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Humanity, Empathy, and the Self: Comments on Fleischacker's *Being Me Being You*

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In *Being Me Being You* (BMBY), Samuel Fleischacker offers a novel interpretation of Smith's conception of empathy—or 'sympathy', as Smith referred to the phenomenon—and defends the importance of this conception of empathy for ethical theory. The book is a treasure trove of intricate discussions of various conceptions of empathy—primarily contagion versus projection accounts and the ways they map onto Hume's and Smith's respective moral philosophies—as well as of the differences between empathy and other types of emotional reactions. Fleischacker also brings Smithian empathy into conversation with empirical work, discussing the relationship between Smith's work and cognitive psychology, empirical work on novels and empathy, empathy and altruism, and whether animals experience empathy. Furthermore, he discusses the importance of culture for Smith's conception of empathy and uses this conception of empathy to offer a response to the worry that empathy goes out far more readily to members of limited social groups around us. Finally, Fleischacker responds to challenges posed to moral systems that rely on empathy, discusses empathy and the limits of utilitarianism, and examines the relations between empathy and demonization. My focus in this commentary will be relatively narrow: I will be critically assessing only the second chapter of Fleischacker's book, where he makes use of Smith's account of empathy to develop a distinctive Smithian conception of 'humanity'. Despite the shortcomings discussed below, his discussion of Smithian humanity is, to my mind, one of the most sophisticated and impressive philosophical commentaries on Smith's thought.

Fleischacker's Smithian conception of humanity has two key components. First, it is associated with having a perspective: to be human is 'to develop and sustain a perspective', understood as 'a mesh of opinions and attitudes that respond to the situations we have lived through in the past and shape the way we live through future situations', or 'a *subjective take on the world*' (BMBY: 31). Second, it is a 'felt common' or 'shared sentimental' humanity in the sense that it consists in 'shared dispositions to have certain feelings' and in the sense that we recognize it primarily 'by way of feeling' (BMBY: 30).[1] Fleischacker arrives at this conception by building on Smith's projection account of empathy, according to which the spectator projects herself into the actor's situation and imagines how she (or the actor) would feel in this situation (TMS I.i.1.2, I.i.1.10, & VII.iii.1.4).[2] Two important features of the Smithian account of empathy are (a) that it consists not merely in feeling *what* another person might feel, but in being aware that that is how things feel *for* them; and (b) that mutual empathy, according to Smith, is always a source of pleasure (BMBY: 24-25). This account entitles us to claim that a spectator is aware that the actor has a distinctive perspective from which she experiences her feelings. Moreover, one could postulate, as Fleischacker does, that sharing our perspectives, and thus being reassured that we participate in a common humanity, is what makes empathy a source of pleasure (BMBY: 28-30). Therefore, Fleischacker argues that what unites each one of us sentimentally with the rest of humankind is an ability to be aware of having certain feelings in certain circumstances—an awareness of feelings 'in myself and others, as from a distinctive perspective' (BMBY: 30).

[1] As Fleischacker notes, the following dichotomy might be too sharp: 'Insofar as Smithian empathy depends on a reflective process of putting ourselves in another's situation, it requires a certain amount of reasoning. But the shared sentimental humanity that arises from this process is still sharply different from the shared rational humanity of a Plato or a Kant. Reason alone neither constitutes nor makes us aware of Smith's common humanity' (BMBY: 30).

[2] *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* will be referenced as 'TMS' with the part, section (if applicable), chapter, and paragraph in the Glasgow Edition.

Before examining how Fleischacker develops this Smithian conception of humanity, there is a point that is worth emphasizing. Conceptualizing humanity merely in terms of having a unique perspective, as Fleischacker's formulations sometimes suggest (BMBY: 31), might be over-reaching, for certain animals may have the requisite mesh of opinions and attitudes. Accordingly, what makes us human is not merely that we have a perspective, but that we are capable of being *aware* that we have a perspective, an awareness that is distinctively human. And, indeed, Fleischacker does sometimes recognize this point, noting, for example, that 'there is a connection between engaging in Smithian empathy and being aware of perspectives: being aware, even, of our own perspective' (BMBY: 34). This emphasis on being aware that we have a perspective is of particular interest in a Smithian context, since the awareness in question would seem to be a necessary condition for the very possibility of Smithian empathy. In particular, in part I of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Smith argues that when A empathizes with B, A imagines how A would feel in B's situation. For example, Smith notes that spectators' empathy 'arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner' (TMS I.i.1.3). It is reasonable to assume that it is precisely because we are aware of the fact that we have a perspective that we can imagine ourselves, our own perspective, in another person's situation. And it is highly plausible that other animals are not aware of their perspectives in this sense.

Indeed, one could further argue that one's awareness of one's perspective just is empathy towards *oneself* in this Smithian sense. Accordingly, Smith, who argues that we judge ourselves by attaining a certain distance from ourselves and imagining the effects that our behavior would have on us through the eyes of others (TMS III.1.2), notes that in judging one's conduct, one

divides oneself into ‘two persons’: (a) ‘the judge’, that is, ‘the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view’, and (b) ‘the person judged of’, that is, ‘the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion’ (TMS III.1.6). And we approve or disapprove of our own conduct in the same manner in which we approve or disapprove of the conduct of others, namely, if, when we place ourselves in the situation of the judge, we either can or cannot empathize with the sentiments and motives that influenced it (TMS III.1.2). In other words, we are the type of being that can act as both a judge and the person judged of, and, accordingly, empathize, qua spectator, with ourselves, qua actor. And to return to my initial thought, since Smith’s account of empathy is perspective-based, we are the type of being that is *aware*, qua spectator, of our own unique *perspective*, qua actor.

Setting aside these initial observations, let me move to the heart of Fleischacker’s Smithian account of humanity. Fleischacker initially argues that we can ‘enter one another’s perspectives by way of [Smithian] empathy’ and that ‘only by empathetically understanding that others have perspectives different from ours do we come to recognize that we ourselves have a perspective’ (BMBY: 31). Now, the first claim might very well be true. In particular, empathy, on Smith’s projective theory of it, certainly provides an effective way of entering another’s perspective. Indeed, there is a case to be made that Smith would argue that empathy is the *only* way of entering another’s perspective, since he believed (a) that we do not have direct access to other minds (‘our senses will never inform us of what [another person experiences, since] they never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person’ (TMS I.i.1.2)); and (b) that empathy is *necessary* in order to attain information about other minds (‘it is by the imagination only that we

can form any conception of what are [another person's] sensations' (TMS I.i.1.2)).[3] Of course, none of this yet shows that it is only by empathetically understanding that others have perspectives different from ours that we come to recognize that we ourselves have a perspective. Nor does it show that, as Fleischacker later puts it, 'you cannot even *have* a perspective unless you can enter empathetically into other perspectives', so that 'the connection between empathy and perspectivalism is […] a metaphysical and not just an epistemological one' (BMBY: 34). I will dub this stronger, metaphysical claim—one of three metaphysical claims that Fleischacker advances—the 'Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim' and turn to examine it in detail.

Fleischacker's main argument in support of the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim focuses on the distinction between imagining being oneself in the actor's situation (self-oriented empathy) and imagining being the actor in the actor's situation (other-oriented empathy). He questions the supposition, which this distinction presupposes, that one can have a stable and sharply delineated perspective independently of empathy, asking 'is there really such a thing as "my perspective" and "your perspective," independently of empathy?' (BMBY: 34). Fleischacker is right that if we are not entitled to speak of 'my perspective' and 'your perspective' independently of empathy, then the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim would be true: if empathy with others' perspectives is a necessary condition for my having a perspective, then I cannot have a perspective unless I can enter empathetically into other perspectives. However, I believe that Fleischacker ultimately ends up arguing only for what I will call the 'Weaker Claim': *when* we empathize, we are not entitled to speak of 'my

[3] For a discussion of these issues, see Ben-Moshe (2020, 743-44). As I explain in that piece, Smith does think that we can know *that* a person is sad, happy, or angry by way of, for example, inductive inferences rather than empathy. However, he also thinks that we can know *what it feels like* to be sad, happy, or angry—the 'qualia' of sadness, joy, and anger—only by way of empathy. Thus, Smithian empathy is necessary in order to *experience* another's feelings.

perspective' and 'your perspective.'[4] Accordingly, most of Fleischacker's discussion focuses on several claims that would seem to support the Weaker Claim, primarily (a) that we cannot enter someone else's shoes without also imagining ourselves as them, nor imagine ourselves as them without also entering their shoes; (b) that if we try to take on *all* of someone else's characteristics and experiences, we will no longer be empathizing with them, but attempting to merge with them; and (c) that our perspectives can and often do change, and do so as a result of both greater self-understanding and, relatedly, empathy with other perspectives (BMBY: 34-37).

One could question whether the Weaker Claim is true. Consider claim (a). Fleischacker argues for this claim primarily by providing various examples, such as a white person attempting to imagine what a black person feels when subjected to a racial insult. The thought is that the white person cannot simply enter the black person's situation *qua white person*; rather, he would need to imagine what it would be like to be the black person in their situation (BMBY, 34-35). However, while it is certainly plausible that there may be various circumstances in which we cannot simply imagine *ourselves* in someone else's situation, it is surely the case that we often can empathize with others through *our* perspective. Indeed, Smith provides examples of such pure self-oriented empathy: blushing for the impudence and rudeness of another, feeling compassion for someone who is incapable of appreciating their miserable condition, and a mother who empathizes with her sick infant (TMS I.i.1.10-12). And, in connection with claim (b), other-oriented empathy need not entail an imagined *identity* between actor and spectator; it requires only that the spectator abstract away from his own idiosyncratic characteristics and imagine the actor's situation as one encountered by someone with the actor's characteristics, that

[4] I make this observation in Ben-Moshe (2023b).

is, by someone with the actor's beliefs, attitudes, character traits, and so on.[5] Since this is a form of empathy that does *not* incorporate our perspective in any interesting sense, it seems that we can empathize with others through *their* perspective (pure other-oriented empathy). So contrary to the Weaker Claim, we can empathize with X *and* be entitled to speak of 'my perspective' and 'your perspective'. And claim (c) bears little on this possibility: even if our perspective can and does change—in response to, for example, our empathetically entering into other perspectives—it seems plausible that we can have *a* perspective on a given situation at any given point in time.

Perhaps Fleischacker intended the Weaker Claim to be even weaker: it is *sometimes* the case that when we empathize, we are not entitled to speak of 'my perspective' and 'your perspective'. However, it does not ultimately matter whether the Weaker claim (in its weaker or stronger version) is true, for even if it is true, it does not entail the truth of the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim: while the former pertains to the relations between my perspective and your perspective *when I empathize with you*, the latter pertains to the relations between my perspective and your perspective *simplicter* or *independently of empathy*. More specifically, while the former argues that there is no clear distinction between my perspective and your perspective *within* the phenomenon of empathy, the latter views empathy as *a necessary condition* for having a perspective. And the truth of the latter claim is what, I believe, Fleischacker has not conclusively demonstrated: (a) if it is plausible to talk of my perspective independently of empathizing with your perspective, then the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical

[5] I make these observations in Ben-Moshe (2020, 752). See also Nanay (2010, 90). Smith, for his part, was well aware that the person judging and the person being judged are two distinct individuals. For example, he concludes the passage about dividing oneself into two persons, the judge and the person who is being judged, by noting: 'that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect' (TMS III.1.6). Moreover, Smith was sensitive to the fact that there cannot be an imagined identity between spectator and actor, as he notes that the sentiments of spectators and those of actors 'will never be unisons', but 'they may be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required' (TMS I.i.4.7). Indeed, Fleischacker himself goes on to explain that one needs to maintain a certain distance from the perspective of another person, amongst other things, in order to judge their feelings morally (BMBY: 35-36).

Claim is not necessarily true; (b) for all Fleischacker has said, it is plausible to talk of my perspective independently of empathizing with your perspective; (c) therefore, the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim is not necessarily true. Claim (b) is key, of course: I am arguing that even if Fleischacker has demonstrated that, when I empathize with you, I cannot draw a sharp boundary between my perspective and your perspective, he has not ruled out the possibility of me having a perspective—which I can (at least sometimes) project into your situation—even *before* I attempt to empathize with your (or, indeed, anyone else's) unique perspective.

There is another important claim in Fleischacker's account of humanity, which makes use of the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim and which pertains to Smith's conception of the self. Fleischacker argues that we 'have no self independent of having a perspective' (BMBY: 37), which I will call the 'Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim'. Since he believes himself to have shown that we have no perspective independent of our empathetic interactions with others, he aims to show that we have no self independent of our empathetic interactions with others—'I will have no self prior to my acts of empathy' (BMBY: 39)—which I will dub the 'Self-Empathy Metaphysical Claim'. So the three metaphysical claims yield the following argument:

Perspective→Empathy	[Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim]
Self→Perspective	[Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim]
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Self→Empathy	[Self-Empathy Metaphysical Claim]

The key evidence for the alleged truth of the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim consists of two well-known passages from TMS (BMBY: 38). Given the importance of these passage to Fleischacker's argument, I present them here at length:

> [O]ur first moral criticisms are exercised upon the characters and conduct of other people […] But we soon learn, that other people are equally frank with regard to our

> own. We become anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause, and whether to them we must necessarily appear those agreeable or disagreeable creatures which they represent us. We begin, upon this account, to examine our own passions and conduct, and to consider how these must appear to them, by considering how they would appear to us if in their situation. We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct. [TMS III.1.5]
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> Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects which he cannot easily see, […] and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind. To a man who from his birth was a stranger to society, the objects of his passions, the external bodies which either pleased or hurt him, would occupy his whole attention. The passions themselves, the desires or aversions, the joys or sorrows, which those objects excited, […] could scarce ever be the objects of his thoughts. [TMS III.1.3]

I do not believe that these passages, in and of themselves, demonstrate the truth of the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim, for two reasons. First, both passages focus primarily on the manner in which we learn to make judgments of the *propriety and impropriety* of our passions and conduct by considering how they would appear to us if we were in others' situation. In other words, their focus is on our *moral* selves and not on our selves *simpliciter*.[6] Now, one might argue that the second passage is broader in scope and examines the conditions for the formation of a reflective, self-conscious mind (or self). Even if this is true, there is a second reason why

[6] At some points in his argument, Fleischacker does highlight the *moral* functions of the self in Smith's account: 'Society brings the self into existence and at the same time provides the standards guiding its characteristic acts of self-reflection—which for Smith are first and foremost acts of moral self-reflection. […] [Smith posits] a continuous self for moral purposes. […] [O]n this conception of the self, constructed for moral purposes out of our acts of empathy with others, and with ourselves as if we were another person, I will have no self prior to my acts of empathy. […] [Selfhood is] a necessary and ineliminable component of our moral and psychological reflections' (BMBY: 38-40). Nevertheless, even if the self has important moral functions in Smith's account, Fleischacker does seem to focus his argument on the self *simpliciter*, regardless of the functions that this entity might, in turn, have.

these passages do not demonstrate the truth of the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim: they could be interpreted as merely suggesting that without others we would not come to be *aware* that we have a self, which is an epistemological claim; they do not suggest, in any obvious way, that we *have* no self independent of having a perspective, which is a metaphysical claim. (As a side note, suggesting the truth of the weaker, epistemological claim does not amount to offering a conclusive argument for its truth, but I will not be pressing this point in this commentary.)

Fleischacker explicitly rejects the epistemological claim and claims that 'without the mirror provided by society, we would not just be *unaware* that we had a self; we would in fact *not have* a self', noting that Smith's 'metaphor of the mirror is misleading' (BMBY: 38). He thus insists on the truth of the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim. It seems that the key defense of this claim, above and beyond the two passages from TMS, is the following one: 'On the Cartesian and Lockean views of the self from which early modern philosophers begin, […] my self does not exist if I am not aware of it; the self, on these views, is by definition something that reflects upon itself. So Smith's self cannot so much as exist until it is awakened to such reflection by society. Society brings the self into existence' (BMBY: 38). So it seems that Fleischacker's key thought is that (a) recognizing that one has a self is necessary in order to *have* a self, and (b) this recognition amounts to having a perspective. This would seem to establish the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim. Smith's specific contribution here consists in the fact that he points out that this awareness of one's self, which amounts to having a perspective and which is necessary for having a self, occurs in the context of our interacting with others, that is, in the context of other people judging us. Of course, this line of reasoning is conditional on endorsing the early modern understanding of the self, and no independent argument has been provided for the feasibility of

this understanding. (One may, for example, wonder whether it is rather the case that having a perspective is *dependent* on having a self, but I will not pursue this line of thought.)

What are we to make of the third metaphysical claim, the Self-Empathy Metaphysical Claim? When Fleischacker argues for the truth of this third claim, he writes the following:

> [O]n this conception of the self, […] I will have no self prior to my acts of empathy. I come to determine who you are by distinguishing your perspective from mine, and I come to determine who I am by distinguishing my perspective from yours. What I take to belong properly to you, and what I take to belong properly to me, may change as I proceed with this imaginative and interpretive process. It follows that there will be no 'natural,' pre-empathetic self to which I might turn in order to ground a distinction between imagining being myself in your situation and imagining being you in it. That distinction will arise, rather, *from* the process of empathy. [BMBY: 39]

Naturally, Fleischacker is relying on the truth of the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim in order to argue for the Self-Empathy Metaphysical Claim. However, since I have argued that the truth of the former claim is questionable, we have no reason to accept the truth of the latter claim (even if the Self-Perspective Metaphysical Claim is true). Now, there is a sense in which one could argue for the truth of a more *modest* version of the Self-Empathy Metaphysical Claim. What Smith argues in TMS III.1.2-5 (see above) is that, as we interact with others and learn to judge ourselves through their eyes, we develop a certain distance from ourselves that allows us to refine our ability to experience other-oriented empathy towards *ourselves*: we can imagine, as spectators, the effects of our own behavior as actors. Importantly, when experiencing other-oriented empathy towards ourselves, we need not imagine being B in B's situation; rather, we merely need to imagine the manner in which B views our situation, where most of B's defining characteristics can remain unknown to us. Therefore, there is no genuine attempt to view the situation *qua B*. Indeed, we ultimately come to empathize with ourselves through the eyes of an

impartial spectator (TMS III.1.2), a *notional* or *hypothetical* other person.[7] Thus, insofar as empathy is needed for the formation of the self, it pertains merely to the ability to view ourselves from a distance. In particular, the constitution of the self does not require acts of empathy that take into account what it is for B to be in B's situation, and thus does not require us to take into account B's own perspective, which was of importance in Fleischacker's discussion.

I wish to conclude by briefly discussing two additional issues. First, apart from the problems discussed above, there is a psychological example that poses a *prima facie* problem for some of Fleischacker's metaphysical claims, namely, the highly narcissistic individual. It seems psychologically plausible that such an individual has a perspective (and, arguably, a self), *even if* they are incapable of empathy. This individual may simply project their own perspective onto others and/or believe that others should promote their perspective, while not empathetically appreciating that other people have their own perspectives.[8] I do think, however, that the highly narcissistic individual could also potentially strengthen Fleischacker's case. In particular, it also seems psychologically plausible that (a) a highly narcissistic individual might not *recognize* that they have a perspective, and (b) this is precisely *because* they have no empathetic understanding that others have perspectives that are different from theirs. (The thought is that one needs to empathetically recognize that there are many perspectives in order to recognize that one has *a* perspective.) As was the case regarding the self, Fleischacker may wish to argue—especially in connection with my observations about the importance of being *aware* of a perspective as a condition on it counting as a human perspective—that if one does not recognize that one has a

[7] I make these points in Ben-Moshe (2020, 749-50). Regarding the hypothetical nature of the impartial spectator, Smith notes that this spectator 'has no particular relation either to ourselves, or to those whose interests are affected by our conduct, […] but is merely a man in general […] [an] abstract man, the representative of mankind'. (This quote is taken from a footnote on pages 129-130 of the Glasgow Edition of TMS.) See also Ben-Moshe (2021).
[8] I make this observation in Ben-Moshe (2023b).

perspective, then one does not have a perspective (and, hence, according to Fleischacker, a self). Combining all of these thoughts, one could argue that (a) entering empathetically into other perspectives is necessary in order to *recognize* that one has a perspective, and (b) recognizing that one has a perspective is necessary to *have* a perspective (which, in turn, is necessary to have a self). Needless to say, this discussion is based on armchair psychology, which may be false.[9] Furthermore, it is based on (potentially question-begging) stipulations about the conditions for having a perspective. Indeed, it would seem to entail, desirably or undesirably, that the highly narcissistic individual does not have a distinctively *human* perspective (nor, perhaps, a self).

Second, I fear that some of Fleischacker's metaphysical claims are too *psychologistic*. One might wonder what is the philosophical importance of, for example, the Perspective-Empathy Metaphysical Claim: why is it important to demonstrate that one cannot have a perspective unless one can enter empathetically into other perspectives? Since we are associating having (and being aware of having) a perspective with humanity, one could look to Korsgaard's (1996, 132) attempt to show that 'valuing humanity in your own person […] implies, entails, or involves valuing it in that of others'. In the context of our discussion, this would amount to showing that valuing my perspective implies or entails valuing other people's perspectives. Note, importantly, that the interesting connection to be forged between my humanity and your humanity is *normative* in nature: the thought is that your humanity—anyone's humanity—is normative for me, and thus that your perspective—anyone's perspective—is normative for me. Forging a normative connection between my humanity and your humanity would probably

[9] Earlier I suggested that it is reasonable to assume that it is because we are aware of the fact that we have a perspective that we can imagine ourselves, our own perspective, in another person's situation. I am now suggesting that it is because we can imagine other persons, their perspectives, in their situation that we can come to recognize that we have a perspective. Although the two claims pertain to different forms of empathy (self- versus other-oriented empathy), it is far from obvious that they can both be true: it is plausible that self-oriented empathy is more *rudimentary* than other-oriented empathy, but the conjunction of these two claims seems to suggest otherwise. If the second claim is not true, then the example of the highly narcissistic individual does not support Fleischacker's case.

require us to make use of the *impartial spectator*, which provides the required normative import in Smith's account.[10] To be sure, Fleischacker does make use of the impartial spectator in his account of humanity, but he gives this spectator primarily a *psychological*, rather than a normative, role: 'I come to determine who both you and I are by contrasting our perspectives with that of the impartial spectator. […] [T]o the extent that you don't seem to think or feel [like an impartial spectator], I take you to occupy a distinctive perspective on the world. And I come to see myself as having a distinctive perspective by way of *my* differences from the impartial spectator.' (BMBY, 39).[11] I cannot flesh out, in this commentary, an account of how the impartial spectator might forge a normative connection between my humanity and your humanity. My aim is merely to gesture at the Smithian resources that such an account will likely need to utilize.[12]

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[10] Smith notes, for example, that only 'when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes' with the 'passions of human nature' are these passions 'proper' (TMS II.i.2.2), and that the 'precise or distinct measure by which this fitness or propriety of affection can be ascertained or judged of […] can be found nowhere but in the sympathetic feelings of the impartial and well-informed spectator' (TMS VII.ii.1.49).

[11] Fleischacker does argue that 'the impartial spectator […] guides—disciplines—the process of construction by which I interpret who you are and who I am: provides norms, standards, for that process, a benchmark of how 'people in general' feel or act, against which I can recognize and assess your peculiarities and mine' (BMBY: 40). However, this normative aspect, insofar as it is a normative aspect, pertains to how people in general feel, not to a normative connection between your perspective and my perspective. The latter requires making use of the impartial spectator as it figures in Smith's moral theory. While Fleischacker acknowledges that the impartial spectator is 'the centerpiece of Smith's moral system', he also notes that his focus 'is not on Smith's moral theory' (BMBY: 39).

[12] I develop such an account elsewhere, by arguing that a third-person point of view, that of the impartial spectator, gives authority to a second-person point of view, in the form of other-oriented empathy (Ben-Moshe 2023a).

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