The Very Important Virtue of Tolerance

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Introduction

The central task of moral philosophy is to find out what it is, at the deepest level of reality, that makes right acts right and good things good. Or, at least, someone might understandably think that after surveying what some of the discipline's most famous practitioners have had to say about it. As it is often taught, ethics proceeds in the shadows of three towering figures: Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. According to this story, the Big Three theories developed by these Big Three men— virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism—divide the terrain of moral philosophy into three big regions. Though each of these regions is very different from the others in important ways, we might say that, because of a common goal they share, they all belong to the same country. Each of these theories aims to provide an ultimate criterion by which we can judge the rightness or wrongness of acts or the goodness or badness of agents. Although the distinct criteria they offer pick out very different features of acts (and agents) as relevant in making true judgments concerning rightness and moral value, they each claim to have identified a standard under which all such judgments are properly united.

Adam Smith's project in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*[1] (TMS) belongs to a different country entirely. Smith's moral theory does not aim to give an account of the metaphysical grounding of moral properties—that is, to describe the features in virtue of which right actions and

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[1] All in-text citations without a listed author refer to this work, Smith (2004).

good things *really are* right or good. His goal, instead, was to characterize and explain the beliefs and practices that people in fact regard as moral in a way that captures how they really experience them. The subtitle of TMS describes its project as providing an "Analysis of the Principles by which Men naturally judge concerning the Conduct and Character, first of their Neighbours, and afterwards of themselves." Smith's goal is to explain our "natural judgments" about acts and character traits. In keeping with this aim, his account of morality does not make any metaphysical claims about what it really is, at the deepest level, for an action to be right or wrong, or a thing good or bad. It instead takes morality as an empirically given feature of human thought and practice, influenced by the particular histories of communities and the social conditions they face, and seeks to describe its character and the psychological processes on which it depends. Smith thought that, by analyzing the nature and origins of morality in human minds and societies in this way, he might be able to "say something about which features of morality appeared to be universal to humanity and which ones appeared more or less historically variable," reflecting a view of moral philosophy as "central to a new science of human nature" associated with his friend David Hume (Haakonssen 2004, vi-vii).

By taking the moral judgments of ordinary people as the primary subject matter of ethics, Smith's way of doing moral philosophy reflects what Samuel Fleischacker calls "an unusually strong commitment to the soundness of the ordinary human being's judgments, and a concern to fend off attempts, by philosophers and policy-makers, to replace those judgments with the supposedly better "systems" invented by intellectuals" (Fleischacker 2017, 1). This commitment is nowhere more evident than in Smith's famous passage on the "man of system." His description of this figure appears in Part VI of TMS, "On the Virtues." This Part, introduced in the last edition of TMS to appear in Smith's lifetime, "presents the virtues of prudence, benevolence and self-

command by way of a series of elegant character portraits" (Fleischacker 2017, 2). These portraits, often novelistic in their detail and psychological acuity, serve to illustrate these virtues as they might appear in the conduct, motivations, and habits of someone who exemplified them. The description of the Man of System[2] comes in Section II of Part VI, concerning "the character of the individual so far as it can affect the happiness of other people" (which Fleischacker covers with the notion of benevolence). As we will see, Smith's characterization of this figure is far from an endorsement of his moral character, suggesting that it is best read as a description of a kind of vice.

The Man of System is the arch-reformer: a man whose commitment to his vision of the ideal society is so unwavering that he takes no one's opposition to it as grounds for adjusting how he conceives of or intends to implement that vision. He is "apt to be very wise in his own conceit; and is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it" (275). Smith vividly illustrates this figure's zeal for control in his much-commented-on chessboard metaphor. The Man of System

> seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it. (275)

The Man of System fails to appreciate that the elements he wants to organize according to his artificial social ideal are persons with the capacity to develop and freely pursue their own plans. His attachment to a rigid conception of the ideal social order blinds him to this important fact and places him under the delusion that it is irrelevant to his reformist project.

This paper interprets Smith's description of this character as an illustration of the vice of intolerance. I offer an account of tolerance that locates its value in its role as a necessary condition

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[2] The capitalization is mine, not Smith's.

for our seeking and achieving the respect of our equals and for maintaining a free society. The badness of intolerance, and therefore of the moral character of the Man of System, lies in the fact that it threatens our enjoyment those goods. Section I offers further exposition of Smith's passage and introduces the notion of tolerance I use in this paper. Section II sharpens our understanding of that notion, identifying tolerance as the attitude a person holds toward other members of her society when she sees them as entitled to shape the character of that society by living their lives according to their own plans, values, and practices, free from coercive interference. Section III canvasses Smith's view on the importance to us of becoming deserving objects of the respect of our equals, and Section IV explains why intolerance, when widely held in a society, undermines the ability of its members to pursue that very important good. Section V highlights a relationship between tolerance and freedom, arguing that tolerance constitutes the necessary attitudinal basis for respecting others' entitlement to lead their lives as they choose, which is essential to a free society.

I. What's Wrong with the Man of System?

Smith describes the Man of System in contrast to "whose public spirit is prompted altogether by humanity and benevolence" (274). The appearance of these opposing figures in Smith's chapter on the virtues, paired with the use of obviously approving language in relation to the one and clearly disapproving language with respect to the other, suggests an interpretation of their descriptions as a characterization of a certain kind of virtue and its corresponding vice. Since these descriptions belong to the section of the chapter dealing with "the character of the individual, so far as it can affect the happiness of other people" (255), the virtue they pick out must be a distinctly social one, by which I mean a character trait whose value lies in the way that possessing it affects other people. To identify this virtue (and, more to the point of this paper, its corresponding

vice), we ought to look for the central feature with respect to which these opposing figures differ from one another. Any satisfactory account of the virtue of the Man of Humanity and Benevolence and the vice of the Man of System will capture that difference. Such an account must also capture the severity of our negative moral evaluation of the latter. For most of us, we are intuitively morally repelled by the Man of System. A good description this figure's central vice, then, will account for the importance we attach to our judgment of the badness of his character. It will capture the fact that we judge his moral failure to be significant.

The focus of the contrasts Smith draws between the Man of System and the Man of Humanity and Benevolence is on a difference in their responsiveness to others' interests in formulating and pursuing their visions of the ideal society. While the Man of Humanity and Benevolence "will accommodate, as well as he can, his public arrangements to the confirmed habits and prejudices of the people," the Man of System "goes on to establish [his ideal plan of government] completely and in all its parts, without any regard either to the great interests, or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it" (275). When the Man of Humanity and Benevolence cannot establish the best system of laws, he will endeavour to establish the best that the people can bear," whereas the Man of System recognizes no such limit on the imposition of his idea of what makes a society good: he insists "upon establishing, and upon establishing all at once, and in spite of all opposition, every thing which that idea may seem to require" (275-6). In each of these passages, Smith describes his characters according to a way in which they see the relationship between their political ideals and the people who would be affected by the realization of those ideals. The Man of System sees his vision of perfection as so important that the value of achieving it overrides any objections others might raise against it. The Man of Humanity and Benevolence, by contrast, sees their objections as important considerations in constructing and seeking to bring

about his social ideal. While he too has an idea of what the best society would look like, he does not take his word to be the only one that counts in determining the character of his society. Others' interests matter to him, and he tries to accommodate them in the formulation and execution of his plans for social reform. This, as I see it, is the central contrast our account of the vice of the Man of System must capture.

Smith's choice of words might prompt us to identify the chief moral failing of the Man of System as pride. He describes this figure as "very wise in his own conceit," and as possessing the "highest degree of arrogance"—descriptions clearly pointing to the objectionably high estimation of self-worth (especially in relation to others, seen as of lower status) that we associate with pridefulness. But this diagnosis does not fully capture what distinguishes the Man of System from the Man of Humanity and Benevolence. I identified that difference in a willingness on the part of the Man of Humanity and Benevolence to adjust his social and political aims to accommodate the interests of those who would be affected by their achievement. Certainly, pride could interfere with that willingness. If someone took her worth to be so much greater than others' that in any conflict between their interests and her ideal vision of society, the latter would win out, then we would have a case in which pride provided the attitudinal basis for ignoring their interests in the way that is characteristic of the Man of System. Indeed, Smith seems to think that something like this contributes to the Man of System's discounting of others' objections to his plans:

> [T]o insist upon establishing, and upon establishing all at once, and in spite of all opposition, every thing which [an ideal of social perfection] may seem to require, must often be the highest degree of arrogance. It is to erect his own judgment into the supreme standard of right and wrong. It is to fancy himself the only wise and worthy man in the commonwealth, and that his fellow-citizens should accommodate themselves to him and not he to them. (276)

A gulf between how one sees his worth or status and the worth or status of others—in this case, a gap between his assessment of his own practical judgment and that of others—is clearly at the

root of the intransigence of the Man of System. So, pride must be at play in whatever vice is central to his character.

But that vice cannot be *mere* pride. I said that the key difference between the Man of System and the Man of Humanity and Benevolence lies in a difference in their sensitivity to the interests of others. Identifying the vice of the Man of System as pride is unsatisfying because one can be prideful in ways that do not bring about the insensitivity to others' concerns that is distinctive of the Man of System. A person might, for instance, be prideful as an athlete, unreasonably regarding herself as better at some sport than she in fact is and refusing to take responsibility for her failures on the field or court, while nevertheless having a healthy regard for the importance of other people's interests in her social and political beliefs. Pride alone does not seem to capture what is essential to the badness of the character of the Man of System. If that badness is explained by pride, then it must be a certain *kind* of pride rather than the entire body of attitudes of superiority that we typically include under that notion.

II. What is Tolerance?

I argue that the central defect in the character of the Man of System is an attitude that unduly ignores, or at least heavily discounts, the interests of those whose values, practices, and beliefs, are at odds with his own. I call this attitude *intolerance*. The intolerant person does not see others as entitled to lead their lives according to their individual conceptions of the good when those conceptions conflict with his own. Intolerance is related to pride because it expresses the belief that the intolerant person is superior to others in an important way; however, it is not identical with pride because, as I have already said, one can be prideful without going wrong in the way that the intolerant person goes wrong. A prideful person's unwarranted high estimation of

herself need not lead her to conceive of those whose values, beliefs, or practices disagree with her own are inferior to her in such a way that they are not entitled to live their lives in accord with those interests.

According to T.M. Scanlon, tolerance is the attitude held by a person who would affirm that "all members of society are equally entitled to be taken into account in defining what our society is and equally entitled to participate in determining what it will become in the future" (Scanlon 190). Because the "nature and direction" of a society is determined by the values, attitudes, practices, and beliefs of its members (however these may be influenced by the exercise of political power), tolerance requires that each of us recognize each other's right to lead her life according to whatever values, attitudes, practices, and beliefs she chooses to adopt—so long as she does not interfere with others' entitlement to do the same—and, in so doing, influence the character of the society to which she belongs. Tolerance demands not only that we not interfere with our neighbors' right to vote or speak freely on political matters; it requires that we respect their entitlement to live their lives according to whatever conception of the good they choose without coercive interference. The "nature" or "definition" of a tolerant society is determined by whatever pattern the interactions among its members takes when each of them pursues her plans in accordance with this respect for others, and the tolerant person does not see herself as entitled to coercively impose some other definition on it. What tolerance does *not* require is that our recognition of our neighbors' entitlement to contribute to the definition of our society be motivated by approval of their conception of the good. We may strongly disapprove of the values, lifestyles, and beliefs of people we tolerate. We may loathe their vision of the nature and direction of our society. Tolerance permits these disagreements: it only requires that, deep though they may be, they occur against a backdrop of mutual respect. This respect is captured by the requirement that

we not take our disapproval of our neighbor's values and beliefs as grounds for preventing him from living his life according to them, expressing them to those who will listen, and persuading others to voluntarily subscribe to them.

It seems to me that what is wrong with the moral character of the Man of System is a failure to adopt this attitude toward others. Recall the "definitional" part of Scanlon's account of tolerance: a tolerant person sees all other members of her society as equally entitled to contribute to defining the nature and direction of that society. The central difference between the Man of Humanity and Benevolence and the Man of System is best captured in terms of this understanding of tolerance. When we describe it in those terms, we see that we are characterizing the Man of System as intolerant, and that this description succeeds in capturing what I identified as the central contrast Smith draws between his two characters. According to this description, the Man of System is unresponsive to others' objections to his plans because he sees himself, and only himself, as entitled to determine the nature and direction of his society. Smith says as much when he points out that, by claiming his as the only vision of the social good that deserves to be realized, the Man of System "erect[s] his own judgment into the supreme standard of right and wrong" (276). Because he takes himself to be the only person whose judgment is suited to decide how society ought to be, he will not adjust his plans in the slightest to accommodate others' objections to his plans. The Man of Humanity and Benevolence, on this account, is willing to recognize others' rights to live their lives in ways that conflict with his idea of social perfection because he does not take himself to have an exclusive right—grounded in the superiority of his judgment or otherwise—to determine the character of society. Intolerance thus provides a satisfying account of the attitudinal basis of the way of seeing others that constitutes the key difference between the Man

of System and the Man of Humanity and Benevolence. It therefore does the explanatory work we want it to do with respect to the central contrast Smith draws between these two figures.

I have not yet said anything about whether it also explains our judgment of the severity of moral badness of the Man of System. The task of the next two sections is to argue that it does. My argument does not aim to identify the psychological basis of our intuitive moral revulsion at this figure. Instead, I attempt to bring out two important reasons we have to place a high value on tolerance, and claim that, for those reasons, intolerance is a serious moral failing. Intolerance threatens our ability to pursue and achieve the respect of our equals and undermines the conditions necessary to maintaining a free society.

III. The Respect of Our Equals

Smith identifies the earned respect of one's equals as a very important good in every person's life. He even suggests that "the desire of becoming the proper objects of this respect, of deserving and obtaining this credit and rank among our equals" may be "the strongest of all our desires" (249). The importance to each of us of becoming the kind of person who deservedly receives respect from others is evident in the major role that ideal plays in shaping the goals we adopt and the projects we pursue. Smith points to two ways in which it plays this "shaping" role. First, desire for high status among our peers provides a large part of the motivation we have to seek the "advantages of fortune." One important reason we have to acquire wealth or seek positions of social esteem is given by the way having these things affects how we think others have reason to see us. If we have these goods, then we can regard ourselves as worthier objects of their admiration and, we hope, actually receive that admiration. Second, the ideal contributes to defining our conception of the kind of "character and conduct" we ought to develop and provides us with

strong reason to develop it according to that conception. Here, it is important to note Smith's care in describing what we want as not only *obtaining* "credit and rank among our equals," but also *deserving* it. Character is a stable and enduring feature of persons. Were we only concerned with receiving admiration from others, our concern could not motivate us to want to cultivate a certain kind of character. At most, it could bring about a desire to *appear* to others as though we had the stable and enduring features we expected them to admire. But for Smith, our concern with others' respect is not primarily a concern with appearances. It is a desire to actually develop the virtues we expect to earn the esteem of our fellows. Hence Smith's remark that "man wants not only to be loved, but to be lovely" (132).

The desire for the deserved respect of our equals, then, not only supplies much of the reason we have to seek external goods like power and wealth; it shapes our idea of the kind of persons we ought to become. If this desire is so important to us, then we have good reason to want to live under social conditions in which everyone has a good chance of fulfilling it, or at least of pursuing it without undue hindrance. I argue that tolerance is a very important social virtue because it is a necessary element in any set of conditions satisfying this goal. The chief moral failing of the man of system is his deficiency in this virtue.

IV. The Value of Tolerance

The value of tolerance as a social virtue lies in the relation it bears to a certain conception of one's fellow members in a society. When we tolerate each other, we can see each other as equals. When we do not tolerate each other, this relationship is undermined. Intolerance precludes, or at least severely hinders, recognizing one another as equals. I argue that laying the necessary foundation of this kind recognition is, so to speak, what tolerance is good for. There might be many

reasons to want to stand in this relation with others. There might, for instance, be some kind of intrinsic value in living among people who mutually recognize one another's equality. Or perhaps this relation is important because it expresses some deep moral fact about the nature of persons and how they should relate to one another. I will sideline these considerations to isolate a different reason we have to care very much about standing in this relation with others and argue that this reason is sufficient to explain the severity of our negative moral evaluation of the man of system. That reason is given by the importance to us of becoming the proper objects of the esteem of our equals, highlighted in Smith's discussion of prudence. Without tolerance, we cannot stand in the relation of equality with others in which we must stand if we are to be able to pursue this good. This is what explains the severity of the man of system's intolerance.

Smith twice emphasizes that the respect we care so deeply about is the respect of our *equals*. To see how intolerance interferes with pursuing that respect, I need to say something about the kind of equality that is relevant to this case. I will not attempt to offer a constitutive definition of it. Instead, I will highlight two attitudes that, when possessed by either the giver or recipient of some expression of praise or esteem, are clearly at odds with the ideal of respect sought and offered among equals. The first attitude I will call "parentalist." A parentalist expression of admiration or approval is one that treats the recipient of praise in the way a parent treats her child when she commends him for obeying rules she has instituted for his own good. This kind of praise expresses a gap between the authority of the judgment of its giver and receiver: the recipient is only praiseworthy insofar as he aligns his own judgment with the judgment of an authority. In the case of parentalism, the relevant authority has the best interests of the person she praises in mind. But this does not save parentalist admiration from failing to satisfy the requirements of respect among

equals. Receiving it, even deservedly, cannot fulfill what Smith calls "perhaps the strongest of all our desires."

I call the second attitude "instrumentalist." Like parentalist praise, instrumentalist praise presupposes that the judgment of the person giving it ought to override the judgment of its recipient in determining how the latter acts. But the right model for instrumentalist praise is the relationship between a master and a slave rather than a parent and child. When someone adopts an instrumentalist attitude, she sees others as appropriate objects of her praise only when they contribute to the achievement of some project of her own. That is, she sees others as deserving of admiration only when, and just because, they serve as a means to an end she values. Receiving instrumentalist admiration is even further from the ideal of becoming the object of deserved esteem of one's equals than is parentalist praise. The key difference between these attitudes is that parentalism requires concern for the interests of the person one judges to be praiseworthy while instrumentalism places no constraints on the admirer's motivations with respect to the admired. The former, at least, cannot express that the interests of the admired are irrelevant. But both attitudes involve a kind of condescension, in the form of an expression of the superiority of both the admirer's judgment and her claim to direct the choices of the admired, that is clearly inconsistent with seeking and achieving the kind of respect Smith thinks matters very much to us.

It seems to me that expressions of admiration from an intolerant person, at least when directed toward those aspects of ourselves and our lives that are most important to us, can at best reflect a parentalist attitude and, at worst, veer into instrumentalism. Because the intolerant person sees himself as having a stronger claim to directing our lives when our plans and values conflict with his conception of the good, his praise, insofar as it concerns our deepest moral, religious, and even political values and beliefs, is contingent on the alignment of those values and beliefs with

his vision of social or individual perfection. Those kinds of values and beliefs are usually the most important elements in our conceptions of our individual identities and life plans. So, when we live among intolerant people, the most important parts of we how conceive of ourselves and our lives are disqualified as objects of esteem beyond the admiration they might garner for contributing to someone else's social ideal. Since that kind of admiration expresses a conviction on the part of the admirer that his judgment ought to determine how the admired live their lives in very important respects, it is only consistent with parentalist or instrumentalist attitudes. So, living among intolerant people prevents us from pursuing and earning the deserved respects of our equals. When those around us are intolerant, we are blocked from standing in the relation with them in which we must stand in order to achieve, or even seek, this very important good. This gives us good reason to judge intolerance to be a serious moral failing and tolerance to be an important virtue. It is a *social* virtue because its value depends on the relation it puts us in with others and the goods those others (and we ourselves) are enabled to enjoy when we stand in that relation.

V. Tolerance and Freedom

I said that a tolerant society is one in which each member is entitled to contribute to the definition and direction of that society by pursuing her own plans according to her own conception of the good, including by enlisting others to voluntarily join in her projects and values. This description also captures a central part of what it is for a society to be free. The understanding of freedom I have in mind is one that holds that a person is free just in case she is not coercively prevented from acting according to her own plans and values, as long as these do not involve coercively preventing others from doing the same. Freedom, on this view, is understood as the absence of coercion. Coercion is a tricky notion, but F.A. Hayek's formulation seems to fit our

ordinary usage of the word well enough to suffice for our purposes: "Coercion occurs when one man's actions are made to serve another man's will, not for his own but for the other's purpose" (Hayek 1960, 133). Whenever we are forced by another person to serve their goals by doing something we would not have otherwise done, we are coerced. The concept of forcing is difficult, too, but it at least includes the threat and employment of physical violence, including its legal use by agents of the state.

Of course, it could be that a full account of freedom must involve more than this requirement. It has been suggested that a Smithian understanding of freedom must include, in addition to non-coercion, freedom from severe material want (Schmidtz 2016). More generally, it is plausible that the kind of freedom covered by bare non-coercion requires the presence of certain basic external goods to have any value to the persons who enjoy it. "Real" freedom, then, would require more than the satisfaction of the negative condition of non-coercion, and in fact coercion might sometimes be necessary to supply those goods to those who do not have enough. But any plausible understanding of freedom must at least include a strong presumption against coercion. If most members of a society could reasonably expect that their plans would normally be thwarted and their actions made to serve another's will, it would be absurd to call that society free. A commitment to non-coercion, or at least a requirement of its presumption, is a necessary condition on a society's counting as free.

The relationship between tolerance and the free society may already be clear. The attitude of tolerance is necessary, at least for those who are in a position to coercively frustrate others' plans, to produce and maintain conditions in which everyone is able to live her life as she chooses in accordance with the understanding of freedom I have suggested. It is obvious that, for a society to maintain conditions in which each member is free to live as she chooses, each member must see

each other as *entitled* to this freedom. Tolerance is defined as the virtue a person has when she sees other members of her society in this way. So, tolerance is necessary to maintaining a stably free society. Intolerance poses a threat to that freedom. The intolerance of the Man of System is bad not only because, if too many people had it, we would not be able to pursue and achieve the esteem of our equals. It is also bad because, in the hands of even one person with significant coercive power over others, it can undermine freedom. If you do not see me as entitled to pursue my own plans according to my own values, and it is within your power to force me to act against my will, you will coerce me into contributing to your aims instead of my own. This danger is especially evident in the case of intolerance among agents of the state. Since state power includes significant power to coerce, and perhaps always involves coercion in its employment (see Gaus 2001, 11), we ought to take seriously Smith's warning that "of all political speculators, sovereign princes are by far the most dangerous" (276). When a political actor in a high office is intolerant, she is in a strong position to threaten freedom by imposing her aims on those whom she fails to tolerate. Tolerance is an especially important virtue among agents of the state in a free society. It must be widely held by the members of any society that hopes to maintain freedom.

In this paper, I have given two reasons for considering tolerance an important virtue. It is valuable because it allows us to see ourselves as potential objects of each other's earned respect as equals, and because it is essential to maintaining conditions in which all of us are free to live the lives we choose. On my view, what distinguishes the Man of System from his counterpart, the Man of Humanity and Benevolence, is his deficit in this virtue. We have good reason, then, to follow Smith in condemning this figure for his bad moral character. His vice threatens our achievement of goods that matter very much to us and even our freedom to pursue them.

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The Cautious Man of System

Adam Smith on the Dangers of Ideology—And Tradition

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Mixing politics and philosophy is always hard. A politician tends to think differently from a philosopher. It is very easy to look too eagerly for something in a text that supports a predetermined position (usually the one that confirms our political leanings). The scholar of politics therefore runs the risk of making a piece of philosophical writing mean what he wants it to mean, or what it seems it should mean in light of contemporary social and political issues, not what the author intended to express. Adam Smith's discussion of "men of system" in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a very good example of this phenomenon. It turns out that he is not arguing what many think. I will examine the text of his book to see what we ought to take away from his arguments, and then compare his position to that taken by Michael Oakeshott in his essay, "Rationalism in Politics." Though the two men appear, on the surface, to be making similar arguments, they actually differ in key respects. A close examination of Smith's arguments reveals cracks in Oakeshott's reasoning and suggests some rather surprising lessons to us today.

Smith's discussion of "systems" is a very small part of a larger work. The "Theory of Moral Sentiments" attempts to explain how our ability to comprehend the feelings leads us to form moral judgements about the permissibility or impropriety of human actions. Since Smith is making a

comprehensive examination of our "sympathy" (in modern terms, empathy) for different people in different situations, he examines the attachment humans feel to groups: humanity as a whole, the state, and particular sub-groups within the state.

For reasons beyond the scope of this essay, Smith concludes that attachment to sub-groups, classes, religions, and so on, as well as attachment to one's country, are stronger than any regard for the general welfare of mankind. Therefore, the preservation of the rights and privileges of established orders of society is key to a stable constitution. Since the preservation of these rights and privileges leads to a strong because stable nation, patriotism includes "a certain respect and reverence for that constitution or form of government which is actually established." (Smith, 339) But it also includes an "earnest desire to render the condition of our fellow-citizens as safe, respectable, and happy as we can." (339) Usually, Smith thinks, these two elements of patriotism will work together. The second leads to the first, because we know that the people will usually be happiest and most free if their nation is maintained in stability. However, he admits that, in times of turmoil, it may sometimes be necessary to upend the established order of society in order to combat particular injustices endemic to the system—injustices that threaten the happiness of our fellow-citizens.

But the risk involved in any revolutionary action of this sort is considerable. "It often requires, perhaps, the highest effort of political wisdom to determine when a real patriot ought to support and endeavor to re-establish the authority of the old system, and when he ought to give way to the more daring, but often dangerous spirit of innovation." (340) It is "dangerous" not merely because it produces instability, but also because it frequently happens that some group or faction may hold out an idealistic solution—a "system"—as the key to solving all of a nation's problems. They wish to turn everything upside-down. These people are "intoxicated with the

imaginary beauty of this ideal system, of which they have no experience, but which has been represented to them in all the most dazzling colours in which the eloquence of their leaders could paint it." (341)

The right approach, on the contrary, is to maintain a spirit of compromise. The good statesman will "respect the established powers and privileges even of individuals, and still more those of the great orders and societies, into which the state is divided." (342) By this, clearly, Smith does not mean natural rights, but rather aristocratic privileges and the like. When these are dangerous, he will seek to palliate them; to create the best constitution for the circumstances, not the best altogether. "Though he should consider some of them as in some measure abusive, he will content himself with moderating, what he often cannot annihilate without great violence. . . . He will accommodate, as well as he can, his public arrangements to the confirmed habits and prejudices of the people." (342)

The factious leaders are "men of system." For them, the government must be entirely new and perfect; they are unwilling to compromise, lest some evil be let in. They think that they can arrange society like the "pieces on a chess-board," (343) but forget that those pieces do not possess their own principle of motion—whereas humans certainly do. Therefore, for peace to prevail, the principles of the system must coincide harmoniously with the motion of individuals. Statesmen respect the tendency of the chess-pieces to go their own way.

But this general discussion of the dangers of what might be called, in modern terms, rigid ideological thinking, leads up to a particular example. If the first danger of "systems" is disharmony and chaos, the second is that the principles of a "system" will be set up wrongly and arbitrarily. This is most likely to happen if they are contrived by one man.

"It is upon this account, that of all political speculators, sovereign princes are by far the most dangerous. . . They entertain no doubt of the immense superiority of their own judgement. When such imperial and royal reformers, therefore, condescend to contemplate the constitution of the country which is committed to their government, they seldom see any thing so wrong in it as the obstructions which it may sometimes oppose to the execution of their own will. . . The great object of their reformation, therefore, is to remove those obstructions; to reduce the authority of the nobility; to take away the privileges of cities and provinces, and to render both the greatest individuals and the greatest orders of the state, as incapable of opposing their commands, as the weakest and most insignificant. (343-4)

So we can see that Smith has a very particular example in mind when he speaks of "men of system." The whole discussion is an introduction to an excoriation of a particular *kind* of "man of system": the sovereign prince—or tyrant—who thinks his own notion of how a country should be run is superior to any other, and whose notion is not merely his own but *wrong.* The man of system, at least the one Smith is worried about, does not impose just any kind of system: instead, he imposes a system that strikes at freedom and individual liberty. He establishes not just a system in disharmony with the habits and customs of the people, but, it seems, one that is *wrong* or evil in a fundamental sense. In this regard, Smith does not seem to be a pure pragmatist.

By considering Smith's historical context, we can construct a tolerably clear picture of the sort of ruler Smith had in mind. Smith wrote this book in 1759—well before the French Revolution. Therefore, he was not concerned, at least not primarily, with the revolutionaries in France, who might at first glance appear to be textbook examples of "men of system." They do seem to resemble the factious party leaders Smith describes in the earlier paragraphs detailed above, but not the despots that most concern him. On the contrary, it is likely that he was addressing the "enlightened monarchs" of his own time—Frederick the Great, Empress Maria Theresa, and so forth. All those rulers, under the guise of "enlightenment," established reforms that benefited the common people

to some degree but were mostly notable for their centralization of royal power and abridgement of aristocratic prerogative.

It is equally possible that he has in mind the history of his own nation: the attempts of Charles I to abridge the power of Parliament, of Cromwell to change the morals of the people, of James II (allegedly) to reestablish Catholicism. None of those attempts ended very well. Or perhaps he is thinking, also, of the recent Jacobite rebellions in his native Scotland, brought about by London's heavy-handedness in dealing with the traditional power structures of the Scottish clan system.

So, Smith is doing two things: first, he is offering a general warning about infringing the customs of the people and allowing the perfect to become the enemy of the good. Second, he is suggesting that systematic thinking tends to be of a sort that infringes liberty and is most to be feared when it comes from an "enlightened" despot.

This brief analysis of Smith's positions should raise a few key questions. First, is custom and tradition only good because it promotes stability, or does it have some inherent goodness? Smith seems to think it is good mostly for the former reason. In fact, as noted above, he seems to admit that customs and traditions could sometimes oppose freedom, even if it seems more likely that a system, designed by one man (or a few) will do so.

Second, and following from this: Suppose that certain customs and traditions do promote evil (even if they likewise produce stability), and it is a contrasting system or ideology that promotes freedom? What if custom and tradition functions like a system? In fact, that's the way tradition is often viewed today—as a set of constraints that harm the people living under them and generally impede freedom. Perhaps custom and tradition sometimes benefit only a few, and those

few (like Smith's "systematic" enlightened monarchs) use them to oppress others. Is stability even desirable if it comes at the cost of harm to a nation?

To summarize: first, customs and traditions might be bad; and second, they appear to be sometimes (especially if they are bad) to be very system-like, and their proponents appear also to be "men of system." And, in the same way, systems sometimes seem to do good.

In order to explore these questions, let us look at another way of interpreting Smith. The outline sketched above differs in some respects from a common interpretation of this passage. Smith's injunction to avoid infringing the habits and customs of the people fits in very well with a conservative understanding of political life that values tradition and distrusts rationalistic ideologies that seek to perfect political society.

At first glance, this similarity might reasonably lead to the position taken by Michael Oakeshott in his seminal essay, "Rationalism in Politics." Oakeshott distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge. There is technical knowledge, which is systematic knowledge that can be written down, learned in a classroom, and so on. Then there is practical knowledge, which is acquired only through experience. Most of it is passed down from teacher to student and learned through imitation. It is *how* to do things, not just *what* to do. Practical knowledge, Oakeshott thinks, is especially vital to politics, because politics is "always so deeply veined with both the traditional, the circumstantial and the transitory." (Oakeshott 7) Politics, rightly considered, is in large measure a practical knowledge of *how* to govern, and therefore an understanding of the habits and traditions of a people. And since these habits and traditions of rule form the practical knowledge of politics, they are a positive good—they do not merely produce stability, but they are themselves imbued with deep wisdom.

Rationalists, he argues, place reason above any sort of practical knowledge; indeed, they discard this sort of knowledge altogether, insisting that it, too, can be systematized, standardized, and subjected to rational scrutiny. A rationalist will not defer to the past—he will defer only to a theory, and preferably his own theory, because "he is something of an individualist, finding it difficult to believe that anyone who can think honestly and clearly will think differently from himself." (6) The rationalist seeks always to approach politics with a blank slate—to find what is best in theory, and then put it into action. "To the Rationalist, nothing is of value merely because it exists (and certainly not because it has existed for many generations), familiarity has no worth, and nothing is to be left standing for want of scrutiny." (8)

It seems that the Rationalist is a "man of system." And though Oakeshott does not himself place his argument in the context of Smith's, it is easy to do so. But a close reading of Smith shows that the two arguments, while similar, are not by any means the same.

First, Oakeshott very clearly has a different culprit in mind than Smith. Smith's concerns are most directly aimed at enlightened monarchs. He is only secondarily worried about factious leaders in times of national turmoil. Oakeshott, on the other hand, writing (naturally) after the French Revolution and several hundred years of democracy, has the latter concern. He argues that rationalism, with its ideological and "systematic" thinking, provides a substitute for a practical education in politics. It is the "politics of the politically inexperienced" for the new rulers of Europe and America—the people—who no longer possess the political training of the old aristocracy. They must turn to something simpler, more "bite-sized," to guide their political decision-making.

Furthermore, there is considerable divergence between Smith and Oakeshott on whether tradition is an intrinsic good—whether anything actually *is* of value merely because it exists. Smith does not say. The passage analyzed above nowhere explicitly argues that tradition has any

particular value of itself. It is good because it ensures stability; and it is good because it is more likely to secure liberty than the machinations of a "man of system." But Smith himself admits that the "statesman" will to some extent be concerned with ameliorating the vices found in the traditions of his people. He is establishing the best government for the circumstances, working with the traditions as best he can: "like Solon, when he cannot establish the best system of laws, he will endeavor to establish the best that the people can bear." (Smith 342) When he can, he must change those that are evil: "When he cannot conquer the rooted prejudices of the people by reason and persuasion, he will not attempt to subdue them by force"; but he *will* attempt to use reason and persuasion. This mindset is somewhat antagonistic to tradition, and certainly somewhat "rationalistic," in Oakeshott's terminology, for even the statesman takes it upon himself to pass judgment on the traditions he must nevertheless permit.

Therefore, let us examine whether traditions can be, or generally are, dangerous, and whether a "system" could be more respectful of human rights and freedoms. Smith seems to think it will not be, most of the time, but we must remember that this could be colored by the particular examples he has in mind when considering systems. It is not clear whether Oakeshott is even worried about this problem at all. He says that Rationalism is the "politics of the politically inexperienced," in the sense that ideologies can provide a substitute for the practical education in politics that the hereditary ruling classes of Europe naturally acquired over generations. But it is hard to see how that particular manifestation of "practical" political knowledge could be praised very much. Does anyone wish to suggest that the political condition of Europe was really better in the 15th century, or the 17th, than the 21st? We must only examine the relative rights and freedoms available to individuals in both eras to see that the strides made by ideology—often in direct opposition to positions that consciously labeled themselves as traditional—have in many respects

brought about a great improvement in the dignity of common citizens. American history presents a particularly ugly example in the form of slavery, which was prominently defended as an integral part of Southern culture and tradition. Nor was that change wrought by slow and gradual measures alone, but by a sudden and bloody war.

Part of Oakeshott's sympathy to tradition, and Smith's deference to established modes of government, can also be explained by the traditions with which they are familiar. Both hail from the British Isles. The UK (including Scotland, of course—Smith was a Scot) has a long history of reasonably free and fair government, and in many ways can be considered the birthplace of modern democracy. But many other countries do not have this fortunate past. A Frenchman writing at the same time as Smith would have much less cause to prefer the established government (and many, as we know, did not). And the distinction becomes even more pronounced when we look at the modern world, especially the Middle East.

Consider the current Syrian conflict. In power is a dictator, Bashar al-Assad, who is sometimes defended by conservatives as the most stable and tradition-based choice. But he is really a perfect example of Smith's "Man of System." Assad's Baath party is an Arab nationalist and Socialist party that spreads its ideology through indoctrination and a far-reaching state security apparatus. (BBC) And today, that ideology (like those of the enlightened despots Smith excoriates) is used mostly for his personal gain. That may be why his rule has not actually bred stability, but provoked a brutal civil war, mostly instigated by Islamists who felt that their ability to practice Islam freely—their traditional rights and privileges—were being impugned. Actually, it is those opponents, the Islamist rebel groups, are much more consciously anti-rationalist. They are fighting for a country based very explicitly on the past. But the customs and traditions they promote are evil: subjugation of women, harsh punishments for small crimes, and terrorization of religious

minorities. Indeed, we can reasonably say that their project—though anti-rationalist and in opposition to a "man of system"—is itself the kind of factious system Smith excoriates. For it is an ideology that will admit of no compromise; it seeks the perfect, not the best for the circumstances, and hopes to radically upend society. Its transformation into a system—though still somehow tradition-based—is most clearly and terrifyingly manifested in the Islamic State.

Surprisingly, in Syria, it is a group that perfectly matches Oakeshott's idea of an ideology, though maybe not Smith's, that offers the best hope for the future. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces want to establish a system they call "Democratic Confederalism," which, to oversimplify a little, is (extremely) decentralized democracy with some socialism and feminism mixed in. The ideology is a bit strange, is definitely an ideology, and has no basis whatsoever in Syrian history or culture—it's a clean-slate design. But is has brought peace, human rights, and considerable political liberties to the northeast of the country.

This pattern repeats itself throughout the region. Every Islamic fundamentalist movement is really a desire to found a government on something other than rationalism, and it inevitably turns into a "system" in Smith's sense—namely, that it oppresses individuals and will admit of no compromise. Clearly the problem is not professing a rationalist system of government, but first and foremost whether that system is good or bad.

To be sure, we can certainly point to examples of rationalist systems that have done great evil, many of which surely crossed Oakeshott's mind. Fascism and Communism were both systematic and rationalist. So were the excesses of the French Revolution. But the point here is not to argue that rationalism is a good thing; only that it is sometimes better than the alternatives, that "practical political experience" can carry dangers, and that Smith, unlike Oakeshott, seems willing to acknowledge that fact.

We can see, then, that the distinction between systems and traditional governments is blurry, especially today, and perhaps especially in non-Western countries. This may be partly due to the fact that few alternatives to (usually rationalist) "systems" remain, which may help to explain why attempts to emphasize traditions of governance can become systematic and ideological. Oakeshott himself seems hardly optimistic that rationalism can be shown the door. "The ordinary practical politics of European nations have become fixed in a vice of rationalism," he says. (33) Once "an exclusively rationalist form of education is fully established," a state he seems to think is not far distant, "the only hope lies in the discovery by some neglected pedant, 'rummaging among old parchments and musty records,' of what the world was like before the millennium overtook it." (37-38). And he himself acknowledges this confluence of system with attempts to promote tradition. In his own day, he admits, the resistance to rationalism in English politics has been converted to an ideology. "A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics." (26) To some extent, therefore, we must work within the constraints of rationalist thought in the modern world. The question thus becomes how to find "systems" that are least likely to possess the worst qualities of the "systems" Smith describes, and more likely to admit compromise and to seek change toward the good, not for the private gain of some group or individual.

According to Oakeshott, the United States is thoroughly rationalist. "The early history of the United States is an instructive chapter in the history of political rationalism," he says. (31) The Americans were "a civilization of self-consciously self-made men," who had no interest in prior traditions and indeed regarded them with suspicion. Even when they did not make everything anew—he admits that they had "a tradition of European thought and native political habit and experience," (32) he merely thinks it was a tradition of rationalist thought—they saw themselves

as doing so. "They were disposed to believe. . . that the proper organization of a society and the conduct of its affairs were based upon abstract principles." (32) The Declaration of Independence is one of the "sacred documents of the politics of Rationalism." (33) America is a country in which the people, having no political education, disposed to think individualistically and trust their own judgment and personal (as opposed to cultural) experience, must substitute ideologies—"systems"—for practical political knowledge.

Oddly enough, Oakeshott makes no particular comment on the results of this experiment, merely denoting it as an example of a country driven by a rationalist system. Perhaps he makes no comment because it is hard to comment too negatively on the results of the American experiment. Ideology seems to have worked well, to have established a society in which freedom is respected and prosperity normalized. This could be, in part, because it is the people who are themselves "men of system." It isn't a few designing men scheming to systematize American life (as Smith fears); instead, the people think systematically, rationalistically, and so it happens that the motion of the chess-pieces coincide with those of the chess-players (who, in America, are undoubtedly popular in character, whether they are demagogues, statesmen, or celebrities). A system has not been imposed from above, but has risen organically from below, and over two centuries has established a tradition of rationalistic thinking which, to my eyes, is very hard to distinguish from the traditions of practical political experience Oakeshott praises. The Americans have established a *tradition* of rationalist government, and thus practical political knowledge in Rationalist government, eliminating the conflict between the chess-player and the chess-pieces.

There are further reasons why American democracy, though a rationalist system by Oakeshott's definition, is not really so systematic when measured against Smith's cautions. A key element of American democracy and American ideological thinking is its toleration of certain

established powers and privileges. If America is thoroughly intolerant toward any hint of aristocracy, it is more tolerant than perhaps any society before or since toward religious groups and civil organizations. Freedom of speech, religion, and association provide broad powers to these groups and organizations. Organizations are even free to pursue policies most people consider absurd, like refusing vaccines and blood transfusions or obtaining exemptions to schooling requirements (the Amish don't need to attend school beyond 8th grade, something I can confidently say, as a German citizen, would never be permitted there). The autonomy given to families is also remarkable from a European standpoint: it is perhaps most clearly manifested in the ubiquity of homeschooling. In other words, the American "system" is designed to require less homogeneity than systems usually do. If it is ideological, the American ideology is an undemanding one.

Moreover, the American political system is designed to prevent upheaval. It is not the most efficient and responsive democratic system in the world, but it may be the most stable. The checks and balances of American government make it very hard for any one person or party to substantially alter the lives of Americans, or the basic principles that govern the nation; in most cases, these have changed slowly. This means that America, though perhaps constantly oriented toward its rationalist founding principles, and suspicious of tradition as a good reason for any policy, is nevertheless slow to change. If there is any danger in rationalism, the American system serves as insulation.

There is one more vital factor that prevents systems from infiltrating any type of government: knowledge. For both Smith and Oakeshott, system is associated with ignorance. For Oakeshott, of course, rationalist ideologies are the "politics of the politically inexperienced." Smith notes that ideologies thrive by gulping up the ignorant and gullible. "Even though the leaders should have preserved their own heads, as indeed they commonly do, free from this fanaticism,

yet they dare not always disappoint the expectation of their followers; but are often obliged. . . to act as if they were under the common delusion." There are two solutions to this dilemma. It is possible to leave government only in the hands of those who are wise; that seems to be Oakeshott's preference. But it is also possible to seek to extend the sphere of wisdom—to teach those who are ignorant, and to give them the tools to understand and analyze ideologies, and ultimately to control those ideologies instead of allowing themselves to be controlled.

To a certain degree, the very design of the American system forces this knowledge on its citizens. America has two institutions that require (or have historically required) public engagement: the jury system and local government. As Tocqueville explained, these institutions serve as a school of government for common citizens, creating practical political knowledge in individuals—not through some traditions handed down in families, but through personal activity. But local government, though still more prominent than in most nations, no longer occupies the public consciousness as it once did. Therefore, education is all the more necessary as a placeholder; in particular, high school and university education. Oakeshott might object that such education imparts merely technical knowledge and so is of little use in combating rationalism, but he is mistaken. First, technical knowledge actually goes a long way in combating systems; for, as we have seen, rationalism is not identical to "system," and most of the dangers of systems can be described very well in technical terms. Second, there is no reason why education must bow to ideology. Education must be dedicated to forming the ability to judge well, an end that rationalism, when properly understood, ought to support. This means, of course, a strong foundation of logic, but also an understanding of history, so that the experience of others may be added to personal experience. And it means an understanding of morality as the standard of any politics, whether traditional or systematic. Otherwise we are left with the sort of unconvincing appeals to "tradition"

of Oakeshott, or appeals to "systems" presented as cure-alls, instead of Smith's understanding that there is a standard of right that every political society must seek. Sometimes this requires fierce and powerful change; though often, as Smith shows, careful and gradual change is safer. Sometimes no change at all is needed. But in all cases, it is this standard of right by which we judge.

This education is the promise of a true democracy. One of the best elements of the American education system, flawed though it may be, is the promise of opportunity it offers to every citizen. It is necessary to ensure that the opportunity is used wisely. By this I do not mean that everyone should attend a university. I mean only that every citizen must receive at least an introduction to the kind of education that makes clear-headed, independent decision-making possible—partly a technical education, certainly, but with at least some element of the liberal arts.

So Smith's warning, then, transposed for modern ears, is not about rationalism, or technical wisdom, or something like that. Instead, it is a twofold warning: first, to seek the good in politics, whether that be by embracing or discarding received wisdom, but never by infringing the liberties of the common people or by allowing that good to become uncompromising. And second, in a democracy, it is an injunction to know the good—to understand what we are aiming at and why. For a democracy, then, to be free of the dangers Smith describes, it must be, insofar as it can, a nation of statesmen—a country in which everyone is equipped to debate the best way of organizing affairs. The "man of system" thrives on ignorance, so ignorance must go. That way, we can avail ourselves of the good in any system while rejecting the bad.

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The Wealth of Community:
Adam Smith and the Limits of Individualism

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All politics necessarily consists of negotiation between the often opposed interests of individuals and the authority defending the common good. The result of such mediation, the degree to which one is elevated at the other's expense, stands as the ultimate determinant of both the form and the actions of any particular state. Hence replying to this quintessential matter becomes the first task of any who would establish a government or a political theory. Adam Smith presents one such resolution by critiquing the systems of theorists who strive after perfection. In the contest between individuals and authority or community, Smith sides firmly with the former. At its core, his position echoes the modern contention that government ought not pursue perfection, in which failure is inevitable, but should rather limit itself to creating a secure space in which individual initiative may run mostly unhindered by government. This assertion indicts "the man of system" for believing in the possibility of perfection and for attempting to place his own will over the plethora of individual, disunited, and often conflicting wills of which society is actually constructed. For Smith, ideal systems ignore that multiplicity of wills, and by disregarding the most basic fact and condition of government, render themselves fantastical and harmful attempts at realistic politics. Instead, authority must be limited to the protection of individual wills, never attempting to exert a will of its own by which individuals could be directed. From this brief summary of Smith's position, one must ask if he (and, by tenuous extrapolation, modernity) have

correctly balanced the forces and interests of individuals and authority, or whether the import of authority must be reasserted.

Regardless of whether one ultimately condemns Smith, the insights and veracity of his position must be acknowledged on at least two counts. First, he is correct in his condemnation of the "man of system," with his "ideal plan of government." Smith detects in the attempt to establish a perfect government a blindness to actual conditions and an inflexible, even fanatical unwillingness to compromise on a single point of the proposed plan, both of which he deems fatal for politics. This adherence to systems, which one might today entitle ideology, carries with it a total ignorance of the driving force behind politics: a mass of individual wills. This is Smith's second valid criticism: the man of system attempts the imposition of one artificial will where there are in fact many, and thus harms those individual wills by attempting to obliterate them.

An understanding of the defects and implausibility of supposedly perfect constitutions was established relatively early in the history of political philosophy. Coincidentally, the first and perhaps widest known ideal system, presented in Plato's *Republic*, contains within it multiple acknowledgements of the practical impossibility of a theoretically perfect model. As soon as the 'city in speech' is conceived by Socrates and his interlocutors, it encounters a series of difficulties concerning any practical embodiment. These include the equality of men and women, the dissolution of families and the holding of women and children in common, and developing the appropriate education for the guardians and rulers, all significant challenges in their own right.[3] The last of these directs Socrates to the measure which even he hesitates to voice due to its

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[3] Plato, *Republic*. Most of Book V consists in the debate over these matters. Polemarchus originally raises the concern of the community of women and children, which gives rise to a whole series of objections and issues. The most serious occurs at 473d, when the greatest practical concern, the elevation of philosophers to kingship, is finally raised.

implausibility, even foolishness: the crowning of philosophers as kings.[4] Only if these wisest of men and women rule, he argues, can the city possess the requisite wisdom and guidance to be perfectly just. This elevation of the wise appears to be precisely what Smith cautions against. The implementation of Plato's plan requires attention to and perfection in every detail. It cannot "suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it," or its goal remains purely theoretical. Thus, Socrates seems to occupy the role of a "man of system," incapable of realizing the numerous practical defects with his plan, "without any regard either to the great interests or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it." But Socrates, and Plato, were certainly more circumspect than this, hardly the shortsighted fool Smith attacks for chasing perfection. Though Plato, through Socrates, provides a defense of the ideal city, his account includes ample evidence that such plans are chimerical, impossible except under the most providential of circumstances. The first obstacle is the list of conditions and transformations already cited. Socrates himself presents these objections, informing Glaucon and Adeimantus that despite the difficulty of obtaining them, perfect justice requires them. Hence justice and the perfect society can develop only under impossibly perfect conditions—if men were angels. But even more damning is Socrates' projection of the fate of the city in speech, were these circumstances met. Were this most perfect of constitutions erected, it would soon fall to the smallest of flaws. Its failure in Book VIII results from mathematical errors in the calculations meant to produce children with the potential for becoming philosophical rulers.[5] The ideal society falls because it lacks and cannot continually generate the wise leadership its founding was premised upon; even in its founding it bears the seeds of its own undoing.[6]

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[4] *Ibid*, 473d.

[5] *Ibid*, 546a-547a.

[6] The issue of our inability to transmit wisdom, leadership, courage, or virtue generally is discussed at length in the *Meno*. The conclusion of that dialogue indicates that proper political leadership cannot be taught, and is thus the result

Though Plato's Socrates intuits inadequacies in his own system, it is Aristotle who fully reveals the flaws inherent in the Platonic approach and firmly establishes a suspicion of ideal plans of government. Eschewing the Platonic construction of castles in the clouds, Aristotle seeks to determine the constitution which exists at the intersection of theory and practice, a compromise between the perfect in form and the practically attainable.[7] The common error which Aristotle and Smith seek to correct lies in the fact that "political writers," like Plato, "although they have excellent ideas, are often unpractical," failing to recognize or accept the implications and restraints of extant conditions.[8] While part of the science of politics must include speculation and reflection upon the most perfect form of government, such considerations must be promptly followed by the understanding that "the best is often unattainable."[9] As Plato began to realize, the tantalizing distance of perfection results from the obstinacy and imperfection of the actual world, its unwillingness to conform to an ideal.[10] The foundation and maintenance of the perfect city rely upon the providential confluence of numerous circumstances, many of which cannot be

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of fortunate guesswork. To a certain extent, the *Republic* agrees. The regime slide of books VIII and IX all result from the inability of fathers to teach their offspring the proper virtues for that regime. Since virtue seems to elude the educational process, no regime can long be maintained since it cannot be transmitted to the rising generation. But in the *Meno*, the apparent conclusion leaves a significant portion of the dialogue untouched. Meno's (and Anytus') inability to name the teachers of virtue stems from their inability to determine what virtue actually is. The *Republic*, however, pursues specific definitions of justice as a sort of arch-virtue, perhaps even the form of virtue, and by reaching a provisional definition of justice (each doing their own work well and not interfering with others), Socrates and his interlocutors can then turn to how it ought to be taught. Thus, while the *Republic* does cast some doubt on the possibility of founding, let alone maintaining, the perfect regime, it adopts a more hopeful attitude towards teaching political wisdom, which could exist across generations in a less than perfect regime.

[7] Aristotle, trans. Jowett. *The Politics*, 1288b25. "The true legislator and statesman ought to be acquainted, not only with that which is best in the abstract, but also with that which is best relatively to circumstances."

[8] *Ibid*, 12288b35.

[9] *Ibid*, 1288b25.

[10] *Ibid*, 1288b40. "There are some who would have none but the most perfect; for this many natural advantages are required."

consciously produced by human efforts.[11] As the necessary conditions for perfection have been placed beyond the scope of human power, the ultimate and eternal ideal ought not be considered a concrete goal. Most nations and cities, finding themselves in physical and political situations less than ideal, cannot prudently hope for the actualization of the formally best regime. Thus "we should consider, not only what form of government is best, but also what is possible and what is easily attainable by all."[12] By granting equal import to theory and practice a particular state pursues the best possible given its conditions, orienting itself towards virtue without reaching for a perfection beyond its means. Hence Aristotle rejects true kingship or aristocracy as viable constitutions for most cities, for they require "a principle of virtue provided with external means," a pair of conditions met by few cities or nations.[13] But he remains unwilling to simply accept the degeneration into oligarchy or democracy to which most cities are prone, asserting that a regime which approximates the results of aristocratic rule lies within their grasp. Aristotle thus recognizes that no theory can shape and dictate reality while maintaining that improvement and striving after the best can be achieved by all political communities.

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[11] Chief among such matters are the physical location of the nation in question, its neighbors, history, and the mores of the people. Rousseau and Tocqueville both acknowledged the importance of such factors in establishing a good, let alone perfect, regime. Rousseau's dedicatory letter to the Second Discourse acknowledges all these factors as highly influential in Geneva's success, and concedes that the lack of fortuitous circumstances elsewhere is partly accountable for their unequal and problematic state. Tocqueville does acknowledge the influence of geography and laws upon a nation, but places special emphasis upon the role of mores. He notes that the correct mores can overcome disadvantageous conditions and poor mores can ruin the best circumstances. But mores do lie beyond the immediate power of a people to change. They are instilled across generations as the habits of the heart belonging to a people. Thus, without a persistent effort to alter mores to be more conducive to a particular type of government, mores effectively lie outside the purview of human power to alter. Hence both Rousseau and Tocqueville admit that the occurrence of the best governments relies at least in part on chance and circumstance (which can be taken advantage of or squandered), and cannot be guided and coordinated by a single will, i.e., by the 'man of system.'

[12] Aristotle, trans. Jowett. *The Politics*, 1288b37-39.

[13] *Ibid*, 1289a33-34.

The fatal weakness which Smith attacks rests in a refusal to accept the obstacles and limitations which both Plato and Aristotle perceive on the path to perfection. For the 'man of system,' "there is no place...for a 'best in the circumstances,' only a place for 'the best'" absolutely, without qualification.[14] This ideological inflexibility denies that perfection lies outside the grasp of humanity, insisting that it may be achieved regardless of present circumstances. "If only my system be followed, and my will executed in all matters," proclaims the deluded disciple of perfection, "the finest human government can be established." With this understanding, "political activity is recognized as the imposition of a uniform mode of perfection upon human conduct."[15] Nothing but the plan born of a unique knowledge matters; all else will be corrected and perfected upon the imposition of said plan.[16] This outlook represents a complete repudiation of the Aristotelian model for politics, which demands that one be realistic in judging how far one's city may proceed towards ultimate perfection. The man of system is one of those impractical political writers whom Aristotle criticizes for insufficient attention to the practical half of politics, whose theory disregards "that which is best relatively to circumstances."[17] This ignorance signifies the invalidity of optimistic theory from Plato to Smith's opponents. The human inability to conjure the necessary conditions defies the wishes of the 'man of system.' His plan, which must be completed in all its details, is reliant upon an ability to alter conditions and receive total obedience to his directives—the world set before him as a chessboard. A single will cannot possibly command

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[14] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p. 10.

[15] *Ibid*, p. 9-10.

[16] Eric Voegelin's *New Science of Politics* discusses the idea that supreme but secret knowledge (*gnosis*) of the nature of reality and the best plan of government has been revealed to a select few to be actualized, creating a sort of 'heaven on earth.' According to the gnostic, all Earth's faults and shortcomings will fade away through the institution of government according to the revealed *gnosis*.

[17] Aristotle, trans. Jowett. *The Politics*, 1288b25.

these manifold variables of history, geography, sociology, and politics to bring about the requisite conditions which his plan requires; thus, his system fails as a viable constitution.

While the impotence of humanity to determine their political situation in all its details forms an insurmountable barrier to the formation of an ideal government, Smith finds an omnipotent power to be particularly lacking in the direction of a state's constituent members. "The imposition of a uniform mode of perfection" elevates the will of the theorist over the voice of the people, obliterating all other wills and plans and rendering all subservient to the chessmaster-tyrant. The sole "principle of motion" is "that which the hand impresses upon them," as they march to the drums of their idealistic leader. But Smith claims that this model contains an egregious misunderstanding of the true nature of politics. Rather than one suprahuman principle of action which, like Hobbes' Leviathan, binds the people together under the monarch's direction, actual governments are driven by numerous principles of motion, the many wills of the citizens.[18] Thus the 'man of system' attempts an impossible reduction from many to one which misunderstands the actual functioning and role of government.

A defense of politics as an individually driven enterprise can also be derived from Aristotle' *Politics*. In the first analysis of existing constitutions, Aristotle asserts that the primary political question concerns the degree of community: whether all things, some things, or nothing should be held in common by the city. Rejecting the *Republic*'s city in speech, Aristotle disagrees with the extent to which Plato unifies the citizens, or the degree to which they have been reduced

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[18] The theory that many wills, acting independently, produce a single product in the actions of government, simply reapplies Smith's invisible hand theory of capitalism to politics. In both cases, the macroscopic product (the state of the market or the actions and attitudes of government) are not arbitrarily dictated but are arrived at via the functioning of a mass of independent wills, each seeking their own good. The solution reflects a sort of mediation or negotiation between wills and interests, and (supposedly) accurately reflects the political or economic choices or desires of the majority of the population.

to a single body. By holding all things in common, even women and children, the city in speech has in fact renounced its classification as a city, for "a state may at length attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state."[19] A city, formed of differing people, not merely those who are alike, thrives due to the variety of its constituent members.[20] To reject such differences as Plato does attempts to transform the whole city into a family, and ultimately into a single man.[21] This reduction back to an individual contradicts the *telos* of the city, to be self-sufficient, and signifies the city's destruction. Only beasts or gods, not humans, can be self-sufficing apart from a community; humanity needs the scale and the variety of the *polis* to attain its own *telos* of virtuous living. An extremely high degree of unity, therefore, proves counterproductive in politics. For its success the city relies upon both the differences between citizens and their sharing in rule, both of which necessitate a lesser degree of unity than in the city in speech. The former recognizes that a true unity, as one desires in politics, is formed between those who are different yet equal, providing the community with a variety of skills and personalities. But as equals, they share in government: "the one party rule and the others are ruled in turn."[22] Not a single, constant will but the many wills of equal citizens guide the city.[23] Both measures preserve the city's status as a collection of individuals rather than a single body dominated by one monolithic guiding force. The interaction

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[19] Aristotle, trans. Jowett. *The Politics*, 1261a17-18

[20] *Ibid*, 1261a24-25. "A state is made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similars do not constitute a state." See also 1261a29-30: "the elements out of which a unity is to be formed differ in kind."

[21] *Ibid*, 1261a18-20. "The nature of a state is to be a plurality, and in tending to greater unity, from being a state, it becomes a family, and from being a family, an individual."

[22] *Ibid*, 1261b4-5.

[23] *Ibid*, 1261a38-1261b3. Aristotle does note that "while there should be continuance of the same person in power where this is possible, yet where this is not possible by reason of the natural equality of the citizens… equals should in turn retire from office." The sharing of power represents once again Aristotle's acceptance that the best is often unattainable. While a kingly continuance in power might be the best, Aristotle seems to find this unlikely in most cases. Thus, the variety of equals and the "principle of compensation" becomes the "salvation of states."

of citizens and their sharing of power, a lesser degree of unity than Plato advises, guides the city towards self-sufficiency. The subsumption of many wills by one is not the ideal model for politics, but in fact its failure and destruction.

To be sure, Aristotle's and Smith's protests against the elimination of the individual are far from identical. While Aristotle seems primarily concerned with people and property, the holding of all physical things in common and the unsavory effects of such action, Smith focuses upon an unnatural unity of wills in which the individual loses the freedom of their will and becomes a mere pawn of the government. But both present cases against an excessive unity which accumulates individuals into a single entity, sacrificing the uniqueness and initiative of individuals for the binding force of authority. However, to vindicate Smith's concern with absolute government which robs the people of their rights and their freedom a modern understanding becomes necessary. Immanuel Kant claims, as firmly and boldly as Smith, that citizens as human beings must not be treated as puppets or pawns to be manipulated by tyrannical rulers. For Kant, this is a moral as well as political question. As humans, granted a capacity for moral action through their freedom, all ought to live uncoerced, subject to their own principle of motion. The failure to allow this freedom of conscience and deliberation has dominated much of human history, as "the guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have seen to it that the far greatest part of them...regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult."[24] Creating a dependency in thinking has prevented the recognition on an individual basis of the moral law, and the subsequent adoption by each of the moral law as their own principle of motion. Leaders have instead demanded unquestioning obedience, as from children, to their "rules

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[24] Kant, trans. Humphrey. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, "What is Enlightenment?," 41.

and formulas, those mechanical aids to the rational use, or rather misuse, of [humanity's] natural gifts… the shackles of a permanent immaturity."[25] Systems have been allowed to dominate individuals, ordaining their movements and motives like chess pieces. In the first place, this treatment of human beings as mere means, pawns, not ends in themselves, presents an enormous moral failure. Furthermore, the unenlightened use of citizens according to the ruler's capricious will has allowed the prosecution of terrible wars and the existence of hostile conditions between nations, creating a belligerent, flawed political situation. Hence the treatment of individuals as means, nothing more than the members of the state, represents a moral and political failure in need of remedy. Rather than abusing freedom to gain power, states must cultivate enlightenment, renouncing their claim to control of citizens actions and ideas and resolving the murderous wars between them. For Kant, the primary directive of government must be to "prevent anyone from forcibly interfering with another's working as best he can to determine and promote his own well-being."[26] All must recognize and hold sacred the human freedom to self-determination, to live according to their own principle of motion, insofar as they do not infringe upon another's ability to do the same. Politically, the result will be the adoption of a republican form of government, which "accords with the principles of the *freedom* of the members of a society… with the principles of the *dependence* of everyone on a single, common legislation… with the law of the equality of them all."[27] Kant forecasts that republican government will, in addition to respecting the rights of its citizens, who participate in legislation, prove averse to initiating wars except for the best reasons, as those bearing the burdens of war would also have the power to declare it. Thus, through

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[25] *Ibid*, 41.

[26] Kant, trans. Humphrey. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, "What is Enlightenment?," 44.

[27] Kant, trans. Humphrey. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," 112.

the pursuit of enlightenment, which champions the individual will and its power to choose, Kant predicts the resolution of the moral and political dilemmas in which humanity is ensnared.

From the wisdom of Aristotle and Kant, it appears that Smith is correct in claiming that the failure of ideal systems becomes most apparent in the inability to impose a single will over the populace and suppress their individual wills. As Aristotle recognizes, the *polis* begins with the many wills of its founding members. Even as the city develops, that multiplicity cannot be annihilated and replaced with a single tyrannical will, which commands all according to its visions and regardless of attempts at opposition. For Kant, the endeavor to eliminate the unruly and unpredictable mass of individuals as participants in politics, is not only fantastic, but immoral. Doing so prevents enlightenment through the free use of one's reason and reduces citizens to the role of political tools, rather than the thoughtful participants in self-government they all ought to be. That individuals, with their unique principle of motion, cannot be eradicated from politics, is clear from this evidence. The man of system, who purports to act as the chess grandmaster, cannot command the pieces as he wishes, for they have a will of their own and a human right to use it.

Concerning his defense of the individual and criticism of the power of authority, Smith presents a correct analysis. His suspicion of systematic thinkers who seek to impose their 'perfection' upon all properly identifies the limits of ideal plans and the indisputable role of individual citizens within the regime. As an Enlightenment thinker, it is hardly surprising that Smith takes this position. Arguing against proponents of absolute monarchy for whom the role of ordinary citizens, not to mention their rights or dignity, occupied a fairly minor portion of their political theory, an assertion of the rights of the individual were necessary. In the question of the balance between individuals and authority, the latter clearly possessed an advantage and the more important role, while the former were clearly neglected in their political role. But fear of

overreaching, grandiose theory may not be the primary challenge of contemporary politics. Ingrained in Enlightenment thought, particularly its American expression, is an assertion of the value of the individual and that due to that value, each be allowed to set their own course and determine their own principle of motion. The treatment of humanity as infinite permutations of a single person, identical and predictable in their actions and reactions and fit to be ruled by one who can command them as pawns, has long been rejected by Western thought. It is known that humans are not susceptible to be governed and directed as machines or as fools; it has been generally admitted that as individuals and free human beings, each has the right to their own principle of motion and a role in government. So potent is the individualistic rejection of the authority of perfect and universal theories that an over-correction becomes possible, even probable. We risk unbalancing the scales once again, this time in favor of the individual rather than the authority of systems. The modern emphasis upon the rights and importance of the individual should heed Tocqueville's warning concerning democracy: that it might grow too quickly and too wild and overwhelm us, its benefits becoming malevolent excesses. We ought instead to consider the danger of a vacuum of principles of motion which unite, a completely atomized and anarchic conception of the world in which only individual principles of motion exist. This tendency errs towards the rejection of all meaningful commonalities, and the accompanying dissolution of any common ground for political interaction.

While Smith's position refrains from this degree of radical individuality, it lacks a suitable defense against such problematic developments. In championing the individual's independence from the power of government, their possession of a personal principle of motion, he undercuts the possibility of a principle of motion which transcends any particular piece. Each piece, or citizen, remains liable to their will and their motives only, regardless of the directives impressed

upon them by the legislature. Though Smith's purpose appears to be the presentation of a case for limited government which digresses from imposing principles of motion and limits itself to the protection of individual principles of motion, one could carry the case to an extreme. If we accept that each of the pieces on the chessboard operates only by its own initiative and its own principle, chaos and atomization appear inevitable. By rejecting any unity of interest or purpose among the pieces as a guiding hand, humanity falls back into a state of natural war, in which one's desires constitute the sole motive. Kant recognized that "man is *an animal that,* if he lives among other members of his species, *has need of a master*"; and if that master is to be just and defend individuality, it must be carefully constructed, an account given in its defense.[28] Hence Smith's position must be supplemented and tempered by a defense of a larger principle of motion, which unites individuals and provides authority without subsequently restricting individual initiative as a 'system' would. Two methods of unification meet these criteria: a model of politics in which the restricted size of the *polis* allows for genuine cooperation and interest in political affairs, and the democratic construction of and agreement upon principles of motion for the regime as a whole. Both of these construct a larger will through the collaboration and agreement of the individual wills upon which Smith places an unmatched value, preventing a suprahuman will from necessarily becoming an arbitrary and systematic one.

In forging a genuine 'will of the people' under modern conditions, the sheer scale of modern nations becomes problematic. If the community encompasses a large area, the number of matters over which all are concerned becomes relatively few, and the massive number of voices become difficult to distill into a single will which is truly popular. A reduction of size, both

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[28] Kant, trans. Humphrey. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, "What is Enlightenment?," 33.

spatially and numerically, eases the genesis of a genuine, active popular will. At the most basic level, negotiation and agreement becomes simpler due to the decreased number of opinions. The reasoning of the American Founders supporting a multiplicity of interests as a defense against factious agreement can be reversed, and fewer citizens can more easily compose an aggregate will. But this ease is only incidental to a greater benefit. In a smaller political entity such as local government encompasses, the affairs attended to lie closer to the hearts of those involved. Many, if not all, are directly involved with a given matter, and are therefore better informed and more invested in the outcome. As a result, the formation of a popular will is not only easier but possesses a greater significance. It represents the measured and deliberative opinion of the body politic with regard to a particular matter, which by their consent and collaboration will guide their action. The plan set forth through their political cooperation becomes the general will to which they consent as the guide for their actions. Thus, individual wills are not simply ignored, for they inform and shape the deliberative process, and the need for authority is also satisfied, as an aggregate will is created to coordinate and lead the many individual wills. This will is neither tyrannical nor systematic, qualities which Smith fears in commanding wills. It avoids tyranny through its democratic formation, and it opposes a system by being established for a specific and limited end. The only sense in which this will transcends particular circumstances and objectives is by intending the good of the community, with some general vision of what that might be in terms of economic or social situations. This vision is certainly not systematic, for it observes and relies upon the changing status of public opinion in light of the current political circumstances. Perhaps most importantly, this will is an aggregate, the agreement of the chess pieces to elevate a will over themselves, to further their goals and their well-being. A general will is formed from individual wills, providing guidance while not infringing upon the rights of the individuals who composed it.

Unfortunately, this formation of a general will for attending to specific situations only appears plausible for relatively small communities. The inclusion of many wills renders their reduction into a single one far more difficult, if not impossible. More importantly, the issues which actuate a small community are often local, specific to a particular group of people in a particular place and time. They concern the affairs and places held in common by that community, and the actions which will affect those common matters. They can be described as common because they are truly shared by the citizens and are common to them all; they exert a significant influence upon the citizens' lives, and are therefore the subject of political conversations and plans. But as the community is expanded, fewer matters are truly held in common, bearing a significant effect on the lives of those involved, resulting in less genuine interest on the part of the citizens. While this is not necessarily apparent even at the state level, at a national level it becomes evident. National affairs often fail to generate the immediate and intense interest resulting from local matters, since the latter exert a greater effect on one's daily life and the places, people, and events one cares for the most. Local political matters, which draw the most interest from individuals, are not held in common by the entire national political community, but only by a small portion of it. Hence the political concerns nearest to citizens' hearts, which can elicit the greatest individual involvement in the formation of a general guiding will, are simultaneously the concerns least susceptible to uniting large political communities. There is everywhere an interest in local politics, but as the issues involved vary according to the particular community and can only directly affect a limited number, local interests can never be the source of any unity beyond a small community. The construction of an informed and accurate general will thus appears to be impossible beyond the confines of local or at best state government.

Practically speaking, however, obtaining a solution which applies solely to small political communities remains inadequate. Large nations do exist, and, if they are to be ruled according to the popular will, they require some method by which that will can be ascertained and executed in subjects which, through their complexity or distance, do not possess for most citizens the familiarity or immediacy which drives the formation of a common will in local matters. The opinions of all citizens, even filtered through representatives, cannot be easily appraised with regard to each proposed action of the national government. Furthermore, the majority of the people often lack the familiarity or knowledge with the specific issue at hand, such as tax policy or the conclusion of a trade agreement, to bestow an informed judgment on that matter which will efficiently pursue the common good. Hence the posing of specific policy questions directly to the people appears both impractical and imprudent as a means of realizing the common will. If the people are to guide their government by granting it a will derived from their own, they must agree upon broad principles which their officials can then apply in specific situations. Such principles will determine the ideas and beliefs valued the most by the people, the ideas and beliefs which they hold in common and can elevate to the position of a general will which unites and guides them.[29] The specific content of the guiding principle can vary greatly, allowing this model for uniting citizens to be applicable in a wide variety of regimes. The United States serves as an excellent example, with the principles of human liberty and equality espoused by the Declaration of Independence ostensibly serving as the guiding light for all subsequent actions and policies. But one could easily imagine other orienting principles, such as a love of honor, wealth, or wisdom, or

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[29] Due to their being broad philosophical persuasions, much larger groups of people can agree upon principles. Specific political problems require that one have knowledge of the matter and be affected by it in order for it to be something held in common. Principles are freed from this need to be bound to a specific time and place, and can thus speak to a much larger community. The construction of a bridge or highway, or a decision on the part of a school board can only matter to the community in which those actions occur. But a love of liberty and equality reaches far beyond that particular instance, and can affect anyone with a capacity for reflection on such matters.

adherence to a particular religious code. All of these, so long as they are derived from the valuations of the people, can constitute the general will and guide the actions of government. Principles represent the regime's election of an authority, a directing force which transcends the individual wills which created it, thus balancing Smith's desire for individual autonomy with the restraint and instruction of a popularly chosen authority. They are not systematic, for they are derived from a multiplicity of wills and always subject to amendment if the values of the citizens were to change. Principles lead a nation without destroying individuality, creating the proper moderation between individuals and authority which is indispensable to good politics.

Ultimately, both a revitalization of small-scale government and a reliance upon principles will be necessary for healthy and balanced politics. The former serves as the primary arena for the exercise of individual initiative, and allows for citizens to actually be engaged in the activities of self-government.[30] This will not only cultivate the mores essential for self-government, but will also prevent apathy in the face of adverse conditions, as the citizens are aware of their power to alter their situation. And as Tocqueville noted, most matters will ultimately be best performed by those to whom it matters most, through the political cooperation of small communities.[31] But the benefits of a large nation call for the unification of these small communities into larger political entities. Aside from the security and industry possible in such countries, their power and influence allow them to pursue the larger goals of principles: liberty, equality, honor, wisdom, or faith, among others. Large entities are brought together by their guidance and can aim their actions towards a more perfect realization of their principles. Together, these models attain practical good

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[30] Tocqueville, trans. Mansfield. *Democracy in America*, 57. "It is nonetheless in the township that the force of free peoples resides."

[31] Tocqueville, trans. Mansfield. *Democracy in America*, 86-88.

for the community while still attempting to create a better world.[32] But most importantly, both forge a vital balance between individual wills and the authority of a guiding will. As such, this theory of principles and small-scale government intends the compromise which is lacking in Smith's criticism of the man of system.

As Aristotle advocated for the presence of a middling element to mediate between the rich and the poor, politics must also seek an intermediary force between unmitigated individualism and an unyielding, systematic pursuit of perfection. Returning to this quintessential political question, it is evident that Adam Smith's position is ultimately deficient. While Smith offers a potent defense of the individual's role in politics, and the damage wrought by faith in systems, he fails to include an account of authority's benefits. His indictments of supposedly perfect systems, with their ignorance of practical conditions and disregard for the existence of numerous principles of motion, are certainly correct, and remain valuable political wisdom. But in his enthusiasm to defend the independence of individuals from government control, he does not fully appreciate the benefits of a unified, directing will. If the pieces of the chessboard have no will above them, nothing which their actions hold in common, they are not members of a political community, but savages in a natural state, with no guidance but their desires. While a tyrannical unifying force, such as Hobbes recommends, impresses authority too strongly, a common will is required for the pieces to actually belong to a political community. By deriving a guiding force from the many wills of those it will rule, one retains Smith's respect for diverse principles of motion while preventing those motions

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[32] The benefits derived from each are not dissimilar to the benefits Tocqueville observes in large and small nations. Small governments provided stability and are generally moderate in their conditions and desires. Large nations produce the greatest works of art and science and wield the greatest power, but also possess the worst inequality and tend to be less stable. America's success is found in combining the strengths of large and small government through the federal system. My arguments here attempt the same sort of compromise between large and small, obtaining stability and individual investment in the regime through local government, and the grander pursuit of principles through the power of national government.

from becoming divisive and anarchic. Balance and moderation are achieved; politics avoids both oppressive tyranny and chaotic individualism. This negotiation is the goal of the best possible politics, and by combining Smith's individualism with the formation of a common will from the many wills of the citizens, it might be achieved.