Fleischacker, Samuel, *Being Me Being You: Adam Smith & Empathy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019, pp. xii + 216, US$35 (paperback).

Samuel Fleischacker's *Being Me Being You: Adam Smith & Empathy* offers a new interpretation of Adam Smith's conception of empathy—or 'sympathy', as Smith referred to the phenomenon in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter TMS)—and defends its importance for ethical theory. Ethicists, especially those with interests in moral psychology, will find his nuanced discussion of empathy of great interest. Moreover, Fleischacker develops an innovative Smithian account of humanity. This account is one of the most sophisticated and impressive philosophical commentaries on Smith's thought that I have encountered. This book is, therefore, an important addition both to the secondary literature on Adam Smith and to ethical theory more generally.

The book commences, in chapter 1, with an illuminating discussion of various conceptions of empathy, especially contagious and projective empathy: catching others' feelings contagiously (per Hume) versus projecting oneself in one's imagination into others' situations (per Smith). Fleischacker does an excellent job explaining why these two psychological mechanisms deserve the name 'empathy', while also highlighting features that are unique to projective empathy: (a) it involves grasping *why* the people whose feelings one shares have those feelings, (b) it allows one to have feelings on behalf of the other person that they do *not* have (but, perhaps, should have); and (c) it is easier, in comparison to contagious empathy, to extend beyond people who happen to be like us. Fleischacker also does justice to contagious empathy by discussing its explanatory role in the apprehension of 'feeling-language': we come to understand what it normally looks like for a person to be, for example, envious or pleased through contagion and thus come to

understand feeling-language. He builds on the later Wittgenstein's understanding of language, and readers sympathetic to Wittgenstein's approach will find Fleischacker's explanatory hypothesis of interest. (Others might argue that one can easily make inferences about other people's emotions based on one's own emotions, without the need for contagious empathy.)

Fleischacker then develops, in chapter 2, Smith's conception of empathy into an account of humanity, understood as having a unique *perspective*. He argues that I cannot have a perspective unless I can enter empathetically into other perspectives, focusing on Smith's distinction between imagining (a) being oneself in the actor's situation (TMS I.i.1.3) and (b) being the actor in the actor's situation (TMS VII.iii.1.4). He questions the supposition, which this distinction presupposes, that there is such a thing as 'my perspective' and 'your perspective' independently of empathy. Fleischacker is right that if empathy with others' perspectives is necessary for my having a perspective, then I cannot have a perspective unless I can enter empathetically into other perspectives. But this claim is surprising, since it seems psychologically plausible that a highly narcissistic individual has a perspective, *even if* they are incapable of empathy: this individual may simply project their own perspective onto others, while not appreciating that they have their own perspectives. And, indeed, Fleischacker's discussion focuses on the claims that (a) we cannot enter someone else's shoes without also imagining ourselves as them, and vice versa; and (b) if we try to take on *all* of someone else's characteristics and experiences, we will no longer be empathizing with them. He therefore ends up, I believe, arguing for a weaker claim: *when* we empathize, we are not entitled to speak of 'my perspective' and 'your perspective'.

In chapter 3, Fleischacker brings Smithian empathy into conversation with recent empirical and theoretical work. He discusses the relationship between Smithian empathy and such topics as cognitive psychology/philosophy of mind, novels, altruism, animals, caring about others' well-

being, and epistemic injustice. I will focus on the first topic. Fleischacker notes that Smith seems to have anticipated 'simulation theory' of the mind, according to which we simulate other people's mental states by placing ourselves in their situation. Nevertheless, he cautions that we should preserve some distance between Smith and contemporary simulation theory: while the latter is primarily focused on how we *predict* one another's behavior, Smith's account of empathy is meant to play an *ethical* role in our lives rather than a scientific one. However, in the second paragraph of TMS, Smith gives empathy an *epistemic* role, arguing that it 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 [others'] sensations' (TMS I.i.1.2). I believe that Smith's thought here is that we can know *what it feels like* to be in a certain emotional state, such as anger or sadness, only by way of a simulationist process. Therefore, simulation is necessary in order to *experience* another's feelings (Ben-Moshe 2020). This exclusively epistemic role does not bear directly on empathy's ethical role and can be seen as pertaining to a practice of predicting others' feelings.

In chapter 4, Fleischacker discusses the relation of culture to empathy and contrasts culturally-inflected Herderian empathy with universalistic Smithian empathy: empathetically understanding others (a) via their culture versus (b) via universal human reactions. Fleischacker argues that the Herderian and Smithian views should be combined: the former is essential to interpreting perspectives shared by a group; the latter is essential to the construction of our general conceptions of human nature. But he also argues that one might worry, in connection with Smithian empathy, that if we think, upon imagining ourselves into the circumstances of people in a different culture, that we would not react as they do, we will conclude that what they feel is a *mistake*. Therefore, we cannot expect to understand culturally different others merely by imagining how *we* would react in their circumstances. Fleischacker is correct, but he is, I think,

underselling Smithian empathy. In particular, it is important to keep in mind that Smith distinguishes, as noted above, between imagining being oneself in the actor's situation and imagining being the actor in the actor's situation. It seems plausible that the latter type of empathy, when sufficiently developed and experienced from the standpoint of what Smith calls 'the impartial spectator', can enable one to empathetically understand what it means to be a culturally different individual in their situation, to understand them via, *inter alia*, their culture.

In chapter 5, Fleischacker offers a Smithian response to the problem that empathy goes out more readily to members of limited social groups than to humanity at large. He focuses on two baleful effects of the limits of our empathy: (a) those that arise from inadequate concern for people outside our close circles and (b) those that arise from excessive concern for people in those circles. Fleischacker's solution to (a) is to increase face-to-face contact with outsiders. I think that he is right about this strategy: for example, John Newton (1788), an English slave ship captain who became an abolitionist, forcibly describes how empathy with slaves allowed him to see them as fellow human beings. Fleischacker's solution to (b) is to use the emotional ties to those close to us to help correct one another's biases. His thought here has two aspects: (a) we are 'more likely to listen to moral correction that comes from [close] circles' than from strangers; (b) 'we expect better moral criticism from intimate others than from strangers' (99). But while it is highly plausible that we are more likely to listen to close others, it is far from obvious that they will provide us with better moral criticism: what if they are all, for example, Nazis? Rather, it seems that the interaction with outsiders is also a more promising way of attaining good moral criticism: such interactions can aid in constructing an impartial point of view that transcends the biases of a society, a point of view of 'a man in general', as Smith dubs the impartial spectator.

Chapters 6 and 7 lay the groundwork for chapter 8. In chapter 6, Fleischacker responds to challenges posed to moral systems that rely on empathy, particularly those posed by Paul Bloom and Jesse Prinz, from a Smithian point of view. As Fleischacker notes, Bloom and Prinz not only eschew empathy, but they do so in favor of utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. He argues that this is wrongheaded, which leads him, in chapter 7, to discuss problems with utilitarianism, showing how empathy is required in order to fully understand key concepts that utilitarians use, such as 'harm' and 'benefit'. In chapter 8, Fleischacker shows how empathy can play a foundational role in structuring moral theories and public policy. He makes use of ideas from Smith in order to argue that our initial take on what is good for agent A comes from what seems good to us when we enter A's perspective empathetically. We then correct this initial take in accordance with a thin theory of human happiness and through rational and empathetic discussion among all stakeholders about the good in question. These are interesting suggestions, but I was not entirely clear about two aspects of the process: (a) how the actor's own understanding of her good is to be weighed against what is in fact objectively good for her (these two aspects often come into conflict); and (b) why empathizing with (potentially many) actors, and discussion among (potentially many) stakeholders, necessarily leads to a sound moral theory or public policy.

Fleischacker concludes the book, in chapter 9, with a rich discussion of demonization—an appropriate way of ending a book on Smithian empathy. His key claim is that demonization is the refusal to empathize with others: we cut off shared humanity with those we demonize by refusing to acknowledge that we may share a motivational structure with them and that we could ourselves have arrived at their perspectives. Fleischacker argues that refusing to demonize anyone is key to a humanistic outlook: we need to see any evildoer, even a Hitler, as someone we could have been if we had lived in other circumstances. Fleischacker's goal is noble, for he

argues that a commitment to seeing oneself in every person will enable us to work together to heal evil. However, I worry that he is running together two ways in which we are all members of a shared human community. First, it may be desirable to appreciate that even a Hitler has recognizably human motivations. But, second, it is far from obvious that we should see a Hitler as a member of the human community in a more substantive sense of 'seeing every human being as worthy of our empathy—and worthy, therefore, of our respect and concern' (165), as Fleischacker puts it in the final sentence of the book. So while Fleischacker is right that we can avoid demonization by attributing evil actions to motives we could see ourselves sharing, some individuals should be placed outside the empathic horizon of humanity, as *un*worthy of empathy.

References

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