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ABSTRACT

This paper has three main aims. First, to make good on recent suggestions that Adam Smith offers a *genealogy* of the origins of religious belief. This is done by offering a systematic reconstruction of his account of religion in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, demonstrating that Smith there offers a naturalised account of religious belief, whilst studiously avoiding committing himself to the truth of any such belief. Second, I seek to bring out that Smith was ultimately less interested in the *truth* of religious beliefs than in evaluating and understanding the place of religion in healthy ethical living. Third, I put Smith's account into contrast with the more famous treatment offered by Nietzsche (as well as Bernard Williams's later, Nietzschean, reflections), and suggest that Smith offers us the more plausible picture of both religion and morality, a finding of both historical and contemporary philosophical import.

KEYWORDS
Adam Smith; religion; genealogy; Nietzsche; truth

1. Introduction

In the now voluminous literature on Adam Smith, perhaps the most vexed disagreements of all pertain to Smith's religiosity – or lack thereof. For Smith has been read as everything from an irreligious sceptic who hid his true beliefs under an increasingly thin veil of rhetorical camouflage[1]; a naturalist about the origins of religious belief but without this necessarily generating sceptical conclusions about either religious belief's veracity or its moral usefulness[2]; a species of Deist who fell short of supporting Christian dogma but was nonetheless of genuinely religious bent[3]; right through to his espousing a sincere theology that underpins a divinely ordered teleology, which itself undergirds the coherence of his seminal contributions in moral theory, and according to some commentators, in political economy also.[4] The following paper neither hopes nor seeks to end these scholarly controversies, spanning as they do Smith's life and circumstances, his innermost private beliefs, his relationship to his friend 'the great infidel' David Hume, his earliest writings in *The History of Astronomy* right through to the *Wealth of Nations* and all six editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS),[5] as well as his complex discussions of teleology, design, providence, nature, efficient vs. final causes, and much else besides. Instead, I put to the side what Smith personally believed about the truth of religion, and ask an orthogonal question that has been unduly obscured by focus on what Smith personally thought about whether or not there is a God. Namely: where does religion fit in Smith's wider assessment of ethical life, and to what extent does religion matter when it comes to our getting that right?

This is done by focusing on Smith's analysis of the *origins* of religious belief, as laid out specifically in TMS, something that has not yet been satisfactorily undertaken (important recent work by Ryan Patrick Hanley and Craig Smith notwithstanding). The reading offered here is that Smith's account of religion in TMS is best understood as a *genealogy*.[6] The first aim of this paper is thus

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to systematically reconstruct Smith's genealogy as found across distinct parts of TMS. I show that Smith consistently characterises religious belief as the product of natural moral sentiments, with human beings inventing and maintaining religious beliefs and explanations to ease the psychological pain that results from the often tragic and unjust character of ethical life. The brute prevalence of injustice and moral luck thus play large roles in Smith's account.[7] However, a key feature of TMS's genealogy is that Smith's arguments are carefully formulated to imply that whilst religious beliefs are *functionally useful*, a space is opened that enables the reader to remain ambivalent, or even sceptical, regarding their *truth status*. TMS may thus be read as offering an *error theory*: insofar as we have alternative (naturalistic) explanations for religious beliefs, this potentially impugns the truth status of those beliefs. Ultimately, however, it is also not the truth status of religion that most interests Smith.

I argue that Smith does not take any firm position on the implications of his genealogy when it comes to questions of truth, studiously leaving such matters open. This is a feature of the account that is extremely significant, yet the importance of which has not been adequately appreciated. For TMS is ultimately less interested in the truth of religious belief than in its place in healthy ethical living, and that this is where our attention should be focused accordingly. We thus need to move beyond asking whether Smith held particular religious beliefs to be *true* (as the scholarship to date has been overwhelmingly preoccupied with, but which I suggest below is a question that cannot be definitively settled), and come instead to see that much more important to him was making sense of religion as part of a more fundamental project of understanding and evaluating the moral sentiments, and indeed ethical life, as a whole.[8]

Characterising Smith as a 'genealogist' of religion, more interested in ethical health than issues of religious truth, invites, in turn, an obvious comparison with Nietzsche. The final part of this paper is thus not confined to interpretation of TMS, but puts Smith's account into contrast with Nietzsche's more famous treatment of these matters. I argue that Smith and Nietzsche are similar in one important respect: they are both less interested in the truth status of religion than of its effects upon our ethical and psychological lives. Yet whereas Smith is for the most part sanguine about these, Nietzsche is anything but. I suggest in turn that whilst we can still learn from Nietzsche, overall it is Smith who offers the more plausible portrait of both religion and morality.

2. Ground clearing

We begin by considering a recent interpretation of Smith which despite offering helpful insights leaves a fundamental issue obscured. Hanley has argued that Smith sees 'true' religious principles as *natural* to human beings, on three distinct grounds. ('True' here means *uncorrupted*, i.e. not the product of fanaticism, factions, and excessive superstition or enthusiasm.[9]) According to Hanley, 'first, they are natural insofar as they have not yet been corrupted; second, they are natural insofar as they reinforce our natural sense of duty; and third, they are natural insofar as they support our natural love of virtue'.[10] I am broadly in agreement with Hanley on these points, and regarding which I will go into detail below. But despite establishing these three senses by which principles of true religion can be 'natural', Hanley leaves a crucial issue unaddressed.

This is that even if Smith does think that religion is *natural* to human beings, that is a separate question from whether religious beliefs *are true*. It may, after all, be natural for human beings to form religious ideas, yet all of those ideas could nonetheless be false. This is a coherent position to hold (indeed I suspect it is *Smith's position*, although I will not press the case here). Hanley side-steps this distinction, however, by reading Smith as rejecting a binary between theism and atheism, suggesting he is instead committed not only to the *naturalness* of religious belief, but to its *necessity* as an outgrowth of underlying moral sentiments, a position which ends up (according to Hanley) putting Smith surprisingly close to Kant, and which renders largely irrelevant any distinction between theism and atheism.[11]

But this will not do. For even if Smith thinks that religious belief is necessary to humans (a controversial claim), this does not eliminate the question of whether religious belief has genuine propositional content. After all, even if it were *necessary* that human beings believe in some falsehood, that does not *eo ipso* make the falsehood true. (Beliefs are true because they are true, not because they are necessary.) Hanley is thus not entitled to sideline the theism vs. atheism debate so quickly: the issue of necessity is a red herring. Although I will later suggest that Hanley is broadly correct to read Smith as ambivalent between theism and atheism in several fundamental regards, this is not because of the alleged necessity of religious beliefs, but because of the otiose nature of theistic claims when analysing the moral sentiments and wider ethical life. To make valid progress, therefore, we need to retreat to Hanley's claim about the naturalness of religious beliefs, and ask: granting that Smith does indeed think that it is natural for human beings to form religious beliefs, what is the truth status of those beliefs, and what relevance – if any – does that carry in turn?

3. 'The author of our nature'

Lisa Hill has suggested that 'Smith's system does not hold together in the absence of a creative demiurge', with some commentators claiming not only that Smith was himself religious, but that his philosophical works do not make sense absent genuinely theistic premises.[12] As regards the argument of TMS specifically, this is simply false: a careful reading of that text indicates that the philosophical arguments all go through without Smith being committed to the truth of *any* theistic claims.[13] I seek to show this below, focusing on Smith's genealogical account of the origins of religious belief. However, my primary aim is not to argue against commentators who urge a theistic reading of Smith, not least because others have already pressed the case.[14] Instead, my aim is to systematically reconstruct Smith's overall genealogical account of religion in TMS, not simply to indicate why theistic interpretations are misguided, but more importantly to move the focus away from whether or not Smith believed in the truth of religious claims, towards what Smith was himself fundamentally more interested in: the relationship of religion to the moral sentiments as a whole. To this end, we start with Smith on the question of design.

It is essential to distinguish two ideas which whilst often run together are only contingently related, and easily pulled apart. These are, first, that the universe is purposefully designed by some being that intended to bring about a certain state of affairs, and second, that the validity of our normative practices somehow depends on the intentions of that alleged designer. One can be ambivalent about the first issue, whilst taking an entirely independent stand on the second. After all, that some creature purposefully designed the universe in minute detail is one thing, but this is distinct from why human beings believe more specific things about the deity, such as that this author of nature is universally benevolent, or interested in punishing the wicked, or has stuck around to continue overseeing what it has created for the rest of eternity. None of these further suppositions (and all of the other usual religious suspects) *follow* from the mere idea of a purposeful designer. They are independent postulations – and that independence opens the possibility for alternative explanations for where belief in them comes from, which need not posit the truth of any alleged designer at all. It would, then, at the very least be *philosophically coherent* for Smith to adopt such a position (ambivalence about the design question, isolating the normative issues for separate analysis) should he be sufficiently attuned to the nuances in play.

Can we plausibly attribute such a position to Smith? Yes. Smith uses the term 'nature' in TMS as an explanatory outer limit: it denotes a point at which certain facts about us, or the world we inhabit, just seem to be so, and there is nothing more that can be said about *why* they are so.[15] Sometimes Smith speaks not only of 'nature' as having ordered things a certain way, but refers specifically to an 'author' of that nature (e.g. II.iii.intro.6; II.iii.3.2; III.2.31), and further implies that the author intended for some beneficial ordering to be the case. The most forthright point at which this occurs is in the long note appended to Smith's discussion, in Part II, Section I, of how ideas of merit and demerit are affected by our ability to enter into and approve of the sentiments of both agents and

those affected by their actions, most especially when avenging acts of injustice. This is worth considering in detail.

Smith affirms, first, that revenge out of line with what strict justice requires, whilst almost always odious to the sentiments of a disinterested spectator, must occasionally have a proper place in moral life, not only because we feel disapprobation towards the person who does not feel *sufficient* indignation at wrongs done to them (II.i.5.8), but furthermore because 'The inspired writers would not surely have talked so frequently or so strongly of the wrath and anger of God if they had regarded every degree of those passions as vicious and evil, even in so weak and imperfect a creature as man' (II.i.5.9). Important to note is Smith's grammar, which states that writers have *talked* frequently of God's wrath and anger, without committing to the truth of any claim that God in fact exists. He also implies that these 'authors' reasoned from human experience *to* extrapolations about the divine, and not via direct mediation with, to, or about, the former. Smith goes on, however, to consider not what a 'perfect' being would approve of in regards to punishments for injustice, 'but upon what principles so weak and imperfect a creature as man actually and in fact approves of' (II.i.5.9). Smith here prefigures his upcoming argument that a pre-reflective impulse to punish those who commit acts of demerit seems implanted within our nature, and that *this* is what originally gives rise to the rules of justice, and in turn the capacity for stable sociable living.[16] He is clear, however, that this is not a function of reason, because such a faculty would be too 'slow and uncertain'. Instead it is founded in 'an immediate and instinctive approbation of that very application which is most proper to attain it'. Strikingly, 'the Author of our nature has not entrusted' the application of proper punishments to reason, implying instead that 'the oeconomy of nature' has been purposefully designed to have reactive sentiment do the work, an 'oeconomy' that is 'exactly of a piece with what it is upon many other occasions'. Smith here cites a key feature of 'nature' as underlying this particular instance of 'oeconomy': human beings always pursuing 'a love of life, and a dread of dissolution; a desire of the continuance and perpetuity of the species, and with an aversion to the thoughts of its intire extinction'. In turn, Smith invokes design a final time: although humans do not individually seek to propagate the species when they satiate their hunger or sexual passions (etc.), instead pursuing these things as ends in themselves, at the aggregate level the human drive to satisfy such passions has the unintended consequence of bringing about 'those beneficent ends which the great Director of nature intended to produce by them', i.e. the continuation of the species as a whole (II.i.5.9).

This is Smith's most explicit statement in TMS of a principle of purposeful design (although its structure is exactly the same as his later claim that the 'irregularity' of our sentiments when it comes to instances of moral luck is on balance a happy occurrence, and hence appears to have been 'the purpose which the Author of nature seems to have intended by it' (II.ii.intro.6.).) But what turns on these references to purposeful design? Smith slips out of talking about 'nature' *simpliciter* in such passages, on occasion adding that nature has an 'author' (or 'director'). Yet what would be lost in the *substance* of the argument if reference to a designer was entirely dropped in favour simply of 'nature' alone, (or for that matter, replaced with a post-Smithian idea like natural selection)? Nothing. But equally, such references *add* nothing, either. Smith frequently employs theistic tropes which upon closer inspection turn out to be wheels that do not turn in the mechanics of his argument, allowing him to deploy rhetorical ornamentation without committing himself either way to the truth of religious premises.[17] Whether he included such ornamentation because he held genuine religious beliefs but realised they could not be independently grounded and so offered them on a merely auxiliary basis, or on the contrary was attempting to camouflage atheistic arguments and thus deflect suspicion from religious critics, is of course a key contention in scholarly disagreements over the status of Smith's private religious views. However, we can put aside that particular dispute and note that when it comes to questions of design, the argument of TMS is entirely ambivalent about the *truth* of such claims, and makes nothing turn on them. It simply does not matter whether the reader interprets Smith as sincere or otherwise in his affirmation of an 'author' of nature – the action is all elsewhere.

What is preserved in Smith's careful grammatical construction, however, is a separation between the truth (if so it be) that nature was purposefully designed, and the further questions of (1) whether there might be an alternative explanation for belief in purposeful design besides the truth of design itself, and (2) whether anything necessarily follows *normatively speaking* from the supposition that nature is designed.

Regarding (1), Colin Heydt has convincingly made the case that Smith should be read as subtly undermining the truth status of any supposition of purposeful design. As well as Smith's early essay on the *History of Astronomy* postulating that belief in purposeful design tends to emerge independent of any actual facts supporting the truth of such design (due to the human urge to explain often running ahead of available evidence), overall Smith's approach is to give 'a naturalistic account of how the idea of a designer arises and is bringing doubt into the contemporary discussions of design through the guise – made popular by Bayle, Hume, and others – of ancient ideas about the divinity'. As Heydt emphasises: 'Does Smith's psychological genealogy of the idea of a designer preclude him from thinking that there is, in fact, a designer? No. But it certainly raises suspicions, particularly given Smith's familiarity with and appreciation for Hume's arguments in the *Natural History of Religion*.'[18] We will likely never know for sure if Smith really did believe, in his heart of hearts, whether or not nature was purposefully designed. But regardless, at no point does the philosophical argument of TMS either presuppose or endorse any definite claim to the effect that human belief in a designer is a function of the actual truth of there being a designer. There might be such an entity. But then again, there might not. And if not, Smith had a story to tell about why belief in such a thing could nonetheless have come about.

This brings us to (2). Note that *even if* one grants that nature is purposefully designed, from that premise nothing follows regarding the status of any *normative* claims. What if the creator ceased to exist after completing its creation? What if the creator had no normative intentions, and viewed our species as merely an interesting experiment in the mechanics of unintended consequences, but got bored and went off to pay attention to other creations? What if the creator thinks of our world as a muddled youthful first effort, and long ago left to try and do it better elsewhere in the multiverse, meaning we are but the discarded relic of a failed first attempt? Such questions are familiar to us now, having been the basic material of Hume's fun in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. That text of course post-dates the first edition of TMS, but Smith was a sharp reasoner, and the structure of his own argument indicates that he was well aware that the mere supposition of a creator cannot by itself generate any meaningful normative conclusions. To get to those, more substantive premises are required, e.g. that the creator is universally benevolent, or that it seeks to punish the wicked (etc.), and that in such cases *therefore* certain conclusions follow regarding human conduct. Yet it is precisely in the supply of further substantive premises and inferences that alternative explanations other than the truth of a deity can be introduced, in order to explain why people believe in such a thing. Indeed, as I show below, this is *exactly* what Smith goes on to provide.

Whether or not Smith believed in a supernatural designer, the argument of TMS is ambivalent on this score. This is appropriate, insofar as nothing of substance turns on it: all of the issues that TMS addresses regarding human moral psychology and the normative claims associated with ethical practice are independent of the question of design. Smith can thus speak of there being an 'author' of our nature without committing himself to anything in terms of further substantive philosophical claims. As Heydt puts it, Smith's including allusions to an 'author of nature', without ever actually committing himself to the truth of such a thing, 'both enables a proponent of natural religion to feel his position affirmed by the text, while never actually saying that the position is true'.[19] Whether or not this indicates skeptical irreligious intent on Smith's behalf, as Heydt suggests, what is salient for present purposes is that it *does not matter* whether Heydt is right about Smith's intentions when it comes to understanding TMS. Whatever Smith's underlying purpose or private commitments, his argument is carefully calibrated so as to isolate claims about design, separating them from claims about more substantively normative religious beliefs, which can then be handled and analysed independently – which is precisely what Smith proceeds to do.

4. The psychology of justice

Having bracketed out design questions as inert when assessing more substantively normative religious beliefs, Smith proceeds to offer a detailed genealogy of those beliefs.[20] He begins whilst in the process of correcting (as he sees it) Hume's claim that justice is an artificial virtue founded in the promotion of utility by individuals who *seek* to promote utility in both founding and then upholding the rules of justice (first out of reasonable self-interest, later out of sympathy with the benefits from justice rebounding to others). Against this, Smith insists that Hume has made a mistake in failing to differentiate between the 'final' and 'efficient' causes of justice (II.ii.3.4–12). Although Smith agrees that it is true that the rules of justice promote utility – hence why justice is the main 'pillar' that upholds society (II.ii.3.4) – it does not follow that individuals are *aiming at* utility when adhering to the demands of justice. Instead, most individuals are moved by an innate urge to punish acts of demerit without any regard for overall utility, wanting to punish wrong-doers simply because they deserve punishment, not because it is socially useful (even though, taken in the round, it is).[21]

Smith here invokes an analogy with a watchmaker, and goes so far as to state explicitly the parallels with the idea of a designing God. The components of a watch do not *intend* to tell the time, because as springs and levers they are incapable of having intentions at all. Nonetheless, they are the efficient causes of the watch telling the time. The 'final' cause comes from the watchmaker, who constructed the watch so as to make all the efficient causes harmonise so as to bring about the intended final result. Analogously,

> When by natural principles we are led to advance those ends, which a refined and enlightened reason would recommend to us, we are very apt to impute to that reason, as to their efficient cause, the sentiments and actions by which we advance those ends, and to imagine that to be the wisdom of man, which in reality is the wisdom of God. (II.ii.3.5)

Here Smith deploys the same stance on purposeful design as noted above: the premise of intentional design can be granted, for it is as good an explanation as any as to why 'nature' seems to have ordered things so beneficially, and *yet nothing of substance* turns on the truth of this claim. In turn, Smith can criticise Hume's account of justice for confusing the final cause (promotion of utility, which we can suppose was intended by God as the author of nature) with the efficient cause (pursuit not of utility in individual cases, but of punishment of the unjust), which is his main aim in this part of the book.

More interesting for present purposes is what Smith does next. Last amongst the battery of examples that follow this passage, all designed to show that justice lies in a desire to punish and not primarily in a direct regard for utility, Smith claims that we feel deeply aggrieved if a murderer dies before they are brought to justice. Clearly, there is no *utility* in punishing this murderer: they are dead, and can't hurt society ever again. Nonetheless, amongst all onlookers 'it would excite the highest indignation, and he would call upon God to avenge, in another world, that crime which the injustice of mankind had neglected to chastise upon earth' (II.ii.3.11). As it stands this is simply a point against Hume: justice is rooted in a pre-reflective desire to punish even when no utility can actually be secured by punishing. But Smith then develops the case, and is here worth quoting at length:

> For it well deserves to be taken notice of, that we are so far from imagining that injustice ought to be punished in this life, merely on account of the order of society, which cannot otherwise be maintained, that Nature teaches us to hope, and religion, we suppose, authorises us to expect, that it will be punished, even in a life to come. Our sense of its ill desert pursues it, if I may say so, even beyond the grave, though the example of its punishment there cannot serve to deter the rest of mankind, who see it not, who know it not, from being guilty of the like practices here. The justice of God, however, we think, still requires, that he should hereafter avenge the injuries of the widow and the fatherless, who are here so often insulted with impunity, in every religion, and in every superstition that the world has ever beheld, accordingly, there has been a Tartarus as well as an Elysium; a place provided for the punishment of the wicked, as well as one for the reward of the just. (II.ii.3.12)

Several things should be noted here. Smith is saying (1) that nature has made us such that we want the wicked to be punished even after death, when they can no longer propagate disutility to society (the point against Hume), but also (2) that we *suppose* that religion authorises us to expect that such punishment will be forthcoming in the next life. The direction of fit is that we have a desire to punish wrongdoers, and the powerful urge for this desire to be satisfied leads us to invent ideas of religious retribution as a way of fulfilling the psychological urge that justice be done. The end of the paragraph reinforces this claim, in a passage added to the final 1790 edition: *all* religions posit both a heaven and a hell, not because we have good independent reasons to suppose such places exist, but because baseline human psychology wants merit to be rewarded, demerit to be punished, and everyone to get what they deserve, in this life or the next. Precisely because many people die *without* getting what they deserve, the living comfort themselves with the thought that justice will be done in the next life. Religious belief, however, is not here presented as having any independent claim to truth, and is explained instead by the functioning of moral psychology.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the final line of this passage as added to the sixth edition of 1790 replaces a long paragraph from editions 1–5 which appears to contain much more overtly theistic content, the removal of which is cited by Kennedy as one of several revisions that Smith made to the 1790 edition of TMS where he appears to be purposefully downscaling and removing earlier instances of apparently religious argumentation and language.[22] Yet even in the earlier editions Smith can be read as studiously leaving open the matter of the truth of religious belief. For his original claim was that the idea of final mercy from a divine being has been invented because of the realisation that if we expect pure justice, then all of us – who appear as mere 'insects' in divine eyes – will fall hopelessly short.[23] The fear of falling short in God's eyes led to the invention of the doctrine of mercy, because that was the only way that anybody could hope to end up anywhere other than in hell if being judged by a perfect being who knows all of our innermost transgressions. The Christian doctrine of mercy thus originates in the psychological contortions of human beings whose desire for retribution to be meted out to the wicked in the next life leads them to invent the idea of divine punishment, but who then fear that *they* will be punished too. Christians thus made up the idea of mercy so as to assure themselves that only the truly wicked, and not the merely fallible, would end up in the flames. But again, Smith carefully avoids committing himself on the question of whether any of this is actually true.

5. Moral luck

Whilst previous commentators have tended to notice Smith's discussion of religious beliefs in connection to his analysis of justice, what has gone largely unnoticed is that Smith continues his pattern of genealogical argumentation regarding the origins of religion from Part II's discussion of justice into Part III, where he returns to discuss the issue of moral luck.[24] Furthermore, whilst Smith is now recognised as having contributed, in Part II of TMS, one of the earliest and most insightful discussions of moral luck, he in fact continues and broadens his discussion in Part III, something that commentators have likewise not discussed.[25] In Part II's discussion of moral luck, Smith invokes God only when positing that despite the 'irregularity' of our sentiments when it comes to the impact that fortune has upon our moral responses (and which appear in that light philosophically perplexing), on balance it is *good* that we exhibit this irregularity insofar as the overall benefits turn out to be considerable, something the 'author of nature' can be supposed to have intended (II.iii.3.2). In Part III, however, Smith returns to the issue of moral luck, and explores this time not simply the 'irregularity' of our sentiments and their (surprisingly) good aggregate consequences, but the pressure put on human psychology that comes from having to cope with a world heavily conditioned by fortune.

This is most evident in cases where innocent people are found guilty – or even just widely believed to be guilty – of crimes that they did not commit. In Part III Smith makes his famous distinction between being praised and being praiseworthy, and not only claims that the former is

(contrary to common belief, and to the ideas of 'splenetic' thinkers like Mandeville) dependent upon the latter, but that the possibility of being praiseworthy even when one is not praised can be a source of strength and comfort, even when all of one's peers (incorrectly) believe one to be worthy of admonition (III.2.27; III.5.8). However, Smith is also clear that only the very strongest, who are unusually self-sufficient, can sustain themselves on knowledge of their praiseworthiness alone. As creatures raised under the gaze of others, whose moral capacities are a function of judging and being judged in turn, it is unsurprising for Smith that most people find it deeply painful to be considered guilty of crimes or wrongdoings that they did not commit, even when they know themselves to be innocent (III.2.28). Knowledge of praiseworthiness can help soothe the pain, but it is often overwhelmed by the horror of being despised by wider society.

This is where moral luck enters the picture: even if one is completely innocent, circumstances beyond one's control can conspire such that one ends up being thought guilty of a heinous deed. Smith here cites a powerful example: the fate of Jean Calas, falsely accused of the murder of his eldest son and burnt at the stake in 1762, the victim of wider intriguing and politicking by Catholics persecuting Calvinists in France. Calas was the victim of terrible moral luck (as well as just ordinary bad luck) and in such a case mere reflection on his own praiseworthiness (he was certainly innocent) could not by itself be expected to act as much compensation for the shame, indignity, and physical suffering he was put through. Accordingly, Smith notes that 'To persons in such unfortunate circumstances, the humble philosophy which confines its views to this life, can afford, perhaps, but little consolation.' Hence, therefore, the view tends to turn to *the next* life: 'Religion can alone afford them any effectual comfort. She alone can tell them, that it is of little importance what man may think of their conduct, while the all-seeing Judge of the world approves of it' (III.2.13). Again, Smith does not here commit himself to the *truth* of religious belief. Rather, it is presented as a comfort used by those afflicted by terrible moral luck. Yet something's being comforting neither makes it, nor requires it to be, true.

Smith does not confine his analysis only to individuals who are the victims of appalling moral luck. Even those who are simply believed to have committed some ill deed which they alone know themselves to be innocent of will struggle to maintain themselves on praiseworthiness alone, not least because even the impartial spectator – the internalised voice of conscience – struggles to affirm our own innocence without 'fear and hesitation' when surrounded by peers who are 'unanimously and violently against us' (III.2.32). In such cases 'the only effectual consolation of humbled and afflicted man lies in an appeal to a still higher tribunal, to that of the all-seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived and whose judgments can never be perverted'. As Smith goes on: 'Our happiness in this life is thus, upon many occasions, dependent upon the humble hope and expectation of a life to come: a hope and expectation deeply rooted in human nature' (III.2.34). But, again, Smith's formulations are very precise. He does not claim that it is *true* that God exists and knows when we are truly innocent. He merely claims that we take comfort in *believing* this to be so, a belief 'deeply rooted in human nature' – but neither of which make the belief true.

Smith continues in this vein. 'That there is a world to come', he writes, one wherein justice will finally be done, and everyone will get what they deserve, 'is a doctrine, in every respect so venerable, so comfortable to the weakness, so flattering to the grandeur of human nature, that the virtuous man who has the misfortune to doubt of it, cannot possibly avoid wishing most earnestly and anxiously to believe it' (III.2.34). The point, once again, however, is that *wishing* to believe this doctrine, and being *anxious* for it to be true, do not make it so. Smith is suggesting that we invent the idea of religious justice because the pain of a world that does not have it is often too much to bear, most especially for those on the receiving end of bad moral luck, but also for those spectators who sympathise with the unlucky and imagine how they would feel in their shoes. As Smith concludes, belief in an afterlife of proportionate rewards is in line with 'all our moral sentiments' – implying that it is the moral sentiments that create this religious belief, rather than it having independent validity.

6. The laws of the deity

Smith brings his genealogical treatment to a head in the most prominent discussion of religion in the whole of TMS: Chapter V of Part III, on the extent to which 'the rules of morality are justly regarded as the laws of the deity'.[26] Smith here offers a series of cumulative arguments, carefully formulated in their presentation so as to reinforce and expand his genealogical account.[27]

First, Smith notes that the sense of moral duty *precedes* ideas of religious obligation, but that reverence for duty 'is still further enhanced by an opinion which is first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy, that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity' (III.5.3). The order of sequencing is therefore that the moral sentiments construct notions of the impartial spectator, duty, and conscience first, and only *later* do religious ideas come into the mix.

Smith adopts a Humean stance in explaining the earliest (polytheistic) religions as 'naturally' arising from the proclivity of humans to ascribe to 'mysterious beings' their *own* sentiments and passions. The ancient gods always resemble human beings much more closely than the Christian God – the implication being that they are made up in line with direct human experience, not in relation to any independent veracity. Ancient gods were, in turn, appealed to for help and assistance, so as to further 'natural hopes and fears, and suspicions … propagated by sympathy and confirmed by education', meaning that 'religion, even in its rudest form, gave a sanction to the rules of morality, long before the age of artificial reasoning and philosophy'. But Smith is clearly not suggesting that the pagan gods were *real*. The goal here is naturalistic explanation: that 'The terrors of religion should thus enforce the natural sense of duty, was of too much importance to the happiness of mankind, for nature to leave it dependent upon the slowness and uncertainty of philosophical researches' (III.5.5). The implication is that the origins of religious belief lie in its social utility as a reinforcement of pre-existing moral ideas, as well as the tendency of human psychology to spread moral qualities onto a world that does not contain them independent of human minds.

Yet what is the case for pagans may not be so for modern Christians. Perhaps 'nature' guided the pagans to religious beliefs via certain mechanisms, which whilst themselves not tracking the truth of religious belief, can nonetheless be confirmed – as Smith seems to suggest – by true reasoning and philosophy. Smith does not rule out such a possibility, instead remaining ambivalent and leaving the door open to a range of possible explanations (III.5.9). Nonetheless, the argument is structured such that whilst we can choose to believe that the rules of morality are God's laws if we wish, this is a further extrapolation, one whose origins lie in basic aspects of our moral psychologies, and not something that we have independent grounds for belief in. Of course, it *might* be the case that the rules of morality are nonetheless also the commands of the deity. But then again, it might not.

Following this Smith returns to the issue of moral luck and its relation to religious belief. He brings to the forefront those dire situations in which we 'despair of finding any force upon earth which can check the triumph of injustice', where either the wicked get away scot free, or the innocent suffer travails that cause us pain to know about. In such cases, Smith states,

> we naturally appeal to heaven, and hope, that the great Author of our nature will himself execute … the plan which he himself has thus taught us to begin: and will, in a life to come, render every one according to the works which he has performed in this world.

In turn, we are

> led to the belief of a future state, not only by the weaknesses, by the hopes and fears of human nature, but by the noblest and best principles which belong to it, by the love of virtue, and by the abhorrence of vice and injustice. (III.5.11)

Again, it is human psychology being 'led to the belief' in a future state, not any purported truth regarding that future state, that does the explanatory work.

Smith completes the story in the same vein: 'That our regard to the will of the Deity ought to be the supreme rule of our conduct, can be doubted of by nobody who believes in his existence.' (But the same does not apply to those who *do not* believe in his existence.) The sense of propriety encourages us to think we should conform to the commands of a Deity or else we will be 'impiously ungrateful … even though no punishment were to follow' such transgressions. (But the mere *idea* that demands of propriety lead us to believe that God has imposed moral rules on us does not actually mean that He exists, or that He really has.) Believing that we are always 'acting under the eye, and exposed to the punishment of God … is a motive capable of restraining the most headstrong passions, with those at least who, by constant reflections, have rendered it familiar to them'. (But merely believing something does not make it true, and what of those who have not engaged in 'constant reflections'?) Finally, whilst we tend to think that the pious are more trustworthy (because they fear that they will be punished by God even if they get away with wrongs in this life), this does not mean that we or they are *correct* in believing in the final judgement of 'that Great Superior' – although it may well be socially useful if many people do think this way (which may explain in turn why the belief has been widely inculcated). Smith thus again consistently located the origin of religious convictions not in any claims regarding the independent truth of religious belief, but in the underlying workings of natural psychology and supervening social institutions (III.5.12–13).

Finally, consider one of Smith's most famous passages, added to the sixth and final edition of TMS in 1790:

> This universal benevolence, how noble and generous soever, can be the source of no solid happiness to any man who is not thoroughly convinced that all the inhabitants of the universe, the meanest as well as the greatest, are under the immediate care and protection of that great, benevolent, and all-wise Being, who directs all the movements of nature; and who is determined, by his own unalterable perfections, to maintain in it, at all times, the greatest possible quantity of happiness. To this universal benevolence, on the contrary, the very suspicion of a fatherless world, must be the most melancholy of all reflections; from the thought that all the unknown regions of infinite and incomprehensible space may be filled with nothing but endless misery and wretchedness. All the splendour of the highest prosperity can never enlighten the gloom with which so dreadful an idea must necessarily over-shadow the imagination; nor, in a wise and virtuous man, can all the sorrow of the most afflicting adversity ever dry up the joy which necessarily springs from the habitual and thorough conviction of the truth of the contrary system.

Smith is not saying that it is *not true* that the world is 'fatherless', merely that believing it to be so renders one melancholy, and that such an idea is 'dreadful'. But things that make us melancholy, or that appear to be dreadful, may nonetheless be so. Likewise, Smith does not say that the world *is not* 'fatherless', only that one who has a 'habitual and thorough conviction' that it is not possess a wellspring of joy that cannot be overwhelmed by 'the most afflicting adversity'. But having a 'habitual and thorough conviction' that P is true does not mean that P *is* true, any more than does the joy arising from a belief that P. Smith is here saying that the world *may indeed* be fatherless – even if contemplating such a possibility is distressing. Is it fatherless? Smith does not commit himself either way. More generally it *might* be the case that various religious beliefs are nonetheless true, in spite of the genealogy about their psychological origins that Smith has offered (he cannot be accused of committing the so-called genetic fallacy). Smith ultimately leaves the matter open. And yet, this very ambivalence is itself indicative as to where Smith judged the real philosophical action to be located.

7. A change of focus

To summarise: TMS offers a consistent genealogical account based in both the underlying psychology of an innate human desire for justice to be done to those who deserve punishment or reward, and in the adaptations made by individuals to the prevalence of moral luck, as explanations for the origins of religious belief, allowing Smith to explain such beliefs without ever committing himself on the question of whether they are actually true. Against theistic interpretations – such as that put forward by Hill, according to whom Smith's thought only makes sense if it is read as inherently

theological, logically dependent on the notion of God's action in nature – on the contrary, as regards TMS at least, *at no point whatsoever* do Smith's arguments require appeal to theistic premises or conclusions in order to go through. Whilst Smith studiously leaves it open to his readers to continue believing in religious claims, he himself never endorses the truth of them. As Craig Smith has put it, Smith's arguments are not intended as 'evidence for the existence of God' but rather are trained on dealing with the fact that religion 'is an observable phenomenon that must be explained and integrated into our system of thought', via a sentimentalist account rooted in observations of human psychology.[28]

Those drawn to an irreligious reading of Smith will be tempted to see his genealogy as evidence of camouflaged anti-religious intent (potentially strengthened by the contextual considerations offered by scholars such as Kennedy and Heydt). Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow that Smith was *himself* irreligious, or that he set out in TMS specifically to undermine or discredit religious belief (as, for example, Hume did). This is because there is a gap between the careful philosophical argument of TMS and what we can legitimately infer about Smith's personal religious beliefs, especially given how cautious he was about ever revealing his private convictions. In the first place, the genealogical arguments of TMS are not incompatible with Smith's being a species of deist, or other form of unorthodox believer. Raphael and Macfie, for example, suggest that despite the philosophical argument of TMS never being dependent on any of the theistic premises Smith occasionally introduces, many of which were removed from the final 1790 edition, nonetheless 'Smith was still imbued with a religious spirit … but it seems reasonable to conclude that he had moved away from orthodox Christianity'.[29] Similarly, Hanley suggests that by the 1790s Smith's argument constitutes 'a displacement of Christianity for some sort of Stoicized natural religion'.[30] Whether or not one agrees with these assessments, both are compatible with TMS offering a purely naturalistic genealogy of religious belief. As Fleischacker has noted, Smith's choosing to always make his arguments independent of any substantive theistic premises is compatible with his having a private faith of some sort.[31] Indeed, even if we accept Phillipson's view that Smith was proceeding in his philosophical enquiries along the lines of a Humean science of man based on experience and observation, and one that must therefore be fundamentally secular in its core mechanics, whilst this would rule out any appeal to religious argumentation in Smith's texts, it would nonetheless be compatible with his retaining religious convictions in private. Similarly, it might be contended that Smith does not himself seek to undermine religious belief in general, nor deny its independent validity, even whilst offering secular genealogical explanations for the origins of many religious beliefs. As Evensky suggests, it might be that for Smith religious belief converges on truth, even if the mechanisms that it uses to get there do not themselves track truth – and hence can be explained through a naturalistic genealogy.[32]

Appreciating TMS as offering a genealogy of religious belief thus cannot settle the question of Smith's private religious views: those are now irrecoverable, unless some hitherto lost historical document comes to light to provide new evidence.[33] Yet the very fact that Smith felt that he *could* remain ambivalent about questions of religious truth is an important philosophical point in its own right. In the first place, this finding indicates that the substantive argument of TMS is ultimately less preoccupied with the issue of whether religious beliefs are true, than with the roles that such beliefs play in our wider ethical lives – and to what extent those can be explained and normatively evaluated. That is, it *doesn't much matter* to Smith's overall analysis whether we conclude from his genealogy that religious beliefs are composed of widespread errors (my preferred reading, and suggested by Phillipson[34]), or whether religious beliefs can nonetheless for Smith be treated as somehow converging on truth, despite not themselves tracking truth in their naturalistically explained origins (as suggested by Evensky and Fleischacker, a reading which will be attractive to those inclined towards a more theistic Smith). Settling such matters is simply not what is most salient in Smith's overall project, hence in part why he himself doesn't offer a definitive answer one way or the other (although contextual factors may certainly also be in play here). What is more important to Smith is offering a naturalistic analysis of moral psychology in the service of gaining a detailed understanding of ethical life.

So whilst the above has reconstructed in detail Smith's genealogical account in order to show how he carefully avoids committing himself to any claims of religious truth, offering instead naturalised explanations of common religious beliefs as part of an explanation of a common and often central aspect of moral life for many individuals, it is nonetheless the case that maintaining singular focus on the truth issue risks both misidentifying what was primarily of concern to Smith himself, whilst also severely underappreciating what his genealogy of religion offers in terms of wider philosophical and ethical analysis. It is therefore to Smith's wider assessments that we must now turn, via an instructive contrast with Nietzsche.

8. Smith and Nietzsche

According to Nietzsche's (in)famous genealogy, our moral practices are not what they appear to be: whilst professing to be about love, forgiveness, care, justice, etc., most of what we do is a function of hidden redirection of urges to make suffer and exert power.[35] Contemporary morality originates in what Nietzsche calls a 'revaluation of values', wherein a previously dominated slave class overthrew its subjugating masters not through force of arms, but by altering the conditions of valuation such that strength, physical domination, self-assertion, and other life-affirming forms of existence were replaced with an emphasis on reactive sentiments emphasising meekness, humility, self-denial, and 'no-saying' asceticism, that were in reality surreptitious vehicles for domination of the strong by the weak. This process has been on-going for millennia, but reaches its apotheosis with the transmutation of 'Jewish hatred' into 'Christian love', a disguise and vehicle for altogether more sinister passions. Nietzsche is clear that Christianity – irreversibly entwined with western practices of morality, even those that purport to be secular and post-Christian – is a tissue of lies and nonsense, composed of metaphysical absurdities like the doctrine of free will, hidden and redirected urges to punish disguised as love, *ressentiment* and the desire to make suffer being redirected inwards over a long process of psychological manipulation and adaptation, and the peculiar and contingent real-world history of how the 'yes-saying' figure of Christ was appropriated by (in particular) Saint Paul, and transformed into an institutional structure designed to further priestly power as part of an aeons-long struggle for mastery.[36]

But that Christianity is systematically *false* in its suppositions with regards to what it claims to be true is ultimately, for Nietzsche, not what is most interesting – or concerning – about it. What really matters is not that the doctrines of Christianity are *untrue*, but that they serve to promote psychological suffering. Christianity is objectionable because although it provided meaning for human suffering over thousands of years, and thus probably prevented the mass auto-extinction of the human race (which without the metaphysical comforts supplied by religious belief could not have coped with the *meaninglessness* of most human suffering), it does so by stunting human development through a process of turning hatred, and the desire to make suffer, *inwards* (the so-called bad conscience), making human beings deeply unwell in the process. Although Christianity's drive to truthfulness will eventually, Nietzsche thinks, end up sawing through the branch that it is perched on – part of what Nietzsche means by his famous phrase that 'God is dead … and we have killed him!'[37] – this is not straightforwardly or necessarily going to lead to an improved state of affairs. This is because the Christian legacy may serve to prevent the emergence of a more healthy, vital, 'yes-saying' form of humanity (the notorious *Übermensch*), leaving instead only the pathetic, mediocre 'last men' who will be all that is left if, following the death of God, we cannot give ourselves new 'yes-saying' values.

How does Smith compare? On the one hand, Smith essentially agrees with Nietzsche: what is most interesting about Christianity, and indeed all religious belief, is not whether it is true, but its relationship to healthy forms of morality (III.6). Smith is ultimately ambivalent about the truth status of various religious beliefs because he is more interested in their relationship to, and effects upon, the moral sentiments, and hence our attempts to live a virtuous life. Like Nietzsche, Smith posits a genealogical explanation for the origin of religious beliefs located in an entirely

naturalistic psychology, although whereas Nietzsche offers an elaborate story about power, forgotten revaluations of values, the need to give meaning to suffering, etc., Smith focuses more exclusively on what is also present in Nietzsche: religious belief as invented as comfort for the pain generated by living in a world dominated by brute fortune and injustice.

Where Smith and Nietzsche diverge is on the entanglement of morality and religion, and the potentially pernicious effects of both. In the first place, Smith offers a much simpler story. Morality came first, a process of repeat socialisation down successive generations of creatures who judge others, are judged in turn, and eventually internalise the capacity for judgement via the figure of the impartial spectator (III.1–2). Religious ideas came only later, or at least towards the end of such a process, acting as a support to independently developed, and prior, moral capacities (III.5–6). Whereas Nietzsche entwines morality with religion from the outset (or at least, from the outset of the great value revaluation which constitutes the true origin of contemporary moral practices), Smith separates them, giving a clear order of priority to the former. In turn, Smith implies against Nietzsche that morality might be straightforwardly decoupled from any unwelcome religious baggage, at least if sufficiently auspicious circumstances allow, not least and precisely because it was morality that came first.

Second, whereas Nietzsche thinks that Christianity, and by extension morality *tout court*, is extensively compromised due to its promoting systematic pathologies in human psychology, Smith is more sanguine. Smith is clear that although religious belief *can* develop in pathological ways, this is the exception not the rule, and he insists that for the most part ordinary religious belief is a welcome support to healthy moral living insofar as it 'enforces the natural sense of duty' (III.5.13). Hence in Chapter 6 of Part III Smith admonishes religious zealots who insist that morality is *nothing but* obedience to God's laws, and insists that well balanced moral sentiment indicates that there is much else to morality besides mere duty to a perceived set of divinely imposed rules (III.6.1–7). Furthermore, Smith is alert to the problem of the religious fanatic who does terrible deeds thinking that they are good because duty to God demands them. Whilst a 'bigoted Roman Catholic' may engage in a massacre of protestants – a heinous and immoral act – but believe that this was the right thing to do, Smith is clear that this is a pathological manifestation of religious duty, and furthermore is the exception not the rule (III.6.13). Smith privileges the judgement of well-regulated, non-pathological, natural human sentiment in such cases: whilst religious distortions of morality do occur, there continues to exist a more authoritative standard founded in well-regulated human sentiment, according to which religious distortions can be coherently judged to be undesirable (III.6.13). Religious belief can certainly go badly wrong on Smith's account, and not only make people do terrible deeds, but also turn them into figures like Pascal: 'whining and melancholy moralists, who are perpetually reproaching us with our happiness' (III.6.9). Such religious extremists suck all the proper joy and healthy balance out of well-regulated and truly virtuous life, and are to be disdained as such. But this sort of thing is again the exception, not the rule. Similarly, Smith insists that the truly virtuous person must *not* give themselves up solely to the duties of God (i.e. self-denying, what Nietzsche would call 'no-saying', ascetic masochism, that the excessively devout insist is the only true form of virtue) but must instead recognise that 'The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher' – even one so great as the pious Marcus Aurelius, thinking deeply on the 'benevolence and wisdom' of 'that divine Being' – can 'scarce compensate the neglect of the smallest duty' in ordinary moral life (VI.ii.3.6).[38]

The overall tenor of Smith's discussion is firmly that properly constituted ethical life here and now represents a form of psychological health rather than being necessarily pathologised, and religion features in this as a usually harmless, and indeed typically beneficial, further support. Religion can of course go wrong, but so can secular morality: fanatics easily lose sight of what the more well-balanced and humane observer knows (III.6.13); Stoic sages can retreat too far into speculative detachment and fail to realise that human affection and warm sentiment are vital to the well lived moral life (III.3.11–14); 'whining and melancholy' moralists can make ridiculous demands upon us with regards the care we show to ourselves and our loved ones versus complete strangers

(III.3.9–10); the 'poor man's son' can be overwhelmed with ambition and sacrifice virtue to the self-undermining pursuits of wealth and power (IV.1.8), and so on. Morality is a complex thing, and living virtuously is a most difficult task, which few ever achieve to any great perfection. But religion is not a systematic source of disease or suffering, and morality *tout court* is not fundamentally compromised. Furthermore, whether religious claims are *true* is ultimately not important in assessing what role they do, can, or should play in healthy ethical living.

Whether one feels more drawn to Nietzsche than to Smith will likely depend on the extent to which one is suspicious of morality as we presently find it, and of the extent to which our current practices can be freed from their Christian inheritance, at least when that is viewed as problematic. But it is significant that Smith provides (to my mind at least) a *more plausible* genealogy of both religion and morality than Nietzsche does, one facilitated by his cleaner separation of the two phenomena, and his prioritising of morality in the account. For Nietzsche's genealogy demands a great deal of us as regards – and this is a difficulty he himself was well aware of – the *truth*, and hence ultimate genealogical power, of the story he tells. As Bernard Williams has put it:

> It sounds like a psychological process, one that happens in an individual. But genealogy, in Nietzsche's own use … explains a social phenomenon. Nietzsche is trying to explain a new kind of collective reason, the shared consciousness of morality, and there is a problem about the role played in this explanation by what is seemingly a type of individual psychological reaction. Moreover, Nietzsche's genealogy is be no means meant to be entirely fictional. It has something to do with history, though it is far from clear what history; there are some vaguely situated masters and slaves; then an historical change; which has something to do with Jews or Christians; there is a process which culminates, perhaps, in the Reformation, perhaps in Kant. It has been going on for two thousand years.[39]

By comparison, Smith's more straightforward account has a lot going for it, insofar as it is simply more believable than Nietzsche's convoluted and historically dubious rendition. This is a considerable mark in Smith's favour, because genealogy can ultimately only move us to the extent that we think it is *true*. It may be the case that we still have much to learn from Nietzsche about specific aspects of our moral practices – the role of *ressentiment*; the human, all-too-human desire to punish; the hard truth that 'To see suffering does you good, to make suffer, better still' – all of which can prevent us from taking *too* sanguine a view.[40] But it is possible to keep hold of these insights, whilst rowing back from Nietzsche's more dramatic claims about the fundamentally pathologised status of moral life. Smith offers a way to do precisely this. But again, what is most important in Smith's treatment in TMS is not the question of whether or not religious beliefs are actually true.

9. Conclusion

Williams, in the process of working through ideas heavily influenced by Nietzsche, drew a distinction between two kinds of genealogy: those that are *debunking* insofar as they seek to undermine, or destabilise, or somehow call into question their target, vs. those that are *vindicatory* insofar as they serve to do the opposite. Williams gives Nietzsche's genealogy of morality as a paradigm case of the former, Hume's account of justice as an 'artificial' virtue as a potential instance of the latter.[41] Where does Smith's genealogy of religion in TMS fit?

On the one hand, Smith's entirely naturalistic genealogy of the origins of religious belief is likely to be psychologically debunking in its effects, at least for those who find that they cannot take succour in the promises of revelation or scripture as independent support. (Hence, the power of Smith's genealogy to unsettle may have gone up since he originally wrote it, depending on what has happened to people's relevant surrounding beliefs in the meantime.) After all, most religious believers want their beliefs to be true *because they are true*, presumably due to some relationship to another truth claim: that God exists, and intends certain things for us. As noted above, whilst Smith's genealogy is not strictly incompatible with an affirmation of the truth of religious belief, the *tendency* of the revelation that religious beliefs are the product of psychological adaptations to injustice and pervasive moral luck is likely to inspire less, not more, confidence in such beliefs.

But unlike Nietzsche, Smith's genealogy of religion does not – and is not intended to – ramify outwards, undercutting wider moral practices in turn. On the contrary, the thrust of TMS is firmly vindicatory when it comes to morality as a whole, even though this turns out to be composed entirely of the psychological responses of intelligent animals capable of imaginative role-switching, and who are highly sensitive to the judgements of others. Morality can sometimes go wrong, and Smith is clear that being a genuinely and fully virtuous individual is difficult, and few will achieve the heights of consistent virtue, and even then probably only late in life. Nonetheless, morality as a whole is vindicated on Smith's picture, and insofar as religious belief is conducive to healthy ethical living, Smith is happy for it to carry on featuring, regardless of whether or not any of it turns out to be true, which turns out to be a question of relatively little importance to him. I suggest therefore that scholars henceforth dedicate altogether less time to wondering whether or not Smith himself believed in a God. Not only can that now not be known as a matter of biographical fact, but when it comes to understanding his moral philosophy, it does not matter anyway. Which, I suggest, is precisely one of the things that Smith was trying to tell us all along.

Notes

1. Gavin Kennedy, 'The Hidden Adam Smith in his Alleged Theology', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 33, no. 1 (2011): 385–402; 'Adam Smith on Religion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, ed. C.J. Berry, M.P. Paganelli, and C. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 464–84.
2. Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'Skepticism and Naturalism in Adam Smith', in *The Philosophy of Adam Smith*, ed. V. Brown and S. Fleischacker (London: Routledge, 2010), 198–212; 'Adam Smith on the "Natural Principles of Religion"', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2015): 37–53.
3. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, 'Introduction', in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 1–52; Richard A. Kleer, 'Final Causes in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (1995): 275–300; Jerry Evensky, 'Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy: The Role of Religion and its Relationship to Philosophy and Ethics in the Evolution of Society', *History of Political Economy* 30, no. 1 (1998): 17–42; Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations: A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), chapter 14.
4. Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1972), 81–2; Lisa Hill, 'The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 8, no. 1 (2011): 1–29; James Alvey, 'The Secret, Natural Theological Foundation of Adam Smith's Work', *Journal of Markets and Morality* 7, no. 2 (2004): 335–61; Gordon Graham, 'Hume and Smith on Natural Religion', *Philosophy* 91, no. 3 (2016): 345–60; Brendan Long, 'Adam Smith's Theodicy', in *Adam Smith as Theologian,* ed. P. Oslington (London: Routledge, 2011), 98–105. The above examples are not exhaustive: for a useful overview of the relevant literature see Colin Heydt, 'The Problem of Natural Religion in Smith's Moral Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no. 1 (2017), note 2.
5. In what follows, all references to TMS are to *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith: Volume 1, The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. A.L. Macfie and D.D. Raphael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
6. This suggestion had recently made by several scholars, but not yet fully substantiated through sustained analysis of Smith's texts. Specifying what a genealogy consists of in philosophical matters is not an easy task – but for pertinent considerations see Raymond Geuss, 'Nietzsche and Genealogy', *European Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 3 (1994): 274–92; Bernard Williams, 'Naturalism and Genealogy', in *Morality, Reflection, and Ideology*, ed. E. Harcourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 18–9. That Smith's account of religion is a form of genealogy is suggested by Heydt, 'Religion in Smith's Moral Thought', 80, with regards specifically to our psychological disposition to perceive nature as designed (even if it isn't). I extend Heydt's suggestion to encompass Smith's account of the origin of religious belief *tout court*. Similarly, Nicholas Phillipson contends that Smith's 'ethics had shown that what many think of as the voice of conscience or the deity has its origins in the complicated processes of sympathetic interaction, thus gently reducing it to a form of false consciousness which Christians would inevitably find objectionable' (Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2010)), 281. I (roughly) agree, but seek to show that such a reading applies not just to Smith on conscience, but the origins of all religious belief. My reading is closest of all to Craig Smith, 'Adam Smith on Philosophy and Religion', *Ruch FilozoFiczny* 74, no. 3 (2018): 23–39, who reads Smith in TMS as claiming that

religion is generated out of the moral sentiments as a psychological coping mechanism. However I seek to go further in the details and implications of this finding than C. Smith does. For readings of Smith on religion beyond TMS and in *Wealth of Nations* especially, see Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 334–40, 344–8; Charles Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 266–92.

7. Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 283–5; C. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', 34–6; Michelle A. Schwarze and John T. Scott, 'Spontaneous Disorder in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: Resentment, Injustice, and the Appeal to Providence', *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 464–76.

8. My position on Smith's account of the origins of religious belief is similar to that of Hanley, 'Skepticism and Naturalism' and 'Natural Principles', though I differ from him on important points of detail, as explained below. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', holds something like the position I defend here, in particular in agreeing that 'Smith seeks to account for the naturalness and ubiquity of religious beliefs, without committing (or having to commit) himself to any view on the truth of such beliefs' (25). I seek to extend the analysis further than he does, however, beyond (Adam) Smith's assessment simply of how good moral philosophy should proceed, into examining his assessment of morality as a whole *independent* of how philosophers go about trying to understand it.

9. Hanley, 'Natural Principles', 38.

10. Ibid., 39.

11. Ibid., 49–50. See also Fleischacker, *Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations*, 71.

12. Hill, 'Hidden Theology', 3. See also Kleer, 'Final Causes'; Alvey, 'Theological Foundation'; James Otteson, *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75–80.

13. I thus align myself with earlier scholarship on this point, such as Alec Macfie, *The Individual in Society: Papers on Adam Smith* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); Ronald Coase, 'Adam Smith's View of Man', *Journal of Law and Economics* 19, no. 3 (1976): 529–46; Louis Schneider, 'Adam Smith on Human Nature and Social Circumstance', in *Adam Smith and Modern Political Economy: Bicentennial Essays on the Wealth of Nations*, ed. G. P. O'Driscoll (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979); Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), as well as the more recent correctives urged by Schwarze and Scott, 'Spontaneous Disorder'; Heydt, 'Religion in Smith's Moral Thought', and C. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', against revisionist theistic readings.

14. In particular Kennedy, 'Hidden Adam Smith' and 'Smith on Religion', and the articles by Heydt, C. Smith and Schwarze and Scott cited above.

15. Coase, 'Smith's View of Man', 539.

16. Paul Sagar, 'Beyond Sympathy: Adam Smith's Rejection of Hume's Moral Theory', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (2017): 690–5.

17. J.R. Lindgren, *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 148; C. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', p. 35.

18. Heydt, 'Religion in Smith's Moral Thought', 80.

19. Ibid., 81.

20. As far as I know only C. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', has attempted to sketch Smith's wider genealogy in TMS, but by focusing mostly on justice. I seek to offer a full reconstruction of Smith's genealogical account as a whole.

21. Sagar, 'Beyond Sympathy', 690–5.

22. Kennedy, 'Hidden Adam Smith', 396–7; Raphael and Macfie, 'Introduction', 19–20.

23. See footnote appended to II.ii.3.12. For more detailed discussion see Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, 341–2.

24. Schwarze and Scott, 'Spontaneous Disorder'; Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', 34–6.

25. For Smith on moral luck see Paul Russell, 'Smith on Moral Sentiment and Moral Luck', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1999): 37–58; Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 240–44; Chad Flanders, 'This Irregularity of Sentiment: Adam Smith on Moral Luck', in *New Voices on Adam Smith*, ed. L. Montes and E. Schliesser (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 193–218; Simon Blackburn, 'Williams, Smith, and the Peculiarity of Piacularity', *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 2 (2015): 217–32; Hankins Keith, 'Adam Smith's Intriguing Solution to the Problem of Moral Luck', *Ethics* 126, no. 3 (2016): 711–46.

26. For detailed analysis of this part of TMS see Hanley, 'Natural Principles'.

27. TMS III.5 has recently been analysed by Lauren Kopajtic ('The Vicegerent of God? Adam Smith on the Authority of the Impartial Spectator', *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2019): 61–78 who argues that Smith exhibits a 'polyphonic' argument that simultaneously (and problematically) attempts to represent the perspective of an empirical science of man whilst also affirming Smith's personal religiosity in an attempt to 'enact' the good effects of religious belief. By contrast, I argue that Smith exhibits no intrinsically religious argumentation or intent in this chapter at all, and speaks with a single unified voice: that of the genealogist.

28. Smith, 'Philosophy and Religion', 34. See also Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, chapter 14.

29. Raphael and Macfie, 'Introduction', 19. See also Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, chapter 14.

30. Hanley, 'Skepticism and Naturalism', 204.

31. Fleischacker, *Smith's Wealth of Nations*, 70.
32. Jerry Evensky, *Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 108.
33. Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, 333–4.
34. Philipson, *Enlightened Life*, 281.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. K. Ansell-Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. R.P. Horstmann and J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
36. For a helpful overview see Geuss, 'Nietzsche and Genealogy'.
37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. B. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120.
38. On Smith's treatment of fanaticism see Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 281–92.
39. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 37.
40. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 42.
41. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 36–7.

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