The belief that individuals have the right to make choices based on their own private deliberations is a basic norm of modern liberal democracies. And yet the concept of autonomy, summoned by this belief, has a strikingly vexed status in the humanities today. Associated with the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant, autonomy is often said to commit us to a pernicious individualism and transcendentalism that ignores the ties of community, the claims of the emotions, and indeed, all of the social and material contexts of subjectivity that make individuals who they are.\(^1\) A related argument, forwarded by communitarians and proponents of a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, is that systems of moral philosophy like Kantianism, which put a high premium on autonomy, work with a highly technical and rule-bound understanding of theoretical reason, one that leaves no meaningful role, within moral deliberation, for the messy practice of context-sensitive judgments. Charles E. Larmore contends, for example, that modern moral philosophy implies that “we have an adequate theory of some intentional human practice, if we can reconstruct the rules, both explicit and tacit, that characterize it.”\(^2\) This relegates judgment to the margins since judgment, which relates particulars to universals, often “transcends the explicit or tacit rules upon which it only partially depends.”\(^3\)

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3. Ibid.
In this essay I want to challenge the argument that a commitment to autonomy implies a denigration of judgment, as well as the contention of Larmore and others that modern moral philosophy has little to say about the practice of moral judgment. I will do so by considering the writings of two of Kant’s most important Enlightenment precursors in the history of moral philosophy, Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both of whom occupy the curious crossroads of eighteenth-century thought marked by liberalism and sentimentalism. While many scholars take the definition of freedom Rousseau offers in The Social Contract (1762)—that is, “obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself”—to constitute a seminal account of autonomy (one that exercised enormous influence on Kant’s later formulation), I will focus here on Rousseau’s narrative about educating the autonomous man in Emile (1762). Regarded by Rousseau himself as his “worthiest and best book,”

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4 Larmore identifies Smith, alongside Hans-Georg Gadamer, as one of the few modern thinkers to attribute significance to moral judgment but he finds Smith’s development of this topos in The Theory of Moral Sentiments to be suggestive rather than substantive. Smith’s view, he argues, “never really advanced beyond the assertion that proper moral judgment should be seen as the expression of the moral sentiment that ‘the impartial spectator’ would feel.” Larmore, Patterns of Moral Complexity, 18.


Emile explicitly ties the cultivation of moral freedom to that of a finely honed judgment.\(^7\) Rousseau underscores that his eponymous pupil is to learn “less science than judgment,” so that, as an adult, he will “no longer have need of any guide other than himself.”\(^8\)

To summon Adam Smith’s writings in the context of an argument about autonomy is more complicated since until quite recently, Smith’s contributions to moral philosophy in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, 1790) were eclipsed by the economic arguments of the more famous *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Furthermore, Smith’s *Theory*, like his fellow sentimentalist’s David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), foregrounds a psychological and social explanation of the origins of moral judgment rather than a normative account of moral obligation or freedom. Nonetheless, following scholars such as Samuel Fleischacker and Michael Frazer, I will suggest that implicit in Smith’s argument about judgment is a compelling account of moral freedom, understood as the exercise of independent judgment.\(^9\)

In bringing together Smith’s and Rousseau’s writings, my aim is not to uphold sentimentalism as a wholesale alternative to rationalism: I suggest elsewhere that eighteenth-
century sentimentalism and rationalism are best seen as productively intersecting, rather than antithetical, philosophical programs. I seek rather to explore the implications for moral freedom—that is, for autonomy, broadly construed as the condition of being “directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally on one”—of two related, but ultimately distinct, paradigms of judgment. The differences I have in mind have less to do with Smith’s championing of modern commercial society and Rousseau’s critique of it, since recent scholarship has done much to complicate the caricature of Smith as an apologist for laissez-faire capitalism. I am interested instead in Smith’s and Rousseau’s very different attitudes toward public opinion and intersubjective exchange as determinants of private moral judgment. Rousseau repeatedly refers to other people’s opinions as a “poison” (Emile 178) that corrodes the integrity of judgment, though, as we will see, he reverses his position in relation to women so that “Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women” (365). On this account, concern for the judgments and opinions of others is the work of the relative, and, for Rousseau, typically negative, self-love that he calls amour-propre and that most commentators translate as vanity. Rousseau contrasts amour-propre with amour de soi, the healthy instinct of self-preservation that is

11 I take this understanding of autonomy from John Christman and Joel Anderson, Autonomy and the Challenges of Liberalism: New Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.
man’s principal guide in a state of nature, a condition described at length in his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1755) or *Second Discourse*. Emile’s education seeks to foster independence of judgment by forestalling the development of *amour-propre* and limiting social engagement until young adulthood. Whereas for John Locke, Rousseau’s most important Enlightenment interlocutor in the field of educational theory, instruction in public opinion and judgment of it are coterminous developments, for Rousseau, a child who engages other people’s judgments before developing his own will never rise above common prejudice. In *Emile* he asserts, “if you begin by instructing [your pupil] in public opinion before teaching him to appraise it, rest assured that, whatever you may do, it will become his, and you will never be able to destroy it” (187). Reinforcing this point, he observes, “As soon as one must see with the eyes of others, one must will with their wills” (84).

While the figure of other people’s eyes accrues a distinctly negative charge in Rousseau’s writings, it has both positive and negative connotations in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Societal judgment, Smith argues, often serves as a paltry standard of right and wrong since the world’s eye is blinded all too often by the glare of wealth and fashion. At the same time, Smith accords value to the considered judgments of society—as codified, above all, in the laws of justice—as whetting stones in the cultivation of private judgment. More radically still, he suggests that independent moral judgment is only possible in an interactive context. This is because the standard of judgment, as Smith understands it, is its impartiality, and impartiality requires an “othering” of personal perspective that comes from engaging standpoints other than one’s own. Delineating the process by which individuals judge the propriety or impropriety of their own motives and actions, Smith notes, “We can
never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them.”¹³ Far from being a baneful influence, the eyes of others strengthen the capacity for impartial viewing by individual judges.

I will argue below that notwithstanding his extensive accommodation of social influence, Smith prioritizes independence of moral judgment in ways that render him a cogent theorist of moral self-direction. Rousseau is more readily recognizable as such, with *Emile* delineating a radically individualistic pedagogy. Smith and Rousseau are bound together also by their sentimentalism, with moral judgment being understood by both as, in significant ways, a matter of inner sentiment. For neither, however, does this mean that moral judgment equates personal preference. Both thinkers indicate that judgment has standards and it is in their respective accounts of its standards that they part ways, specifying different directions not only for sentimentalism but also for a future liberalism. For Smith, as I have already begun to suggest, judgment gains its objectivity in an intersubjective context. By contrast, Rousseau looks for the standards of judgment in what might best be described as a norm of nature, where “nature” connotes not only the physical world and its laws but also an inner human nature that is defined in sharp opposition to social influence. Justice and goodness, he argues in *Emile*, are “not merely abstract words—pure moral beings formed by the understanding—but are true affections of the soul enlightened by reason, and hence only

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an ordered development of our primitive affections” (235). On this account, the uncorrupted passions, free from the taint of *amour-propre*, join hands with reason to yield moral conceptions, and they do so in attunement with a natural order that has priority over civil and social institutions. I will suggest that the narrative about judgment developed in *Emile* engenders an understanding of moral freedom that is vulnerable to many recent criticisms of autonomy, and especially the criticism that autonomy presupposes a radical self-containment. By contrast, Smith’s account of judgment, which seeks to align the imperatives of interdependence and moral independence, paves the way for an understanding of autonomy that is hospitable to our common intuitions regarding the individual’s social embedment. As such, it serves as an important and still overlooked rejoinder to the argument, forwarded by communitarian and poststructuralist thinkers, that our status as socially embedded subjects renders autonomy an, at best, illusory, and at worst, pernicious, ideal.¹⁴

*The Social Contexts of Private Judgment*

According to the Kantian philosopher Christine M. Korsgaard, the British sentimentalists first gave morality the decisive inward turn that culminated in the modern ideal of autonomy.¹⁵ And they did so by contesting the realism of earlier schools of moral

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philosophy. Whereas for the moral realists, right and wrong are intrinsic features of certain actions and motives, for the sentimentalists they are attributes that individuals project onto those actions and motives. According to Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, an action is understood to be good or bad not because it is good or bad but because we deem it to be so.\textsuperscript{16} Moral judgments, these thinkers argued, are like aesthetic judgments because they do not trade in empirical truths: they do not discern a truth that is “out there” in the world but are subjective understandings or sentiments. The most famous formulation of the sentimentalists’ fact-value distinction, also known as Hume’s law, is given by David Hume in Book III of \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature}. Hume remarks:

\begin{quote}
Take any action allow’d to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find a matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you towards this action.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Judgments of value require that one turn one’s eyes inward in “reflexion.” Paraphrasing Hume’s law, Korsgaard observes, “Strictly speaking, we do not disapprove the action

\textsuperscript{16} Important differences, however, distinguish Hume’s and Smith’s versions of sentimentalism from Hutcheson’s. The latter’s moral sense theory indicates that perceptions of right and wrong are enabled by an inner moral sense that operates like the physical senses, instantaneously and independently of will. By contrast, for the later sentimentalists, judgment is a deliberative process that requires reason, feeling, and imagination.

because it is vicious; instead, it is vicious because we disapprove it."\textsuperscript{18} The sentimentalists, we might say, are moral constructivists rather than realists, with constructivism being understood in the sense given to it by John Rawls, who argued that moral principles cannot be justified by any “moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine, an order apart from and distinct from how we conceive ourselves.”\textsuperscript{19}

If the sentimentalists gave morality a decisive inward turn, rendering it analogous to aesthetics, they did not seek, however, to make it a purely subjective matter. Taste, Hume enjoins in his famous 1757 essay, “Of the Standard of Taste,” also has a standard. And the standard of that which is subjective—namely, aesthetic taste and moral judgment—derives from intersubjectivity. Both Hume and Smith argue that one’s judgments are only as valid as they are likely to solicit the agreement of others. Both describe the workings of moral judgment by summoning a scenario with more than one character in it. There is, to begin with, the actor or agent whose actions or intended actions are being judged; there is at least one judge or spectator of the action; and for Hume, there is also always a recipient of the action (Smith brings this third character into the picture only when talking about judgments of merit and demerit). Smith’s is generally regarded as a more autonomy-friendly account than Hume’s because it is less consequentialist—judgments of right and wrong consider the motives underwriting an action rather than its consequences—and it is for this reason that I will focus below on Smith as a representative of British sentimentalism.

\textsuperscript{18} Korsgaard, \textit{Sources of Normativity}, 51.
In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argues that moral judgments are the work of a sympathetic *spectator*; the figure of the spectator signals a certain distance from the actions and motives being judged. We approve of a given action if, upon imaginatively transporting ourselves into the position of the agent, we sympathize with his motives. In the absence of such sympathy, we deem the agent’s action inappropriate. Likewise, we judge our own actions by imagining how they might appear to an onlooker, and, ideally, to an onlooker who has no stakes in the consequences of the action. If we believe that an impartial spectator will sympathize with us, we judge our action to be appropriate and vice versa. Smith explains:

We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it. And, in the same manner, we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it. We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. (109-110)

While moral judgments are sentiments, not all sentiments are judgments. Only the sentiments of approval and disapproval that have been reflectively endorsed from an
impartial standpoint have normative justification. Smith suggests that impartiality is relatively easy to establish vis-à-vis the actions and motives of others, in relation to which we naturally occupy the position of an onlooker. It is harder to cultivate in relation to one’s own actions and motives. To create the requisite critical distance, one must consider, at least to begin with, how one’s actions appear to others, who are bearers of standpoints different from one’s own. The judge, Smith elaborates, must be open “either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others” (110). The impartial standpoint is cultivated through such engagement. As such, it does not specify a view from nowhere or entail transcending bias, as under ideal observer theories. Instead, it enjoins that the judge complicate bias by reference to the real or imagined judgments of others under specific moral scenarios.

Society, on this understanding, is the *sine qua non* of moral judgment, as it is also of aesthetic discrimination. Both require a shifting of personal perspective that is only possible through social engagement. The eyes of others, Smith argues, are a necessary mirror for self-review:

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, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present

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20 On the difference between Smith’s impartial spectator and Roderick Firth’s ideal observer, see, for example, T.D. Campbell, *Adam Smith’s Science of Morals* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 33.
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. (110)

Morality, Smith argues, is coterminous with sociability. A man on a desert island, who has never known others, does not engage in the higher-order reflection of the judge. He perceives but he does not reflect upon his perceptions: “the objects of his passions, the external bodies which either pleased or hurt him, would occupy his whole attention. The passions themselves…could scarce ever be the objects of his thoughts” (110). In the absence of others, the primary perceptions would constitute subjectivity; it is only when (real or imagined) others are present that their quality matters, and the inner doubling of self-review begins.  

While society, according to Smith, is a mirror for the moral self, it is so, significantly, only in the first instance. As he indicates in the passage above, it is in society that man “first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions.” In response to the criticism of

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21 Smith’s argument that the capacity for self-review is a development of sociability anticipates, in some respects, Freud’s account of the superego as well as Michel Foucault’s account of the modern subject’s constitution through disciplinary power. The parallels are certainly there but they need to be treated with caution. Hence Freud’s superego is a development of forces over which individuals exercise no control whereas Smith’s impartial standpoint is at once a product of societal dynamics and self-consciously cultivated. Likewise, Foucault’s account of the subject’s constitution at the hands—or rather, through the gaze—of systemic Power posits a unidirectional influence that Smith would contest. The panoptical paradigm is unable to account for the perspectivism or difference introduced by more reciprocal modes of intersubjective exchange (Foucault’s modern individual or prisoner is unable to communicate with his or her fellow prisoners). See Nazar, Enlightened Sentiments, ch. 1. For a reading linking Smith and Freud, see D.D. Raphael, The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On Smith and Foucault, see Fonna Forman-Barzilai, Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially ch. 3.
broadly sympathetic readers, like his friend Sir Gilbert Elliot, Smith took pains, after the first edition of the *Theory*, to explain that the impartial standpoint is not the same as the standpoint of convention. A mature moral agent, he argued, will establish ideals of propriety over time that will likely conflict with the notions of propriety upheld by actual observers of her conduct. Given such a conflict, she should be motivated by the love not of praise but of praiseworthiness: “The love of praise is the desire of obtaining the favourable sentiments of our brethren. The love of praise-worthiness is the desire of rendering ourselves the proper object of those sentiments” (126). To the “well-formed mind” (117), the second motive takes precedence over the first, and self-approbation, on the basis of standards one has set for oneself, trumps approbation by others. While the just man, Smith observes, might crave the praise that is due to him, the wise man “sometimes…neglects, and even despises it; and he is never more apt to do so than when he has the most perfect assurance of the perfect propriety of every part of his own conduct. His self-approbation, in this case, stands in need of no confirmation from the approbation of other men…This self-approbation, if not the only, is at least the principal object, about which he can or ought to be anxious” (117).

Of course, there is still the possibility that self-love leads individuals to imagine that they are living up to their best ideals when they are not. There is also the possibility that the ideals they establish for themselves are insufficiently robust. Smith is aware of these possibilities, as is indicated by his discussion of the limitations built into the impartial standpoint—the impartial spectator, he notes, is a demigod not a god (131)—and by his extensive acknowledgement of the prevalence of self-deceit, which he deems a “fatal weakness of mankind” and “the source of half the disorders of human life” (158). It is in this context that he makes his case for the importance of general rules to everyday morality, with
rules signaling, in the case of the mature moral agent, principles that one has established for oneself and that one has compared with widely accepted societal norms. Respect for rules, Smith suggests, is “a principle of the greatest consequence in human life” (162) because it ensures that one’s actions accord with one’s own reflectively endorsed principles even when circumstances or dispositions plead otherwise. Unlike the other British sentimentalists, Smith places respect for rules or the sense of duty at the center of his moral theory:

> When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and so noble? . . . It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. It is he who, whenever we are about to act so as to affect the happiness of others, calls to us, with a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions, that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it. (137)

This account of principle looks forward to the famous passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) where Kant speaks of his reverence for the moral law: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”

Smith, however, shuns the transcendentalism that accompanies the Kantian picture of self-respect.

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and respect for rules. He contends that respect for rules should not confuse us into according morality a transcendental status, the mistake of “several very eminent authors” who “draw up their systems in such a manner, as if they had supposed that the original judgments of mankind with regard to right and wrong, were formed like the decisions of a court of judicatory, by considering first the general rule, and then, secondly, whether the particular action under consideration fell properly within its comprehension” (160). Rules, Smith elaborates, are not handed down to us by God or by a supersensible reason but are ultimately founded in the sympathetic responses of impartial spectators: “Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper to be done or to be avoided” (159). The implication here, one that Smith does not wholly develop, is that what is first formed “insensibly” must then be refined through active comparison with the rules of others and of society. A dialogic or discursive ethic is at play in Smith’s talk about impartiality and the formation of general rules: the mature moral agent seeks to know the judgments of others, not only as these are unconsciously imprinted in their eyes and demeanors but also as they become manifest in conversation and critical dialogue. While Smith’s primary focus is a genetic explanation of the social origins of private judgment, his account carries a clear-cut prescription: judgment should be a co-development of private and public deliberation.

To return briefly to the Kantian connection summoned above, it is well worth noting that in Kantian terms, Adam Smith understands moral judgments to be “reflective” rather than “determinant.” For Kant, reflective judgments, of which the paradigmatic case is
aesthetic judgments, are judgments for which a rule is not given but must be found. He contrasts these with determinant judgments—for example, moral judgments—for which the rule is given *a priori* by reason. Political theorists like Hannah Arendt have argued that Kant’s restriction of reflective judgments to the aesthetic domain is a major shortcoming of his critical philosophy, one that shortchanges its full potential as critique. This is because critical thinking, like reflective judgment, entails “thinking without banisters”; it shuns the absolutism of determinant judgments and relishes the perspectival quality of a “phenomenal world” of appearances or opinions rather than truths. I have argued elsewhere that the understanding of political judgment that Arendt develops by adapting Kant’s aesthetics bears remarkable parallels to the understanding of moral judgment delineated by sentimentalists like Hume and Smith. What Arendt shares with these thinkers is not only an interest in aesthetics, and in reflective over determinant judgments, but also an understanding of the standards of judgment as a development of sociability. “The power of judgment,” Arendt explains, “rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to an agreement.” Seyla Benhabib interprets this understanding of judgment as

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enabling a universalistic ethics that is attentive to the claims of particularity. Arendt, Benhabib suggests, “intimated that intrinsic to Kant’s model of ‘reflective judgment’ may be a conception of rationality and intersubjective validity which would allow us to retain a principled universalist moral standpoint while acknowledging the role of contextual moral judgment in human affairs.”27 Benhabib also argues that Arendt helps us renew the ideal of autonomy by revising our understanding of the moral point of view, which is no longer “an Archimedean center from which the moral philosopher pretends to be able to move the world.” Instead, it articulates “a certain stage in the development of linguistically socialized human beings when they start to reason about general rules from the standpoint of a hypothetical questioning: under what conditions can we say that these general rules of action are valid not simply because my parents, the synagogue, my neighbors, my tribe say so, but because they are fair, just, impartial, in the mutual interest of all.”28 On this interpretation, critical independence from the force of tradition is postconventional but not postsocial, so to speak.

I believe that we can see a comparable attempt to align the imperatives of autonomy and sociability in Smith’s writings on judgment. Prioritizing self-approbation over public approval, Smith’s account of moral judgment endorses autonomy, even as it maintains a connection between moral independence and social participation. In Smith’s moral universe, the true lover of virtue is one who cares about the quality of her actions regardless of the applause bestowed upon them. However, she judges those actions on the basis of standards

28 Ibid., 6.
that are formed by engaging others. On this account, one cannot see for oneself without engaging the eyes of others. Sociability enables and strengthens autonomy.

*From Necessity and Utility to Goodness*

In a 1756 letter to the editors of the *Edinburgh Review*, Adam Smith recommended Rousseau’s recently published *Discourse on Inequality* to the particular notice of the journal’s Scottish readers. Mr. Rousseau’s treatise, Smith observed, is a spirited and eloquent work, and one that builds on the contributions to metaphysics and morals of an influential group of native British thinkers. Smith’s praise becomes double-edged, however, because the native thinker he summons as Rousseau’s closest precursor is one that he, alongside the other British sentimentalists, repeatedly singled out for criticism—that is, the consummate philosophical egoist or “profligate” Mandeville, as Smith calls him. On Smith’s description indeed, Rousseau is fundamentally a Mandeville in sheep’s clothing. With the help of a moving style and a “little philosophical chemistry,” he manages to render attractive all that is repugnant in Mandeville: “the principles and ideas of the profligate Mandeville seem in him [Rousseau] to have all the purity and sublimity of the morals of Plato, and to be only the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far.”

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30 ibid., 251

31 ibid.
The parallel Smith draws here is a seemingly counterintuitive one since the proud citizen of Geneva was a self-described lover of virtue while Mandeville gleefully sought to expose virtue’s seamy underside: the notorious thesis of the *Fable of the Bees* is that greed and vanity undergird the so-called social virtues. Smith concedes that the two thinkers differ in some respects: he observes that their claims about pity and their hypotheses regarding a state of nature are productively distinguished, with Rousseau picturing the latter as a golden age of sorts and Mandeville following Hobbes in his interpretation of it as a state of universal war. But these differences, Smith argues, pale by comparison with what they share, which is a deep-rooted suspicion of society and all sociable impulses. Rousseau’s and Mandeville’s projects become powerfully welded, on Smith’s reading, by their shared belief that “there is in man no powerful instinct which necessarily determines him to seek society for its own sake: but according to the one, the misery of his original state compelled him to have recourse to this otherwise disagreeable remedy; according to the other, some unfortunate accidents having given birth to the unnatural passions of ambition and the vain desire of superiority, to which he had before been a stranger, produced the same fatal effect.”

It is easy to see why Smith would be hostile to any interpretation of society as a “disagreeable remedy” or “fatal effect” since his moral theory begins from the premise of natural sociability. As already noted, Smith understands moral judgments to be founded in the sympathy of an impartial or “indifferent” spectator of society, whose indifference by no means implies that she is unfeeling—the impartial spectator is endowed by Smith with plenty of sympathy and imagination—but indicates instead that she is not the “person principally concerned” in the moral scenario at hand. That is, she is not the agent whose actions the

32 ibid., 250
spectator approves or disapproves of to the extent that she is able to sympathize with them (in the case of self-judgment this means that the agent must adopt of the persona of a spectator of herself).

But is Smith’s characterization of Rousseau as a fundamentally anti-social thinker fair? In *Emile*, which appeared seven years after the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau emphatically asserts, “It is not good for man to be alone” (357). Like the later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Bildungsromane*, of which it is a prototype of sorts, the generically mixed *Emile*—part philosophical treatise, part educational manual, part novel—ends in marriage. Rousseau’s pupil, therefore, is by no means the savage he describes in the *Second Discourse*, who lives mostly alone, exercising a rough kind of justice through sporadic acts of pity for his kind, and satisfying his sexual needs in random sexual encounters. Nor is he the citizen of *The Social Contract*, who subsumes his individual will entirely under the general will. Instead, he is the autonomous moral man, who lives alongside others but who adheres at all times to his own judgments: “It suffices that, enclosed in a social whirlpool, he not let himself get carried away by either the passions or the opinions of men, that he see with his eyes, that he feel with his heart, that no authority govern him beyond that of his own reason” (255). Such a being, Rousseau contends, is not to be found in the world as it is but must be made from scratch. He is the product of a new kind of education, a natural education, which seeks to preserve some degree of the original freedom belonging to man—that is, the freedom of man in the state of nature. *Emile*, Rousseau charges, “is not a savage to be relegated to the desert. He is a savage made to inhabit cities” (205).

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Why is the freedom of the “savage” so attractive to Rousseau? In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau explains that before he entered civil society, man was an entirely self-sufficient being, reliant upon neither the labor nor the good opinion of others: “the Savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his existence solely from their judgment” (*Discourses* 187). In contrast with civil man, whose very sense of self is contingent upon the judgments of others, natural man thinks nothing of the opinions of others; he thinks only of himself and his own preservation. He is guided in what he does by the natural and freedom-preserving passion of *amour de soi*. In *Emile*, Rousseau suggests, “Our natural passions are very limited. They are the instruments of our freedom; they tend to preserve us. All those which subject and destroy us come from elsewhere. Nature does not give them to us” (212). Above all, natural man is free from the unrealistic expectations of *amour-propre*, which demands that others accord us the same degree of importance we accord ourselves. Against philosophical egoists like Hobbes and Mandeville, Rousseau distinguishes between good and bad forms of self-love. In *Emile* he observes that “Self-love, which regards only ourselves, is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour-propre*, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible” (213)

The argument of *Emile* is that a child will mature into an autonomous adult, capable of using his own reason and judgment, only if childhood is a time of relative freedom from the claims of *amour-propre*. As Rousseau puts it, “Before instructing him in our sentiments, begin by teaching him to evaluate them” (187). Rousseau would agree with Adam Smith that
in the absence of others, there are no moral conceptions whatsoever. But he deems such ignorance to be the best preparation for moral life, or life as an autonomous moral being. Until he is a young man, Emile recalls the solitary Smith summons at one point in the *Theory*, the man on a desert island who has no need for higher-order moral reflection because he lacks access to the mirror that is society. Rousseau explicitly likens his pupil to the eponymous hero of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, the only book Emile is allowed to read until early manhood, the prohibition on books being part of Rousseau’s program of protecting the child from an investment in the opinions of others. The state of the solitary, Rousseau underscores, is not Emile’s final state or destination. Nonetheless, “it is on the basis of this very state that he ought to appraise all the others. The surest means of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one’s judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge of everything as this man himself ought to judge of it with respect to his own utility” (185).

For Rousseau, in other words, non-moral judgments have a certain ineluctable priority over moral judgments. Interpreting priority principally as chronology, Ryan Patrick Hanley argues that *Emile* traces a “movement from the merely physical to the genuinely moral.” Rousseau’s pedagogical prescriptions, Hanley suggests, have as their principal aim encouraging “the child to transfer his or her cultivated capacity for the judgment of physical

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relations to the judgment of moral relations.”

Accuracy of comparison and discernment in one domain enables a like facility in the other domain.

My argument below will be a different one: I will suggest that the transition from the non-moral to the moral is fraught with problems for Rousseau because of a fundamental qualitative difference between the two domains, a difference that is acknowledged by the British sentimentalists through their fact-value distinction. Judgments of fact, Hume and Smith would argue, serve as poor analogues for judgments of value because the “objects” of moral judgment—human motives and actions—are not like objects in the physical world. As I have already indicated with regard to Smith, these theorists of judgment believe that we see ourselves in the actions of others, just as others see themselves in our actions. The relationship between self and other is not one of subject and object but of two subjects, whose intersubjectivity is transformative of each. Moral judgment, as Smith describes it, takes account of this transformative potential since it finds its standard in a standpoint that is shaped by intersubjective exchange. By contrast, Rousseau, I will suggest, seeks to bridge incommensurable domains by forestalling the transformative potential of an encounter with others.

To develop this argument, I will consider Emile’s education as divisible into two broad phases. Following Rousseau, we might call the first stage, which embraces the period from birth until adolescence, an education through dependence on things rather than wills. While childhood is perforce a time of weakness and dependence, Rousseau explains that there are two kinds of dependence, with varying implications for freedom: “Dependence on things, since it has no morality, is in no way detrimental to freedom and engenders no vices.

36 Ibid., 255.
Dependence on men, since it is without order, engenders all the vices, and by it, master and slave are mutually corrupted” (85). Emile is dependent only on things until the second phase of his education, during which he is introduced into society, albeit under the guardianship of his tutor. It is only at the end of this phase, signaled by the news that he is about to become a father, that he is ready to assume full moral responsibility.

The first phase is a time of highly limited sociability. The child, Rousseau argues, should be placed on the path of freedom by protecting him from public opinion and all other-directed passions until he has reason and judgment of his own. While the world he inhabits is by no means a solitary one—his omnipresent tutor manages every aspect of his daily life—it is meant to be a world divested of moral consequences since the child does not encounter other people as sources of authority or as bearers of wills that he can bend to his own. The tutor performs a vanishing act of sorts whereby he ceases to exist for his pupil as someone who might command or obey. Rousseau enjoins: “Do not give your pupil any kind of verbal lessons” (92), “Command him nothing” (91). All the lessons the tutor would have the child learn seemingly emanate instead from an impersonal nature. These include not only knowledge of the natural world and of the child’s physical ability but also a sense of personal limitation: “Let his haughty head at an early date feel the harsh yoke which nature imposes on man, the heavy yoke of necessity under which every finite being must bend. Let him see this necessity in things, never in the caprice of men” (91). Punishment, in particular, should appear to have nothing to do with the ill will of others: “Never present to his undiscriminating will anything but physical obstacles or punishments which stem from the actions themselves and which he will recall on the proper occasion” (85).
Rousseau is aware that a child brought up amidst others, even in the small village society in which he places his pupil, can hardly be unconscious of other people. Indeed, various episodes in Books I to III of *Emile*, which trace Emile’s education through things, complicate the assertion that the child is conscious only of things. Hence, Emile learns the meanings of justice and property through an altercation with his gardener. He learns to estimate distances through running competitions with peasant boys. And he learns how magnetic forces operate through a humiliating encounter with a magician at a local fair. In each of these instances, the relative “I” is mobilized and yet Rousseau claims that his pupil is brought up until the age of fifteen only in dependence on things.

Rather than interpreting this as a straightforward contradiction, let us concede to Rousseau that his pupil is brought up mostly in dependence on things and that his encounter with wills approximates a dependence on things since it engenders learning primarily of a non-moral sort (for example, knowledge of distances and magnetic forces). Jonathan Marks usefully glosses Rousseau’s paradoxical remarks about his pupil’s dependence on things, citing Rousseau’s suggestion that “If the laws of nations could, like those of nature, have an inflexibility that no human force could ever conquer, dependence on men would then become dependence on things again” (*Emile* 85). 37 Rousseau, Marks argues, ascribes a certain inflexibility and impersonality to the tutor’s will: it is not shaped by the pupil’s demands; nor does it enjoin obedience. It simply *is*—a force to be felt rather than a perspective that Emile can recognize as a comparable standpoint on the world. As Rousseau himself elaborates, “Let the bridle that restrains him [the child] be force and not authority. Do not forbid him to

do that from which he should abstain; prevent him from doing it without explanations, without reasonings” (91).

Dependent principally on things, Emile learns the use of his limbs and, over time, exercises his mind in relation to the natural world. He learns what Rousseau deems the most useful kind of reason of all. This is “to know well the use of our strength, the relations of our bodies to surrounding bodies, and the use of the natural instruments which are within our reach and are suitable for our organs” (124). Above all, he comes to know two laws that will be crucial to his well-being over the course of his entire life: the laws of necessity and utility. As already noted, he learns of the first when he acknowledges that he is not omnipotent. He learns of the second with his growing recognition that the objects around him can be useful to him and that their value resides in their utility rather than in the importance others attach to them. Emile, therefore, will attach little value to the labor of a jeweler but a great deal of that of a carpenter, in a manner not unlike Crusoe.

At the age of fifteen, Emile is meant to be entirely independent in a non-moral sense. His tutor proudly proclaims that “Emile has only natural and purely physical knowledge… He knows the essential relations of man to things but nothing of the moral relations of man to man…What is more useful to him, he takes more seriously; never deviating from this way of evaluating, he grants nothing to opinion” (207). This is the time, Rousseau argues, to introduce the young man safely into society since he has sufficient judgment of his own to judge society’s specious standards of judgment. It is also the time to directly solicit the latent voice of conscience, which Rousseau describes as a “rule prior to opinion [that] exists for the
whole human species”—as an inner principle that comes into maturity, however, only by interacting with a developed reason.  

Yet Rousseau’s account of the second phase of Emile’s education implies that it is never quite safe for the independent individual to become a social participant: heteronomy continually threatens to undo autonomy. Emile’s social interactions are heavily monitored by his tutor during this stage of his education and they are monitored, more precisely, to prevent other people’s judgments from influencing his own in any way. Indeed, other people are prevented from emerging as bearers of judgment at all. Emile, in other words, might have judgment (that is, of a non-moral sort) of his own but his judgment (once it moves from the non-moral to the moral) remains truly his only if other people are encountered as something other than judges in their own right. Emile’s introduction into society does little to modify what we might characterize as Rousseau’s “ocularphobia” since he encounters the world of other people less as a domain of multiple perspectives or potentially conflicting judgments than as a space where only one person has the power of vision—namely, himself.

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38 Rousseau argues: “A rule prior to opinion exists for the whole human species… This rule judges prejudice itself, and only insofar as the esteem of men accords with it ought this esteem to be authoritative for us” (382). The Savoyard vicar, Jean-Jacques’s mentor on the subject of natural religion in Emile, reinforces this sentiment: “There is in the depths of souls…an innate principle of justice and virtue according to which, in spite of our own maxims, we judge our actions and those of others as good and bad. It is to this principle that I give the name of conscience” (289). Reason is a necessary supplement to conscience, the vicar elaborates, because “the acts of conscience are not judgments but sentiments” (290). Hanley offers a helpful reading of Rousseau’s account of the interrelationship of reason and conscience, arguing that for Rousseau, “Conscience…is not a sentiment passively implanted in the heart of man but a latent faculty, the excellence of which requires epistemic training.” Hanley, “Rousseau’s Virtue Epistemology,” 256.

This is the gist of Rousseau’s discussion of pity, which he characterizes as the first relative sentiment that links the individual to the species. Emile’s tutor seeks to bridge the gap between the non-moral and moral domains by encouraging his pupil to pity all others rather than see them as alternative sources of judgment. Pity prompts the young man to feel tenderness for his species but it also discourages him from seeing other people as potential interlocutors or equals. Rousseau describes pity as “the best-conceived sentiment that man can have about his species” (236) not only because it tempers the aggression that accompanies the birth of *amour-propre* but also because it has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the boundary that divides self and other. As such, it preserves the hard-earned self-sufficiency Emile has gained through his dependence on things in the first phase of his education. Pity moves Emile outside himself and towards empathy with others but it also prompts a rapid self-return that is experienced as self-satisfaction. Rousseau explains: “If the first sight that strikes him is an object of sadness, the first return to himself is a sentiment of pleasure” (229).

The sentiment of pity structures Emile’s early interactions not only with the living but also with the dead. Rousseau indicates that the young man is now ready for books, especially histories, but he adds that Emile will be reading history as the history of pitiable humanity. Again, the emphasis is on preserving Emile’s self-sufficiency, which should remain undisturbed as he encounters the great men of the past, whom he will view with a combination of tenderness and disdain as objects of pity, blinded by vanity and ambition. Emile, Rousseau underscores, will not find a mirror for himself in history books; he will only find examples of what not to become: “Emile will hardly recognize himself in the strange objects which will strike his glance during these new studies. But he will know ahead of
time how to dispel the illusion of the passions before they are born; and, seeing that in all
times they have blinded men, he will be warned of the way in which they can blind him in
turn, if ever he yields to them” (243). Even the historian, Rousseau warns, should not be
encountered by the young reader as a role model, or potential teacher, or as someone who
makes any judgments at all, since, if those judgments appeal to Emile, he will cease to judge
for himself. As Rousseau puts it, “The worst historians for a young man are those who make
judgments. Facts! Facts! And let him make his own judgments. It is thus that he learns to
know men. If the author’s judgment guides him constantly, all he does is see with another’s
eye; and when that eye fails him, he no longer sees anything” (239).

To argue, as I have been arguing, that Emile is discouraged from engaging the
judgments of others, or from imaginatively inhabiting points of view other than his own, is
also to suggest that he is discouraged from using his imagination. For Smith, we will recall,
ipartiality is cultivated by imagining how other people might perceive particular actions
and motives. By contrast, Rousseau is highly skeptical of the claims of imagination, a
skepticism that Vivasvan Soni has aptly characterized as Rousseau’s “attempt to eradicate the
fictionality of judgment.” Such an attempt is especially clear in the first phase of Emile’s
education, where the imagination, as Soni notes, is perceived to loosen the nexus between
judgment and sense impression, thereby rendering judgment inaccurate. Rousseau’s anxiety
about the imagination is also due to his sense that it militates against the acceptance of
personal limitation and natural necessity. Hence, “It is imagination which extends for us the
measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and
nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them” (81). To maximize strength is to limit

40 Vivasvan Soni, “Committing Freedom: The Cultivation of Judgment in Rousseau’s Emile and
Austen’s Pride and Prejudice,” The Eighteenth Century 51, 3 (Fall 2010): 363-87, 364.
desire and imagination: “The real world has its limits; the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us restrict the other, for it is from the difference between the two alone that are born all the pains which make us truly unhappy” (81).

The imagination assumes a somewhat greater role in the second phase of Emile’s education but its activities are still strictly monitored in an effort to preserve what the tutor describes as Emile’s still fragile self-sufficiency. The tutor appeals, for example, to Emile’s imagination when he paints for him a deeply attractive ideal of womanhood. The principal aim of this fiction, however, is to keep Emile out of the reach of real women, all of whom seem to him to fall far short of the ideal. As such, he is able to sublimate the sexual feelings that, according to his tutor, increasingly threaten to undo his self-sufficiency and make him a victim of his passions.

There is, however, one instance in Emile in which Emile’s imagination is solicited to move him outside of himself rather than keeping him within the borders established by his dependence on things. This is the moment when the tutor reveals to his pupil the story of his tutelage in order to maintain it on higher grounds—that is, through Emile’s consent, which, Jean-Jacques suggests is necessary once Emile becomes a young man. Subterfuge, Rousseau contends, can be used to render children docile but a young man should be made so through gratitude and affection. It is imperative then that the story of his education or his relationship with his tutor be a moving narrative, one that will lead him to willingly relinquish to his tutor the government of his passions. This particular fiction must be “engraved” in “his memory in such a way that it will never be effaced” (321). Rousseau indicates: “I shall choose the time, the place, and the objects most favorable to the impression I want to make. I shall, so to speak, call all of nature as a witness to our conversations…I shall heighten the force of my
reasoning with images and figurative language. My speeches will not be long and diffuse and filled with cold maxims but will be abundant with overflowing sentiments” (323). In sublime natural surroundings, the tutor claims his pupil as his life’s work and as someone forever in his debt: “You are my property, my child, my work. It is from your happiness that I expect my own. If you frustrate my hopes, you are robbing me of twenty years of my life, and you are causing the unhappiness of my old age” (323). With no other relationship mediating or producing a distancing perspective on Emile’s relationship to his tutor, the young man proves a willing subject of tutelage. He readily concedes to Jean-Jacques the authority he claims: “You had this authority up to this time only due to my weakness; now you shall have it due to my will, and it shall be more sacred to me…Make me free by protecting me against those of my passions which do violence to me” (325).

While Rousseau suggests that the tutor claims the authority to govern by consent only temporarily—that is, as long as Emile remains unmarried—it is unclear when his “higher” mode of tutelage ends. *Emile* concludes with a resounding reaffirmation of the tutor’s authority. In Emile’s last speech to his tutor he announces at once that he is about to become a father himself and that he needs his tutor-father as much as ever. While Emile looks forward to becoming the tutor of his yet unborn son, Jean-Jacques will remain “the master of the young masters” (480) who are Emile and his wife Sophie. Indeed, according to Emile, “As long as I live, I shall need you” (480).

It appears that Emile’s “autonomy” is a capacity that comes into play in all relationships other than the primary relationship between Emile and his tutor. The other principal relationship of Emile’s adult life, that with his wife Sophie, is certainly very different: it reverses the hierarchy of the tutor-tutee relationship by casting Emile in the role
of governor and Sophie in that of docile pupil. There is no interdependence here, only Sophie’s dependence on her husband’s judgment, a dependence that ensures that Emile will remain untroubled by the possibility that other people have judgments different from is own.

Marriage, as Rousseau understands it, is a union of unequal beings: “In the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way…One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance” (358). Women, on Rousseau’s account, lack the judgment and reason for autonomy. Their virtue resides instead in modesty and a concern for their reputation. While, according to Rousseau, public opinion poisons male virtue, it is the foundation of female virtue. While the eyes of others exercise a baneful influence upon male morality, a woman must “give evidence of her virtue to the eyes of others as well as to her own conscience” (361).

By the very law of nature women are at the mercy of men’s judgments, as much for their own sake as for that of their children. It is not enough that they be estimable; they must be esteemed. It is not enough for them to be pretty; they must please. It is not enough for them to be temperate; they must be recognized as such. Their honor is not only in their conduct but in their reputation; and it is not possible that a woman

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who consents to be regarded as disreputable can ever be decent. When a man acts well, he depends only on himself and can brave public judgment; but when a woman acts well, she has accomplished only half her task, and what is thought of her is no less important to her than what she actually is…Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women. (364–65)

It is crucial that a woman care about the opinions of others because only if she is universally respected will her husband be motivated to respect her and to care for her (and her offspring). Rousseau contends that as the physically weaker sex, women need men for their well-being far more than men need women. While a man should be educated to be autonomous, a woman should be educated to please men, so that they will serve her and ensure her well-being: “Thus the whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honored by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet—these are the duties of women at all times, and they ought to be taught from childhood” (365).

Sophie needs to cultivate the arts of pleasing because in the moral universe Rousseau describes only some have the right to judge for themselves. Others are figured as inert objects of judgment—we are back here to Emile’s childhood world of things—denied the possibility of looking back or judging in turn. Rousseau can bridge the gap between non-moral and moral judgments only by blinding one sex so that the other sex remains untroubled by its judgments. Characterizing the trajectory of Emile’s development as a move from dependence on things to independence in the midst of others, Rousseau is unable to give interdependence any place in his final account of autonomy. Emile, as we leave him at the
end of Rousseau’s pedagogical narrative, is likely to remain untroubled by the judgments of most people—and not only those of his wife—because he is not in the habit of seeing others as judges or as bearers of equally worthy perspectives on human actions and motives. Ultimately, Rousseau’s ocularphobia occurs at the expense not only of women but also of perspective itself: excising the eyes of others (that is, others other than the tutor) from Emile’s adult world brings the world of value into safe approximation with the world of fact but it also severely limits the possibility of seeing otherwise, of seeing from somewhere else, or with someone else. By contrast, Adam Smith’s trope of spectatorship endorses a critical perspectivism and encourages the kind of thinking that doesn’t need banisters. It does so by imagining the social world as a domain of competing but also potentially compatible viewpoints, which must be sympathetically engaged for moral judgment to gain whatever validity it has. Independence of judgment, Smith suggests, does not entail contempt for the opinions of others. Conversely, openness to the opinions of others does not entail contempt for one’s own judgments. The autonomy that accompanies this understanding of judgment simply has no meaning without sociability.