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**Citation for published version:**

Brady, E 2011, 'Adam Smith's 'Sympathetic Imagination' and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Environment' Journal of Scottish Philosophy, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 95-109. DOI: 10.3366/jsp.2011.0007

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.3366/jsp.2011.0007](https://doi.org/10.3366/jsp.2011.0007)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Journal of Scottish Philosophy

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Published in the Journal of Scottish Philosophy by Edinburgh University Press (2011)

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ADAM SMITH'S 'SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION' AND THE AESTHETIC  
APPRECIATION OF ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significance of Adam Smith's ideas for defending non-cognitivist theories of aesthetic appreciation of nature. Objections to non-cognitivism argue that the exercise of emotion and imagination in aesthetic judgement potentially sentimentalizes and trivializes nature. I argue that although directed at moral judgement, Smith's views also find a place in addressing this problem. First, sympathetic imagination may afford a deeper and more sensitive type of aesthetic engagement. Second, in taking up the position of the impartial spectator, aesthetic judgements may originate in a type of self-regulated response where we stand outside ourselves to check those overly humanizing tendencies which might lead to a failure in appreciating nature as nature.

Key Terms: aesthetics, Adam Smith, nature, imagination, environment

Adam Smith's aesthetic theory is usually discussed in relation to his lectures and essays on music, imitation, and rhetoric,<sup>1</sup> but his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) and his essay, 'The History of Astronomy' also provide a source for his reflections on aesthetic judgement, beauty and imagination (Smith 1976, 1982). In TMS Smith not only makes use of various examples from the arts, especially literature, but his discussion of imagination in moral judgement also offers insight into the positive and productive ways it functions to enable sympathy in relation to others. Smith's essays on the history and philosophy of science place imagination

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*The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 9.1 (2011): 95–109  
DOI: 10.3366/jsp.2011.0007  
© Edinburgh University Press  
[www.eupjournals.com/jsp](http://www.eupjournals.com/jsp)

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at the center of scientific theory and knowledge, and his accounts of wonder, surprise and admiration in science are strikingly aesthetic in tone. On the whole, rather than being associated with the hazards of illusion and fantasy, imagination is theorized as creative and productive; its powers are essential for making our world coherent and intelligible.

In relation to nature, Smith's moral philosophy has recently found an interesting new context in environmental ethics. Patrick Frierson provides persuasive support for why we might prefer Smith's moral theory to Hume's because, first, it assigns a different and more complex role to sympathy, and second, it can more easily be extended beyond humans to sentient and non-sentient creatures, including even holistic natural entities such as species and ecosystems, which are central to moral valuing in ecocentric ethical theories (Frierson 2006a, 2006b). In this paper, I draw on some of the promising conclusions of Frierson's work to explore the significance of Smith's ideas on sympathy, imagination and the impartial spectator in the different area of environmental aesthetics. Although directed at moral action, Smith's ideas offer, I believe, something like a 'regulative ideal' for aesthetic judgement. Why might such an ideal be of any concern to aesthetics? Imaginative activity is often identified as central to aesthetic judgement and to the freedom characteristic of the aesthetic response (Kant 2000, Hepburn 1984). Yet that freedom of imagination can sometimes lead to problems associated with attention to the aesthetic object. This sort of objection has been raised specifically against how imagination functions in aesthetic judgements of nature, where it has been argued that imaginative activity may lead to judgements which sentimentalize or distort nature. Here, I show how Smith's ideas lend support to a particular 'non-cognitivist' approach to aesthetic appreciation of nature which puts significant emphasis on imagination.

#### I. FRAMING THE PROBLEM: AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

What justification can be given for drawing on Smith's ideas to solve a problem in aesthetics? In eighteenth-century philosophy, we see a close proximity between moral and aesthetic value, with a particular form of non-instrumental valuing generated by this proximity, linked to the concept of disinterestedness.<sup>2</sup> Disinterestedness migrated from moral to aesthetic theory during this period, and through those discussions we can see the moral inflection it gives to aesthetic judgement (Stolnitz 1961; Rind 2002). On Francis Hutcheson's view, for example, the feeling of beauty involves indifference to the 'practical advantages of the object' on the part of the spectator (Hutcheson 2004: I.13). Aesthetic theories of the time commonly viewed aesthetic judgement as independent of an understanding of the function or utility of the object of perception. These views

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continue to have a strong hold on philosophical understandings of aesthetic value in both philosophy of art and aesthetics of nature.

More specifically, philosophers have argued that there are aesthetic dimensions to Smith's moral philosophy, some going so far as to describe it as an 'aesthetic morality' (Fudge 2009). The fundamental evaluative concepts of TMS, 'propriety' and 'impropriety', apply to sentiments in general, not only to moral ones. Laughter at a joke, for example, falls within the scope of propriety, suggesting that fellow feeling is relevant to both aesthetic and moral responses (TMS I.i.3.1). And, as mentioned above, in both TMS and 'The History of Astronomy', aesthetic concepts are integral to Smith's explanations of morality and natural systems. Robert Fudge points to several ways in which Smith shows a tendency to bring moral and aesthetic norms together. Concerning judgements of propriety and the use of sympathy in them, approbation and disapprobation are equated with concepts such as 'decency' and 'ungracefulness', and 'harmony and correspondence' characterize the fellow feeling which gives rise to approbation (TMS I.i.3.6; I.i.4.5; Fudge 2009: 135). Our judgements of virtues in other people also reveal an aesthetic orientation, where, for example, 'Virtue is excellence, something uncommonly great and beautiful, which rises far above what is vulgar and ordinary' (TMS I.i.5.6). This is similar to views held by other philosophers in Smith's time who, writing in an explicitly aesthetic context, found particular virtues of character, such as heroism or benevolence, to evoke a feeling of the sublime. I should clarify that I am not pursuing an argument that Smith's moral theory does, in fact, appeal to aesthetic norms. Rather, I raise these points just to show that aesthetic considerations were not far from his concerns. Following Kant—and as I see it—a distinction between aesthetic and moral value can be maintained while at the same time recognizing affinities between both types of value (Kant 2000: 225–8).<sup>3</sup>

The historical connections between eighteenth-century aesthetic theory and current debates in aesthetics of nature are also relevant. Although the concept of disinterestedness fell out of favor to some extent in twentieth century aesthetics, largely due to moves away from an interest in aesthetic experience and towards institutional theories of art,<sup>4</sup> many philosophers would still agree that the aesthetic response is correctly characterized as involving sympathetic attention to the qualities of the object for their own sake (Carroll 1999). Aesthetic pleasure continues to be understood as a type of feeling connected to the perceptual qualities and meanings surrounding the object itself, apart from any purpose.

In environmental aesthetics, some have argued that positive aesthetic judgements of nature potentially underpin a positive moral attitude toward the environment (Brady 2003: 246ff.; Lintott 2006). That is, they have extended the idea that aesthetics supports ethics to the environmental sphere. This view is not without its problems, but it indicates a further association between aesthetics and

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ethics which lies in the background of current debates. It is no accident, too, that environmental aestheticians have looked back to Kant's aesthetic theory for inspiration, with its sophisticated account of judgements of the beautiful and the sublime in nature. Few philosophers, however, have looked back further than Kant, which leaves a serious lacuna in the debate given the central place of nature in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory compared to preoccupation with the philosophy of art that has dominated since then. An additional link between aesthetic theory of that period and contemporary aesthetics can be found in the role of imagination. Addison's essays on the 'Pleasures of Imagination', generated a subjective turn in aesthetics, with imagination lying at the center of many accounts (Addison and Steele 1879). Contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of mind have also seen a growing interest in how imagination functions in our experience of the world.

A central question in recent debates in environmental aesthetics asks what constitutes appropriate aesthetic judgements of nature. Appropriateness within this aesthetic context is usually construed in terms of appreciating nature *as nature* as opposed to, say, appreciating nature as if it were a work of art. That is, what is it to appreciate nature on its own terms, as the kind of thing it is—a particular object in the environment, a group of objects, or indeed a whole environment (Saito 1998)? With works of art, artistic considerations such as style and artistic intention help to ground and guide appropriate judgements, but in the case of nature this guidance is absent, so it is less clear what terms are relevant. If one agrees with the view that aesthetic judgements of nature are more indeterminate than judgements of art, this problem would appear to be more acute in the case of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Responses to this question usually divide into two approaches: 'scientific cognitivism' and 'non-cognitivism'. Scientific cognitivism stipulates an epistemological condition of scientific knowledge to guide and inform appropriate judgements. Allen Carlson argues that, for example, to make an appropriate aesthetic judgement of a humpback whale we need to know that it belongs to the category of mammal rather than fish, for it would appear a 'clumsy' and 'oafish' fish, but judged correctly, a 'graceful' and 'majestic' mammal (Carlson 2000: 89). Non-cognitivist theories contend that while knowledge can play some role, it is not a necessary condition of appropriate aesthetic judgement. These theories make room for emotion and imagination in the aesthetic response, arguing that a richer, deeper and in some ways more egalitarian appreciation may emerge compared to appreciation constrained by or demanding particular forms of 'expert' knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Cognitivists worry about the possibility of distorted appreciation, where trivializing or humanizing nature occurs through imaginative and emotional responses unconstrained by scientific knowledge. The challenge for the non-cognitivist is to show that our judgements can be free and appropriate

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yet not idiosyncratic or liable to distortion of the aesthetic object. Within this debate, I have developed a non-cognitive theory, the 'integrated aesthetic', which emphasizes perception, imagination, and emotion together with a lesser role for knowledge (Brady 1998, 2003). In respect of imagination, I set out a typology of its activity: exploratory, projective, ampliative, revelatory and metaphorical imagination. By bringing a range of experience and ideas to bear on perception, imagination contributes to the meaning of aesthetic objects, and to situating ourselves in relation to them. Imagination makes new relations and connections, opening up the aesthetic horizon and deepening our response. However, alongside the potential offered by imaginative engagement lies the problem of idiosyncratic and self-indulgent imaginings which threaten to distort nature and distract attention from valuing the object for its own sake. In the absence of a guiding role from scientific knowledge, cognitivists believe that imaginative activity may lead to judgements which fail to appropriately appreciate the aesthetic object.<sup>7</sup> For example, in a recent discussion, Glenn Parsons raises worries about an aesthetic judgement of the night sky based on 'the tales of Greek mythology, imagining the stars as faithless lovers flung into the sky by the fickle gods' (Parsons 2008: 23).

My strategy for addressing the problem of wayward imaginings has been to set out how imagination functions along lines of relevance (Brady 2003: 158ff.). First, I argue for the importance of recognizing how the aesthetic object's perceptual qualities both *evoke* and *direct* our imaginings, keeping them in line with the character of the object itself. For example, the smooth surface and round shape of a beach pebble evoke imaginings of waves tumbling it onto the shore over and over again. There are also, importantly, two explicit guiding features of the response: (1) disinterested attention; and (2) 'imagining well', which is characterized by comparing imagination to a virtue, so that we 'imagine well' when we use imagination appropriately according to the aesthetic situation. Imagining well is developed through practice, akin to the exercise of virtue. Flexibility governs these features as they guide the aesthetic response, since inflexibility would conflict with the range of responses demanded by the diversity of natural objects and appreciators and the freedom afforded by imaginative engagement.

Although Ronald Hepburn and Kant are key influences on my approach, it also shares a great deal with the concerns of Smith's moral philosophy. This may be no accident, given some of the eighteenth-century connections discussed earlier, and the influence of Scottish Enlightenment thought on Kant. As we shall see, the emphasis Smith places on perception and imagination in his moral epistemology, coupled with a lesser role for knowledge and understanding, opens up interesting territory for drawing explicitly on his ideas to defend an aesthetic approach which has faced objections from scientific cognitivism.

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## II. SYMPATHY AND IMAGINATION

Many Smith scholars hold that his views on sympathy and imagination are more complex than Hume's and provide a different, richer picture of how sympathy works beyond simply trying to put oneself in someone else's shoes (Frierson 2006b; Fleischacker 1999; Raphael 1975). This suggests a very good reason for turning to Smith for thinking through a kind of sympathetic aesthetic engagement with nature that underpins more attentive, less superficial forms of appreciation. Imagination and feeling can provide a route to this, defining a free aesthetic response, unconstrained by knowledge but self-regulated nonetheless.

### **Sympathy**

Let me first turn to Smith's concept of sympathy. Sympathy is a function of projective imagination, of imaginatively putting oneself in the shoes of another. More precisely, there is a 'double movement' of imagination where we first project ourselves into the shoes of an impartial spectator and then, from that position, imaginatively put ourselves into the shoes of the other. This impartial standpoint is not abstract or dispassionate, rather it involves affective engagement with the situation or person at hand. So, we judge the moral situation from a standpoint that is not wholly abstracted from ourselves, but where we try to take on the position of the impartial spectator putting themselves into the shoes of another person. Once in that position, if we find that we would feel similarly towards the situation, our response will be one of approval.<sup>8</sup> It is important to point out that we are not trying to make ourselves feel in the *same* ways the other person does, that is, to say, 'feel her anger,' but rather to put ourselves into that situation as an impartial spectator and then to see how we would react.

What does this imaginative projection have to do with non-human nature? Frierson has provided a persuasive argument for the extension of sympathetic imagination to both sentient and non-sentient nature, despite non-sentient nature (at least) having no feelings. Frierson emphasizes that Smith's concept of sympathy is not concerned with feeling the *same* feelings as the other but rather imagining oneself in the other's situation, where there is, importantly, a *gap* between one's own feelings and the feelings of the other person; the feelings may in fact be quite different (TMS I.i.1.2; Frierson 2006a: 450; cf. Griswold 1999: 86ff.; Griswold 2006). The significance of this is crucial when thinking about sympathy in relation to environment, as Frierson says:

For Smith, this gap is important to make room for moral disapproval. For environmental ethics, however, the gap is important because it makes room for cases of disconnect between the feelings of spectator and object of sympathy where the object of sympathy feels nothing at all and even when it is impossible for the object of sympathy to have any feelings. (Frierson 2006a: 452)

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Frierson cites Smith's example of sympathizing with the dead to support his claims and to show that Smith provides a notion of sympathy which recognizes that we often cannot feel the way others do. This is not at all a sign of weakness, rather it is a function of differences between ourselves and others—human or otherwise, the limitations of our imaginative abilities and the fact that we are who we are. That is, we do not fully abstract from our own feelings and own position in the world (Frierson 2006a: 454).

So, we have a neat model of how sympathy might function in relation to non-human others. I see it as especially helpful for the way it retains something of *who we are*, and as Frierson points out, it retains the human perspective. Our perspectives as both individuals and humans who feel are very much at the heart of our judgements of nature—both moral and aesthetic—and to overly abstract from these in our imaginative efforts would be not only difficult but not necessarily desirable either. One worry I have in this regard is that to abstract from 'who we are' might be in virtue of trying to move towards oneness with nature, a position I see as riddled with problems at least because 'oneness' (in some forms) denies difference.<sup>9</sup> Likewise moving too far in the other direction, that is, where only a human-centered stance matters, opens up problems associated with anthropocentrism—a problem, I might add, that is sometimes seen as more of an issue for aesthetic than moral judgements.

### **Imagination**

If we accept Frierson's position, then it can be established that sympathetic imagination applies to nature as well as to humans. From his point of view, this is crucial because without understanding how we have sympathy with nature, we cannot make sense of benevolence or our responsibilities towards nature. Why should this matter when it comes to *aesthetic* judgement? It provides us with a way of understanding how imagination functions in appropriate ways in our aesthetic judgements of nature. Sympathetic imagination provides the basis of a robust account of imaginative projection, whether in the context of developing an ethical attitude or within the less action-oriented situation of the aesthetic response. In aesthetic appreciation, projection identifies a form of imaginative activity that is not uncommon, as in cases where we project ourselves into the shoes of fictional characters or, more abstractly, into the scene depicted in a painting. Indeed, Smith himself supports his discussion of sympathetic imagination by noting how we may have fellow-feeling for the plight of characters in tragic drama (TMS I.i.1.4). Why is this sort of imaginative activity relevant in the environmental context? Imaginative projection can enable us to share something with non-human nature—not feelings as such (except perhaps in the case of some sentient nature)—but imagining the situation of some other entity, whether familiar or strange. With non-human nature, we are probably making



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a greater imaginative effort than with fellow humans (real or fictional), but we activate the same tools of imagination and perceptual sensitivity to the particulars of any situation.

Many scientific cognitivists fail to recognize the positive ways in which imagination operates sensibly to structure meaning around the aesthetic object and deepen our aesthetic judgements in relevant ways. The view that imaginative activity is necessarily liable to problematic forms of subjectivity is conceptually narrow and overlooks the richness imagination offers to aesthetic experience when it operates sympathetically.<sup>10</sup> Rather than being suspicious of its powers, Smith trusted imagination, even though he recognized that imagination could be led astray (Griswold 1999, 2006; Fleischacker 1999; Raphael 1975). Projection takes some effort, and, despite Smith's use of the expression, 'illusion of imagination', it is not an exercise of fantasy or spinning tales. Illusion refers to the fact that, as he puts it, 'we have no immediate experience of what other men feel' and so we use imagination to 'conceive what we ourselves should feel in the like situation' (TMS I.i.1.2). For Smith, getting our moral judgements right depends upon our powers of imagination. Projection involves attention to the particulars of the situation with which we are engaged. This attention to detail also involves some degree of understanding. In the aesthetic case, however, where knowledge is often backgrounded and the free play of imagination is foregrounded, I would argue that the situation of the natural object is grasped through keen perceptual attention to the particular aesthetic object and its context rather than detailed *knowledge* as such. Smith's views would largely support this claim in so far as he argued that moral spectators must be attentive and well informed in terms of careful attention or sensitivity to the particulars of a moral situation. However, Smith also points out that the spectator ought to make use of her knowledge of the situation. Now, in both the moral and aesthetic cases this could be construed as bringing in as much knowledge as one has of the object and context in question, yet, it need not suggest that any specific knowledge is required. Smith's emphasis on the moral *spectator* speaks to the weight he wants to put on perception and attention in moral judgement, rather than knowledge.

When moving from Smith's moral case to projective imagination in judgements of nature, we know that it is not commonly feelings of the aesthetic object we attempt to capture but other features. Such imaginative activity can generate a participatory, even embodied aesthetic response to objects or environments. This chimes with recent efforts in environmental aesthetics towards engaged, immersed appreciation and away from the disembodied and distanced aesthetic spectator as characterized by theories of the picturesque or, in more contemporary terms, the 'scenery model' (Carlson 2000).<sup>11</sup> To appreciate the aesthetic qualities of a snowdrop, a flower which blooms in late winter, I might imagine what it is like to live and grow under difficult conditions, bringing my own experience of the change from winter to spring to bear on my judgement.

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With this imaginative effort, I have tools at hand to more deeply appreciate the remarkable toughness which seems so at odds with the delicate beauty of the flower. These imaginings in some ways bring together my experience with the flower, although my experience will be different, as Smith and Frierson point out. It is not fellow-feeling as such that occurs, and there is no mental state of the flower, of course, to imagine from the 'inside', but some attempt is made, nonetheless, to grasp its extraordinary qualities – delicacy and vitality.<sup>12</sup>

In discussing Smith's view in relation to this kind of imaginative projection, it might be asked why I take the extra step of applying his ideas to sympathizing *with* nature rather than just sympathizing with *appreciators* of nature. In other words, what is gained through imagining oneself in the place of nature rather than just having imaginative associations about nature? My aim is to provide an account which tackles one of the more challenging forms of imaginative activity, and one which also speaks to some interesting ways in which we attempt to move beyond the human perspective, a point I take to be significant in both environmental aesthetics and ethics. Functioning in the projective mode, imagination, in relevant cases, grounds a more engaged, vivid response, enabling a more attentive appreciation of aesthetic qualities than might be possible through visual perception alone (or indeed, imagining from the 'outside' only).

In 'The History of Astronomy' imagination lies at the center of Smith's philosophy of science. Surprise, wonder and admiration felt in response to the natural world stimulate imagination, and interestingly, we find an example of the positive, fanciful functioning of projective imagination. The aim of this activity was the invention (or postulation) of the equalizing circle, which was used by ancient (natural) philosophers to investigate the irregular velocities of the planets within their spheres (Harrison 1995: 95):

Those philosophers transported themselves, in fancy, to the centres of these imaginary Circles, and took pleasure in surveying from thence, all those fantastical motions, arranged, according to that harmony and order, which it had been the end of all their researches to bestow upon them. Here, at last, they enjoyed that tranquillity and repose which they had pursued through all the mazes of this intricate hypothesis; and here they beheld this, the most beautiful and magnificent part of the great theatre of nature, so disposed and constructed, that they could attend, with ease and delight, to all the revolutions and changes that occurred in it. (*Astronomy*, IV.13)

Here imagination is used in the service of scientific knowledge, but the operation of imagination and the beauty and simplicity of this natural system are very clearly drawn in aesthetic terms.<sup>13</sup> So, we find projective imagination also in Smith's philosophy of science, where aesthetic value turns out to be germane.

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### III. DEFENDING IMAGINATION

#### **The Impartial Spectator**

Smith's views on imagination and its role in moral action are rich but also careful. He is aware of the possibility of self-deceit in moral matters, and the important role given to the impartial spectator reveals a suspicion in some ways analogous to the cognitivist's worries in environmental aesthetics—at least in so far as it indicates an awareness of how we can go wrong if we lack some degree of distancing from our own feelings. Although aesthetic judgement does not have the same urgency of moral concern, Smith's impartial spectator and the self-command that emerges can function to give a more robust account of how aesthetic judgement works along lines of relevance, especially in the more challenging cases where imagination and emotion are very active. They show how we might stand outside ourselves to check overly humanizing tendencies and correct one's judgements.<sup>14</sup> Smith's ideas can also, perhaps, provide some direction toward a notion of aesthetic judgement lying between aesthetic particularism and aesthetic universalism.

Smith's impartial spectator may serve as a more viable notion than disinterestedness, a concept which although sometimes misunderstood, nonetheless is often seen as defining an overly abstracted aesthetic perceiver. The impartial spectator gives more content to a kind of aesthetic distancing that is situated within a more intimate aesthetic engagement. The position we take up balances partiality and impartiality by including the sentiments, cognitive stock and imaginative skill of the perceiver and at the same time involving a mechanism for distancing oneself from oneself. Through internalizing the impartial spectator, we can strike a balance between the character of the aesthetic perceiver and the character of the aesthetic object.

How might we flesh out the role of the impartial spectator checking imagination in aesthetic judgement? Let me return to the example of the beach pebble. In discussing this case, I want to sketch out a mode of imagination, where one does not take the further step of sympathizing *with* nature but just sympathizes with *appreciators* of nature. I imagine a narrative for how the pebble I hold in my hand becomes so smooth, the waves crashing it onto the beach. My imagination wanders to a past experience of walking along that same beach with a friend, and our exploration of the seashells, pebbles and other things washed up. I recall a falling out between us afterwards and imagine how things might have been if that unfortunate event hadn't occurred. I turn on myself, recognizing my imagination has wandered toward too personal reflections, leaving the object behind. The impartial spectator reins imagination back in, abstracting from these feelings and reflections, and my attention returns once again to the pebble itself. Of course, there is nothing wrong with these imaginative wanderings in themselves, but on this account they do not constitute an aesthetic judgement of the pebble as such,

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hence why imagination functions to check itself. Essentially, in this case, I cannot imagine the impartial spectator sharing in these further imaginings, or the various feelings associated with the more personal aspects of the situation. The aspects of appreciation which cannot be shared are judged to be inappropriate to the object.

### **Self-command**

How might we understand self-command in aesthetic judgement? Because Smith was more Aristotelian than both Hutcheson and Hume, he maintains the importance of moderating feeling, and he argues that self-command is a virtue developed through practice (Fleischacker 1999; Broadie 2010). We cultivate self-command in making moral judgements and become better and better at it. Likewise in aesthetic judgement and the imaginings which may form part of it, as I see it, we can learn to moderate our use of imagination according to a range of experiences we have over time. Self-command can help us to get things right in our aesthetic responses – it may not operate consciously and in fact it may simply become habit over time to check the freedom inherent to the aesthetic response. In this way, self-command provides a further way of thinking through how ‘imagining well’ might function and develop over time.

Interestingly, this also suggests something like looking for consistency in one’s own aesthetic judgements, a consistency that matters to us as individuals who care about the aesthetic tastes we develop. It can be significant in terms of developing an aesthetic identity or ‘personality’ for ourselves, but it may also matter to us what other people think of our aesthetic tastes and the sort of identity we develop around them. Our aesthetic tastes and the acuity of our aesthetic judgements reflect who we are, and in this respect, they are no small matter: it is important that we get our aesthetic choices right.

For Smith, taking on the position of the impartial spectator involves some grasp of society’s views. What meaning might this take on within an aesthetic context? Aesthetic and moral judgements are sometimes contrasted through the claim that aesthetic judgement is not subject to social norms. While this difference exists in some respects, it can certainly be overplayed. Although aesthetic judgement is associated with what Kant called a ‘judgement of taste’, most theories distinguish between mere preferences and aesthetic judgements which seek justification beyond the individual. Our aesthetic values may not carry the same weight as our moral values, but they determine to some extent how we fit in and get along with others. Our aesthetic judgements are therefore important not just on the level of getting things right in terms of a judgement appropriate to the object itself, but also in terms of how our judgements fit with the judgements of others.

On Smith’s account of moral sentiments, we do not simply agree with society’s views, since society can get things wrong. Rather, through the operation of

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imagination and sympathy, our judgements reflect ourselves, while also, if proper, agreeing with the possible sentiments of spectators attentively and impartially aiming to sympathize with us. Translated into a community of taste, our aesthetic judgements will be by their very nature communicable. Also, moving from these ideas and into wider discussions, the extent to which our positive aesthetic judgements contribute to supporting a moral attitude towards the environment, they certainly become significant in a broader sense.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Taken together, the impartial spectator and self-command support a robust notion of both moral and aesthetic judgements which are directed at the object for its own sake. In essence, Smith provides a powerful non-cognitive standard of appropriateness and inappropriateness for aesthetics, especially for the kinds of problematic cases discussed above. I have been favoring an interpretation of Smith's moral philosophy as sharing many features of virtue ethics. As such, it is open to the kinds of criticisms that are often launched at that approach, such as the problem of partiality. I cannot address those criticisms here, though an answer might lie in arguments made recently by Fudge for an aesthetic naturalism in Smith's philosophy (Fudge 2009: 140ff.). In any case, I hope to have shown the ways in which Smith's moral theory, with its emphasis on perception, imagination, and feeling, fits well with non-cognitivism. A rule-based or utilitarian moral theory would present a sharper contrast to aesthetic value, and with Smith's approach we have a notion of impartiality which, if imperfect, nonetheless maps well onto aesthetic judgements which are both particular to the individual but also reach beyond to a community of sentiment.

In the process of applying Smith's ideas to a problem in recent debates, I have also hinted at how he might have approached aesthetics of nature, had he ventured *explicitly* in that direction (a direction, I might add, that would not have been unusual in his time).<sup>15</sup> We have seen too that his moral philosophy provides room for trying to understand, at least, propriety in relation to aesthetic judgement. So, although my focus has been on nature, the ideas presented here on the productive, free yet 'self-regulated' imagination may also be useful for thinking through how imagination functions in our judgements of art. Where objections to imagination arise, we might turn to Smith's impartial spectator for help in adopting a sort of 'aesthetic regulative ideal'.<sup>16</sup>

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jones (1992) and Malek (1972).
- <sup>2</sup> Among influences on Smith, the proximity of aesthetics and ethics can be found in Hutcheson and Hume. Also, recent work on Smith has shown connections between these two realms of value. See Griswold (2006), (1999: 330ff.); Harrison (1995); Fudge (2009); Longuet-Higgins (1992); Schliesser (2005). In relation to Kant and Smith, see: Fleischacker (1999).
- <sup>3</sup> For the contemporary debate on moral and aesthetic value see, Elisabeth Schellekens (2007) *Aesthetics and Morality*, London: Continuum.
- <sup>4</sup> See George Dickie (1964) 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, pp. 56–65. Oswald Hanfling (2000) 'Five Kinds of Distance', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, pp. 89–102; Rind (2002).
- <sup>5</sup> On the freedom and indeterminacy associated with aesthetic judgements of nature, see: Hepburn (1984); Kendall Walton (1970) 'Categories of Art,' *Philosophical Review* 79, pp. 334–367.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Noël Carroll (1993) 'On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (ed.) *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 244–266; Brady (1998); (2003).
- <sup>7</sup> See objections in, for example, Marcia Eaton (1998) 'Fact and Fiction in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Special Issue: Environmental Aesthetics* 56, pp. 149–56; Robert Fudge (2001) 'Imagination and Science-Based Appreciation of Unscenic Nature,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59, pp. 275–285; Allen Carlson (2009), *Nature and Landscape*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 49.
- <sup>8</sup> See also Frierson's discussion (2006b: 149).
- <sup>9</sup> For further discussion of this problem, see criticisms of Deep Ecology in Val Plumwood (2000) 'Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism', in John Benson, ed., *Environmental Ethics*, London and New York: Routledge.
- <sup>10</sup> See Parsons (2008) for discussion of this narrower approach.
- <sup>11</sup> See also extensive work on 'aesthetic engagement' by Arnold Berleant, for example, (1992) *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- <sup>12</sup> In the case of animals, we can of course imagine what it would be like, say, to fly, thus grasping expressive properties such as grace and freedom of flight. We might even try to imagine the feelings of an animal, but a clear connection would need to be made about how that supports the aesthetic judgement as such. The limits of space do not allow me to consider the tricky problem of animal appreciation and the role of imagination here. However, I believe it is possible for imagination to have a role which does not necessarily lead to distorted or sentimental anthropomorphic responses. Ronald Hepburn addresses this problem in some respects in his 'Serious and Trivial in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature' in *The Reach of the Aesthetic: Collected Essays on Art and Nature*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

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- <sup>13</sup> For further discussion, see Robin Downie (2001) 'Science and Imagination in the Age of Reason', *Journal of Medical Ethics* 27, pp. 58–63.
- <sup>14</sup> In the moral context, Frierson also shows how a useful and proper form of anthropomorphizing is possible on a plausible interpretation of Smith's moral theory. Given that my arguments here are trying to make analogies between the moral and aesthetic cases, these views on anthropomorphism may lend support to my argument for appropriate uses of imagination (Frierson, 2006a: 470).
- <sup>15</sup> With its emphasis on the surprise, wonder and admiration felt in response to natural systems, it might be possible to read 'The History of Astronomy' as providing something close to an aesthetics of nature in Smith's philosophy, but that is the topic of another paper.
- <sup>16</sup> I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the opportunity to discuss eighteenth-century aesthetics with colleagues at the seminar, 'Scottish Enlightenment Aesthetics and Beyond' held in St Andrews, Scotland in 2007. This paper has also benefited from discussions with Sam Fleischacker and an audience at the 'Philosophy of Adam Smith' conference, Balliol College, Oxford, 2009.



