide for the material wellbeing of society (Himmelfarb, 1983, p. 3-41).

Beyond these, however, the strongest influence on the thought of Adam Smith may be the history of religious conflict, both in the memory of religious wars and in the contemporary religious debates that threatened social stability. The impact of religious controversy on the thought of David Hume, a friend and collaborator of Adam Smith, comes to the fore in two works written in the last few decades. Jennifer Herdt, whose

reading of Hume is largely focused on his discussion of sentiments, asserts that Hume “found it important to develop arguments on [his skepticism’s] behalf, because of his concern about eliminating religious conflict and securing the conditions for peace” (1997, p. 15). Edward Craig presents Hume as a “conservative,” but one who is involved in a revolution that “aimed at no less than the destruction of the doctrine of the image of God, and substituted for it an anthropology which looked not to the divine but to the natural world for its comparisons, and to the sciences for its methods” (1987, p. 70). Craig likely overstates Hume’s conservatism, especially in light of Herdt’s analysis of Hume’s desire for social improvement, but Craig may merely be referring to the similarity between Hume’s virtues and those generally accepted in his day.

It is outside the scope of this paper to analyze these claims about Hume; I address them merely to demonstrate that there is precedence for understanding Enlightenment thought to be composed in part by the search for social stability through the displacement of religious beliefs in favor of anthropology and sociology. It is such an interpretation that leads Jerry Muller to offer the provocative statement:

The great historical fact which served as the moral backdrop for thinking about capitalism was not the factory or the mill, but war between men with rival views of salvation, men who were so sure of their own view of salvation that they were prepared to shed the blood of their fellow man in order to save his soul (1995, p. 46).

Surely, the presence of economic growth in England and the continued stagnation of the Scottish economy did in fact influence Smith’s attempt to improve his native Scotland, but his turn to humanism had the greater purpose of trying to provide the grounds of civility in the midst of an ever more pluralistic society. As God became an uncertain source of aid, Smith turned to humanity.

The Formulation of an Ethic for Humanity

My reading of Smith as a humanist finds its point of departure in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In this discussion, I will reproduce the structure of Smith’s ethical thought, emphasizing the way in which this ethical theory corresponds to the definition of humanism given above.

Smith's ethics are grounded in an anthropology. His *Theory of Moral Sentiments* opens with the sentence:

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 (1982, 1).

If we seek the most fundamental principle of Smith's anthropology, it would not be that humans are bound to act out of selfishness or self-interest. Self-interest is tempered by the fact that humans are invincibly social. No matter how selfish, all humans have the capacity to sympathize with others, and to do so, not from self-interest, but for its own sake. This point is emphasized even more by the fact that the discourse of sympathy evolved out of a response to Hobbes; sympathy stood as one clear capacity of the human that could not be reduced to self-interest, for what good could it possibly serve me to know the suffering of the man against whom I am waging war (Muller, 1995, p. 101)?

Smith enlarges this notion of sympathy beyond merely feeling pity for the sufferer; rather, it is used "to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (1982, p. 10). Smith often uses the metaphor of our hearts "beating time" with our fellow humans to express this synchronization of feelings. The imagination fulfills an important function here, for in order to sympathize with others, we must envision ourselves in their situations (1982, p. 12). An inherent trait in all humans, then, is that we have the capacity to understand how other humans feel, to place ourselves into their situations, and to experience their feeling as if it were our own. For Smith, sympathy cannot be conflated with egoism because we do not imagine how we would feel if the situation of the other were our own; we imagine how we would feel if we were the other. The concern is not for myself; it is for the other (1982, p. 317).

The shared human capacity for sympathy— itself indicative of Smith's belief in the *universality of the they*—becomes the basis of moral judgment. Smith suggests that there is an analogy between belief formation and sentiment. In the same way that, "to approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions," to adopt the feelings of another is to believe that these feelings are worthy of adoption (1982, p. 17).

Smith relies on his account of the role of the imagination in the sympathy in order to argue this point. We sympathize by using the imagination to place ourselves into the

position of another person. When the emotions of the other concur with what we imagine we would feel, we approve of them. However, if the feelings that we imagine we would feel were we in the other's position differ from the feelings that we observe, we have no possibility of sympathizing with the other. Instead, we disapprove of the other, believing him or her to be reacting to the situation in an improper fashion (1982, p. 16).

This highlights the radically anthropocentric nature of Smith's account of moral judgment. In short, "Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. [...] I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them" (1982, p. 19).

It is the imagined impartial spectator, however, that allows for personal judgments to be universalized. Sentiments, Smith explains, "seem proper and are approved of, when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with them, when every indifferent by-stander entirely enters into, and goes along with them" (1982, p. 69). The self who judges is not an isolated self, but rather a member of a community who shapes society even as she is shaped. In the impartial spectator, Smith bridges the gap between radical perspectivalism and claims to pure objectivity. Our capacities to approve and disapprove are partially formed by our contexts; nevertheless, while we may not claim perfection for our moral judgments, "we cannot complain that the moral sentiments of men are very grossly perverted" (1982, p. 209). In playing the role of the impartial spectator, we approximate with our own universalized moral claims those that we would hold were we fully impartial spectators, that is to say, if the moral sentiments built into our nature were fully uncorrupted.

Smith grounds his treatment of moral acts in the sentiments of gratitude and resentment. Actions that seem worthy of gratitude are considered worthy of reward, and those that, on the contrary, seem worthy of resentment are considered worthy of punishment (1982, p. 68). In order to enter into the sentiments of gratitude and resentment, we must address both the sentiments of the actor and those of the recipient of action. Smith distinguishes between two types of sentiment that together determine how a given act is to be judged. Direct sympathy refers to the fellow-feeling that we share

with the actor, whereas indirect sympathy refers to that fellow-feeling we share with the receiver of the action (1982, p. 74).

Gratitude and resentment are feelings felt by the one who receives the action; however, our experience of them depends upon the way in which we relate to the sympathy of the actor. Direct sympathy or antipathy determines the possibility of indirect sympathy. If we approve of the actor's feelings and are able to adopt them, we will naturally approve of the action that is a result of them. Hence, if the actor acts beneficently to the recipient of the action, we will be able to sympathize with the gratitude of the recipient (1982, p. 70). If he does harm, we will be unable to sympathize with the one harmed, because we view that harm as being deserved (1982, p. 72-73).

Likewise, if an actor acts out of feelings we are unable to sympathize with, we disapprove of that action. If an actor does a beneficent action, we will be unable to sympathize with the gratitude of the recipient, regardless of how strongly she feels it. Rather, we find such action to be foolish and unwarranted (1982, p. 72). On the other hand, if the actor harms another, we will sympathize with the one harmed, because the harm seems unjust. In this case, we adopt the sufferer's resentment, and are often moved to seek retribution on behalf of the sufferer (1982, p. 70). In all of these instances, our approval or disapproval of the action is moral insofar as we are entering into the role of the impartial spectator.

Not only do gratitude and resentment allow humans the capacity to determine the praise-worthiness or blameworthiness of an action, but they also provide us with the notions of justice and beneficence, which in turn support society. Beneficence refers to an action freely performed for the good of another; the action is not required, and, therefore, failure to perform it is not a punishable offense (1982, p. 78-79). These actions stimulate gratitude in the hearts of the recipient, and, through indirect sympathy, in the heart of the observer. Actions of beneficence are those that seem to an impartial spectator as worthy of reward (1982, p. 78). Justice, on the other hand, refers to obligation, and is typically a negative virtue. When an individual causes harm that an impartial spectator would judge to be undeserved, the action is considered unjust. This results in resentment in the mind of the recipient of the action and in that of the impartial

spectator, and the sentiment of resentment in turn drives us to punish the wrongdoer (1982, p. 79-80).

Smith's goal of promoting social stability becomes evident in his discussion of the social results of the human constitution he has elaborated. "Society," he writes, "cannot subsist among those who are at all times ready to hurt and injure one another" (1982, p. 86). Justice is the *sine qua non* of a society's existence; beneficence, while not essential, is the prerequisite for a society's flourishing.

Justice, on the contrary, is the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice. If it is removed, the great, the immense fabric of human society, that fabric which to raise and support seems in this world, if I may say so, to have been the peculiar and darling care of Nature, must in a moment crumble into atoms. In order to enforce the observation of justice, therefore, Nature has implanted in the human breast that consciousness of ill-desert, those terrors of merited punishment which attend upon its violation, as the great safe-guards of mankind, to protect the weak, to curb the violent, and to chastise the guilty (1982, p. 86).

Smith's Stoicism, perhaps transmitted to him through the Stoic stream of humanism, reveals itself strongly in this passage. Justice is necessary for society, and Nature ensures that justice will not be neglected by placing a desire for justice within human nature. That nature personified sees its highest task to support human flourishing suggests just how important human flourishing is for Smith.

Smith's belief in the *universality of the they* is demonstrated in the claim that all humans share a common nature that makes possible their flourishing. To be human is to share in this ability to sympathize with others, which allows for moral judgment that in turn promotes human wellbeing.⁴ Nevertheless, an emphasis on nature can conflict with belief in the autonomy of the I. Likewise, an emphasis on humanity as a group can clash with the finality of the you. I will discuss how Smith resolves these tensions below.

Not only does Smith reject egoism as a motivation for sympathy, but he also takes care to argue that it is not the concern for the preservation of society that motivates moral judgment; rather, it is the concern for individuals who suffer. One must distinguish between the final cause of an action and the efficient cause. Nature or God may have created humans such that they are drawn to act in ways that promote the wellbeing of

humanity as a whole, but individuals act because they are concerned with the promotion of the wellbeing of particular individuals (1982, p. 89).

Part of the reason for the dominance of nature in the first two parts of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is that Smith shifts the terms of the 18th century debate about morality, asserting that the primary question is not why we should be moral, but why in fact we are moral. The answer that is given is because humans have been designed to be so in order that human society will function. This leads to an emphasis on nature rather than on freedom, as well as an emphasis on humanity as a whole rather than as individuals.

Nature, however, can be resisted, giving Smith a reason to argue for why one would choose to live the moral life. Here, Smith once again relies on moral psychology, but examines the moral act from within rather than from without. He provides a psychology of moral development, describing the process through which we are habituated to sympathize with others. In this description, we discover both the autonomy of the I and the finality of the you.

Insofar as we can imagine an impartial spectator when judging the actions of others, we can also imagine how the impartial spectator would view us (1982, p. 110). In a sense, we become two persons, the judge and the agent (1982, p. 112). Humans are by nature concerned with the judgments of others, but “man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love” (1982, p. 113-114). It is this desire that persuades us to do what is right regardless of praise. If there is no judge present, we judge ourselves.

In order to become praise-worthy, Smith recommends “the great school of self-command,” which teaches the self to become “more and more master of itself,” in order that it may “exercise over its feelings a discipline which the practice of the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection” (1982, p. 145). The Stoic ideal is recapitulated in Smith’s commendation, but this ideal is surpassed. We do not exert self-command solely in order to come to grips with the circumstances nature or fate brings, but rather to surpass nature. Smith offers a call to build upon the natural capacities one has been given as a member of the human race, using self-command to become the type of person one desires to be. This is his notion of the *autonomy of the I*.

Nevertheless, if the means are Stoic, the ultimate goal of this self-command has an Augustinian concern for purity of motive, in Smith's case directed, not to the love of God (as Augustine would have had it), but to the human other. Self-command allows us gradually to correct the improper self-love that hinders our ability both to judge ourselves correctly and to sympathize with others. Smith describes the one who has attained this level of perfection in self-command as follows:

He does not merely affect the sentiments of the impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with, he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and *scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel* (1982, p. 147).

The one who enlists in the school of self-command attains in the end the ability to act rightly without reflecting on the impartial spectator. Whereas in the beginning, she acted out of a love of self, she is now able to act out of genuine concern for the other. In the desire to become the impartial spectator, the person who can empathize rightly with all others, we have Smith's version of the *finality of the you*.⁵

The three elements of humanism—the autonomy of the individual, the direction of human acts to the flourishing of individual humans, and the recognition of shared humanity—are thus united in Smith's ethics. It is a project that begins and ends with humanity, in both the corporate and the individual sense. The next task will be to embed Smith's discussions of capitalism and religion within this humanist project.

Smith's Humanizing Project and Capitalism

There are two principal objections to including Smith within the humanist camp. The first concerns the role of his economic thought. The Das Adam Smith Problem asserts a radical division between Smith's ethical views and his economic ones.⁶ How can the founder of "the dismal science" be considered a humanist? A full treatment would be outside the scope of this paper, but I want to examine some of the key points that would suggest that it is possible to locate *The Wealth of Nations* within Smith's humanist project.

A potential objection to the unity of Smith's project involves the anthropology that is presented in Smith's two books. The question here is whether the founding of

economics upon the idea of self-interest conflicts with what Smith has written in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

The most famous of Smith's statements is found in *The Wealth of Nations*, and it provides the essence of the anthropology presented in that text. Smith writes, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest" (1976, p. 26). This leads some to assume that "rational choice," the belief that humans always act with the goal of increasing their utility, is the most basic quality in Smith's anthropology. In this theory, even acts of beneficence (like donating to charity) are motivated by the attempt to satisfy personal preferences (e.g., the preference to feeling moral over possessing more money).

This reading neglects an important distinction between self-interest and selfishness. Selfishness, the decision to always value oneself more than others, is written of disparagingly by Smith. In fact, the restraint of selfishness "constitutes the perfection of human nature" (1982, p. 25). By contrast, self-love is not in itself evil; rather, it is a good in its own right. Self-love encourages us to take care of ourselves when we are able instead of relying upon the beneficence of others (1982, p. 272). "Self-love may frequently be a virtuous motive of action;" selfishness is not (1982, p. 309).

Smith condemns Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* as "wholly pernicious" because it does not distinguish virtuous behavior from vice (1982, p. 308). Since Mandeville asserts that selfishness brings about public good, he conflicts with the humanist project of Smith. Smith, on the contrary, suggests an economic system based, not on selfishness, but on enlightened self-interest. Insofar as these two are distinguished, *The Wealth of Nations* need not contradict his moral project.

If it does not conflict, however, there is still the question of whether *The Wealth of Nations* furthers Smith's project. There seem to be at least two reasons for suggesting that *The Wealth of Nations* does contribute.⁷ First, providing for material wellbeing is an essential part of any humanist project, because humanists recognize that humans are, if not merely animals, also animals. Humans cannot flourish if they cannot eat.

The Wealth of Nations plays an additional role, because Smith believes that extreme poverty is detrimental to the moral development of agents (Muller, 1995, p. 72). Necessity can bring the poor to commit infanticide and euthanasia because they cannot

afford to feed the non-productive members of their society (Smith, 1976, p.10).

Alleviating poverty, then, is a necessary step in encouraging justice and beneficence, so that society may first, endure, and second, flourish.

Smith's Humanizing Project and Religion

Smith rarely speaks of God; he prefers much more to refer to a personified Nature who saw fit to endow certain qualities on the human race. When he does refer to God, God is typically referred to as creator. In these instances, the words God and Nature could easily be exchanged, and the meaning would remain the same.⁸

One important exception involves the link between God and justice. By examining this connection, we receive an insight into the role that religion plays in Smith's thought. Smith introduces the notion of divine punishment for the first time in an argument designed to show that the motivation behind human punishment is not the preservation of society, but rather the concern for justice in a particular situation. The proof that justice is the primary motivation for human punishment is found in the universal religious belief that God will punish and reward after death. Even after an offender can no longer harm society after death, punishment is still sought. "In every religion, and in every superstition the world has ever beheld, accordingly, there has been a Tartarus as well as an Elysium," he writes (1982, p. 91). The desire for a heaven and hell is rooted in the longing for justice.

Not only does religion serve as proof of the human desire for justice, but religion also encourages humans to live in accordance to justice. Confronted with the injustices of the world, one may be tempted to veer from the moral life. Encouragement comes, not from fear of punishment if one strays from the good life, but rather from the hope that the wrongs one suffers in the midst of doing what is right will eventually be avenged.⁹ In the hope for eternal judgment, one finds "the only effectual consolation of humbled and afflicted man." The belief that in the afterlife "exact justice will be done to every man" and "every man will be ranked with those who, in the moral and intellectual qualities, are really his equals" is of such value "that the virtuous man who has the misfortune to doubt of it, cannot possibly avoid wishing most earnestly and anxiously to believe it" (1982, p. 131-132).

Perhaps Smith is writing autobiographically when he mentions the virtuous man who cannot believe; perhaps he is thinking of friends like David Hume. Regardless, Smith is elusive about whether or not this punishment actually exists, and it doesn't seem to make a difference for his argument. It is the belief that matters and not the belief's truth or falsity: the God we need is the God we believe in.

Smith argues that people would never have doubted divine punishment and reward if it were not for the other-worldliness of the religious teachers. Doubt, for Smith, arose when what priests proclaimed was "too frequently in direct opposition to all our moral sentiments" (1982, p. 131). Why would one praise those who practice "the futile mortifications of a monastery" to the neglect of "all those to whom our natural sense of praise-worthiness forces us to ascribe the highest merit and most exalted virtue" (1982, p. 134)? Our natural sense of praise-worthiness directs us to praise those who accomplish earthly goods, and the elevation of asceticism by religion serves, not to discourage people from pursuing earthly good, but rather to encourage them to turn from religion.

Smith seeks to recover religious belief, but it is a religious belief that fits well within his humanistic project. Smith writes, "The happiness of mankind [...] seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature, when he brought them into existence" (1982, p. 166). Given that God's purpose in creating humans was to bring about human happiness, religion, too, finds its end in human flourishing. That religion, for Smith, is ultimately in the service of human wellbeing can be seen in his conclusion:

But by acting according to the dictates of our moral faculties, we necessarily pursue the most effectual means for promoting the happiness of mankind, and may therefore be said, in some sense, to co-operate with the Deity, and to advance as far as in our power the plan of Providence (1982, p. 166).

The idea that humans cooperate with God is not a unique idea within Christian thought; however, the belief that the results of cooperation are primarily internal to the world does seem to be. True religion, for Smith, becomes true humanism. Smith leaves behind the other-worldliness of the monastics in favor of world-embracing humanism. To do God's work is quite simply to do human work, to live in accordance with the impartial spectator, performing those acts of justice and beneficence that promote human flourishing.

Hence, if we are to locate Smith in regard to devout and exclusive humanism, we will have to say that he falls somewhere between these categories. Like exclusive humanists, Smith's notion of human flourishing is not reliant upon a relation to the divine, and yet, for Smith, as devout humanists, religion does (or more accurately, can) support human flourishing.

Smith and the Contemporary Discussion

Having provided a reading of Smith as a humanist, I want to reflect on its implications for using humanism to evaluate our economic practices. Here, my reflections have parts. In the first, I suggest that our evaluation of late capitalism require us to take into account human flourishing in its broadest sense, including both material and immaterial aspects. In the second, I discuss the role engagement with religion should play both in our dialogue about human flourishing and in our evaluation of capitalism.

Todorov has a useful heuristic with which he analyzes responses to the modern emphasis on freedom, and this is a good place to start in exploring the effects of reading Smith as a humanist. Todorov situates modern thinkers within four families, though with the acknowledgement that thinkers often do not fully fit within the confines of one family. The four families are "the conservatives," "the scientists," "the individualists," and "the humanists."

The *conservatives* regret the modern notion of freedom as autonomy, because of its perceived negative results: the loss of God, the self, and society (2002, p. 11-20). *Individualists* sense these same losses, but do not believe that they are losses at all (2002, p. 25-29). The *scientists* are not strictly speaking scientists, but rather proponents of scientism. Scientism submits humans to the laws of nature, such that human behavior is wholly knowable through knowledge of these laws, and at the same time suggests that true freedom is the realization of scientific process. It is through manipulation of these laws that we achieve the good for humanity (2002, p. 20-25). We have already discussed Todorov's definition of humanism, but in this context, it is helpful to note that *humanists* accept the modern notion of freedom, but do not believe any negative consequences flow from that choice (2002, p. 29). That is to say, humanists believe that humans are free to pursue their own flourishing.

Smith has sympathies with thinkers in all of these families, yet the choice of where to locate Smith, if it is possible to do so, would ultimately be whether to include him with the scientists or the humanists. Economists often locate Smith with the scientists, and for good reason, because it legitimates the role that economists have come to play in modern society. I have already made the case for placing Smith among the humanists, but I want to look at the implications for locating him where I do.

The modern branch of scientism of which many contemporary economists are a part is characterized by:

the neglect of the ends that political or moral actions are supposed to pursue (or the disappearance, pure and simple, of such actions); the conviction that these ends flow automatically from the processes described by science; the desire to submit action to knowledge (2002, p. 25).

Scientism fails to reach above the level of instrumental reason in order to discern the ends that are to be achieved as well as the means that are appropriate to achieve them.

Moreover, in assuming that humans are wholly bound by natural laws, scientists end up trampling upon human freedom. From the humanist perspective, scientism becomes the enemy of what is human. In neglecting what is most important—the irreducible value of the human *qua* human—the contemporary members of the scientist family destroy humanity in their very attempt to promote human progress.

There are elements in Smith that can be pressed in these ways: surely, Smith believes in a natural order and in the possibility that unintended consequences can benefit humans. Nevertheless, Smith does not believe in the laws of nature in the same fashion as the proponents of scientism. Nature serves not to bind humans, but to guarantee the resources through which they can flourish. Humans are free to improve themselves, and his project seeks to lay the groundwork for this possibility by emphasizing self-control and other virtues that will enable people to attain their potential while simultaneously bettering society. A humanist reading of Smith, then, suggests that late capitalism must be evaluated in terms of all aspects of human flourishing, material and immaterial, and that no individual's flourishing may be sacrificed for the sake of attaining it.

Smith's humanism also has something to say about the connection of religion to economics and ethics. If economic practices are to be judged in light of their ability to promote human flourishing, the concept of human flourishing cannot remain a formal

consideration, but must be given material specifications. Insofar as we attempt to do this, we cannot refrain from engaging with religious claims that have bearing on our concept of flourishing. Because economic practice must be judged in terms of all aspects of human flourishing, we cannot disregard religious claims about flourishing in our evaluation of economics. If, for example, Max Weber is correct in assuming that the Protestant work ethic that initially motivated the development of capitalism itself leads to the undermining of religious belief by the instrumental reason inherent in bureaucratization (Weber, 2002), a devout humanist would judge this negatively, whereas an exclusive humanist of Todorov's form would be pleased by this development (though we could note that Todorov might have other concerns about bureaucratization). Even a humanist who found religious beliefs to be largely irrelevant but not hostile to his conception of human flourishing (for example, Adam Smith) would still have to need to formulate this conception of human flourishing within the context of religious pluralism, and his concept of human flourishing will, as also in the case of the devout humanist or the fully-fledged exclusive humanist, be judged in part according to its ability to navigate that pluralism.

On a secondary level, religions will also be critiqued according to their ability to foster human flourishing, including economic flourishing. Adam Smith engages in this critique with his discussion of monasticism, which was mentioned above. Smith notes that the values advocated by religions can promote or hinder flourishing. Some devout humanists (say, Catholics) may want to challenge Smith's understanding of monasticism or provide an alternate account that does not fall under proscription, but religion cannot avoid passing through this form of critique.

All of this presents a difficult task for humanism, one that some might say approaches the impossible. With regard to this, I want to conclude with a reflection on hope. As Paul Ricoeur notes, humanism does not call for certainty; it calls for the hope that in evaluating the values inherent within our practices and in proposing new possibilities, we can improve (1974, 68-87). It was this ardor that motivated Smith, and we might do well to emulate it.

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was written through participation in the 2011 Jerald Brauer Seminar, entitled "The Case for Humanism" and led by Professors

² Smith's blend of Stoic and Augustinian forms of humanism may itself be derived from the Calvinism that pervaded the Scotland of his day. For a treatment of the Calvinist influences on Smith, see Joe Blosser, 2011a and 2011b, especially p. 176-238.

³ For a discussion of this problem of motivation to which Adam Smith provides an answer, see Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Herdt engages David Hume rather than Smith, but her treatment is nonetheless helpful for addressing Smith's work.

⁴ An objection to this could be raised by citing Smith's discussion of "savages" in Part V of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but even here, Smith is careful to demonstrate that all humans, including the Native Americans, have the necessary capacities for moral judgment.

⁵ Willemien Otten noted that the ideal of becoming an impartial spectator may be in tension with the love of others. A tentative response might be that impartiality prevents us from allowing love of self to determine that certain others are not worthy of my love (e.g., those who are different from me, or who are of lesser economic or social status than me, etc.).

⁶ This problem was first suggested by August Oncken in "Das Adam Smith-Problem," *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft*, 1898.

⁷ A third, which suggests that Smith thought capitalists systems actually produce virtue and discourage vice, could also be produced, but I will not address it in this paper.

⁸ For an example, see Smith, 1982, p. 85-87, noting the use of nature in II.ii.3.1-4, followed by the reference to God in paragraph 5.

⁹ In framing it this way, Smith avoids the implication that moral actions are a result of egoism.