



Who is Adam Smith's “impartial spectator”?



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The Man within the Breast, the Supreme Impartial Spectator, and Other Impartial Spectators in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

History of European Ideas 2018

The earthquake in China and your pinky 136-7

1st thought experiment: Passive sentiment

2nd thought experiment: Active moral agency

- “the man within the breast”

Some say impartial spec. = Man w/ Br.

Samuel Fleischacker emphasizes the “**eminently human character**” of the impartial spectator (2016, 274).

Jack Weinstein suggests that Smith’s impartial spectator does not have “access to any privileged information” (2016, 352). Continues: “[e]ach impartial spectator is...**unique to its imaginer**” (355).

Craig Smith argues that “the **only** sense in which the impartial spectator is **universal** is that all normally functioning humans have it” (2016, 328).

Some say impartial spec. = Man w/ Br.

James Otteson (2002, 73): “the conscience is informed by the impartial spectator or ‘the man within,’” and that the impartial spectator “**serves as one’s conscience**” (2011, 96).

T.D. Campbell: About “Smith’s image of the impartial spectator”: “all his characteristics are **fully human**, and he possesses these only to the degree which is **common in the average person**” (1971, 137).

David D. Raphael: “[t]he impartial spectator **is still a man, not a god, and indeed a perfectly normal man**” (2007,

45).

Polysemy

Hume:

nature, natural

reason

liberty, freedom

justice

Smith:

nature, natural

justice

impartial spectator

Impartiality



Impartiality

‘When the first Brutus led forth his own sons to a capital punishment, because they had conspired against the rising liberty of Rome’, Brutus acted impartially, because the rules did not carve out allowances for the family of the consul. 192.11

But had the rules been different, had they contained such allowances, *sparing the sons* would have been in keeping with an impartial execution of *that set of rules*.

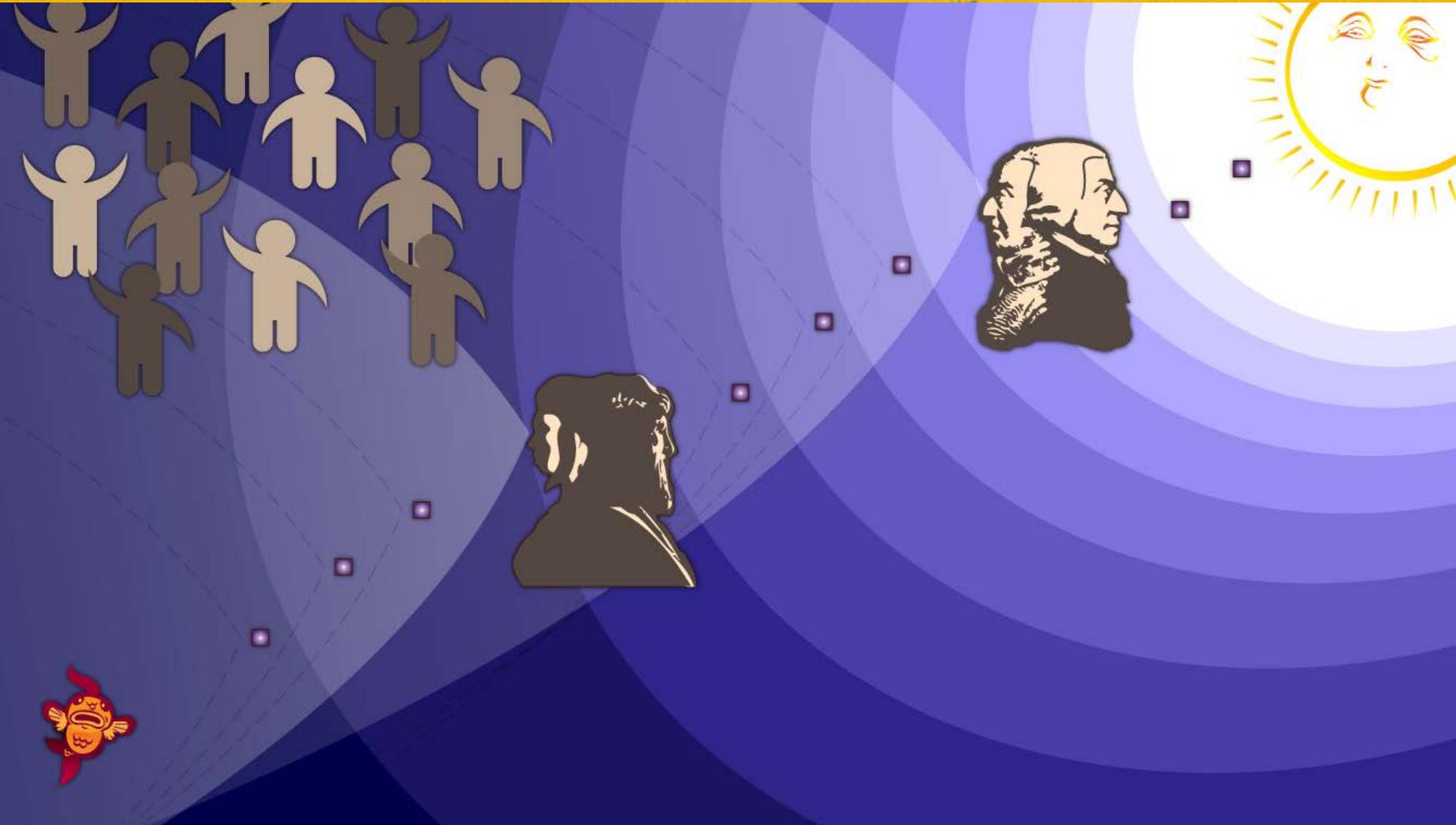
The prudent man 215.11

“the man within the breast”

and

“the impartial spectator”

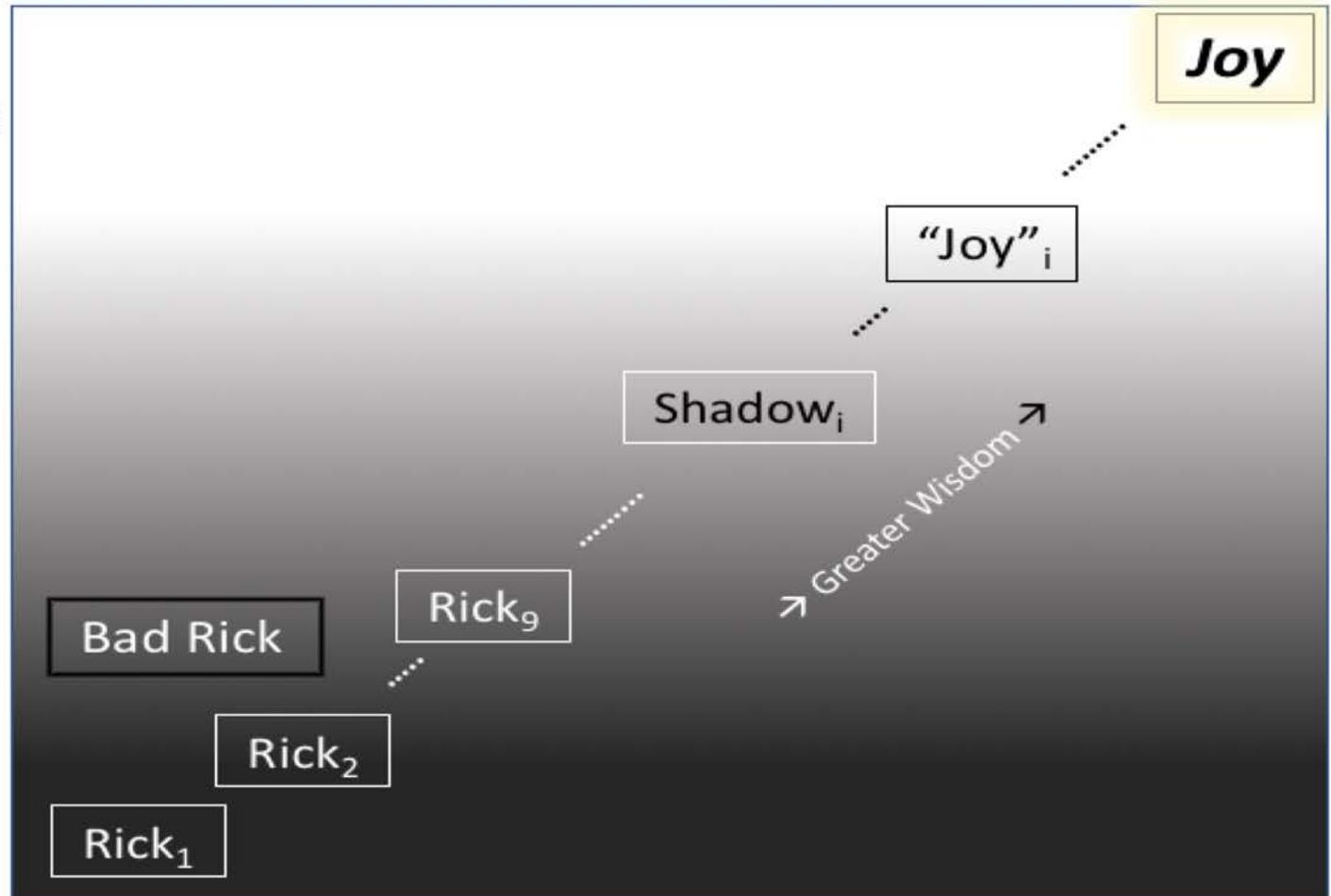
MwB and Joy



Spectators who might be called “impartial”

More intelligent
about the
matter
at hand

Less intelligent
about the
matter
at hand



Less beneficial towards
larger wholes

More beneficial towards
larger wholes

Four Facets of Theism

1. Universal benevolence.
2. Divine providence – God’s creation of the universe.
3. Beholding, seeing our action:
 - A. God’s presence and sentiment is felt, experienced by the individual.
 - B. God’s presence and sentiment are not felt or experienced, but nonetheless supposed to exist.
4. An afterlife or eternity in which justice (in a fullest sense) is completed.

A common distinction

“Deontology”

“Consequentialism”

The Two Goods

Good conduct

Right conduct

Justice, just rules

Virtue

Propriety

Duty

The good of the whole

Action that most benefits society

What serves beneficialness

The correspondence between the two goods

We tacitly maintain correspondence
between the two good.

We manage our words and beliefs to
maintain correspondence.

A system.

Transcending the
deontology/consequentialism distinction.





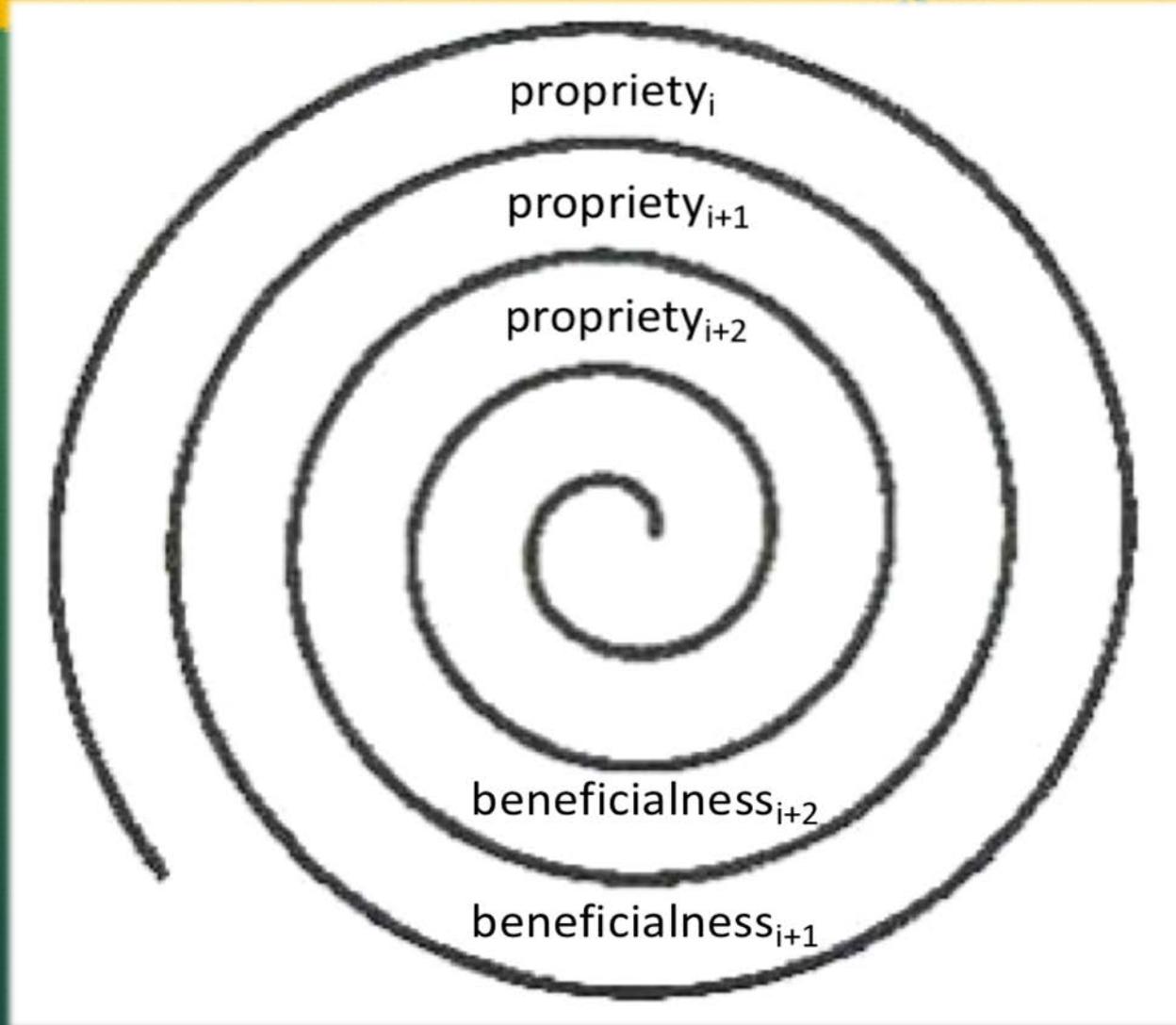
With great power comes great responsibility.





"Look inside yourself.
You are more than what
you have become.
Remember who you are.
Remember..."

The correspondence between the two goods



The holiness of the whole

In the four Scandinavian languages,

god means good,

and the word for God is *Gud*.

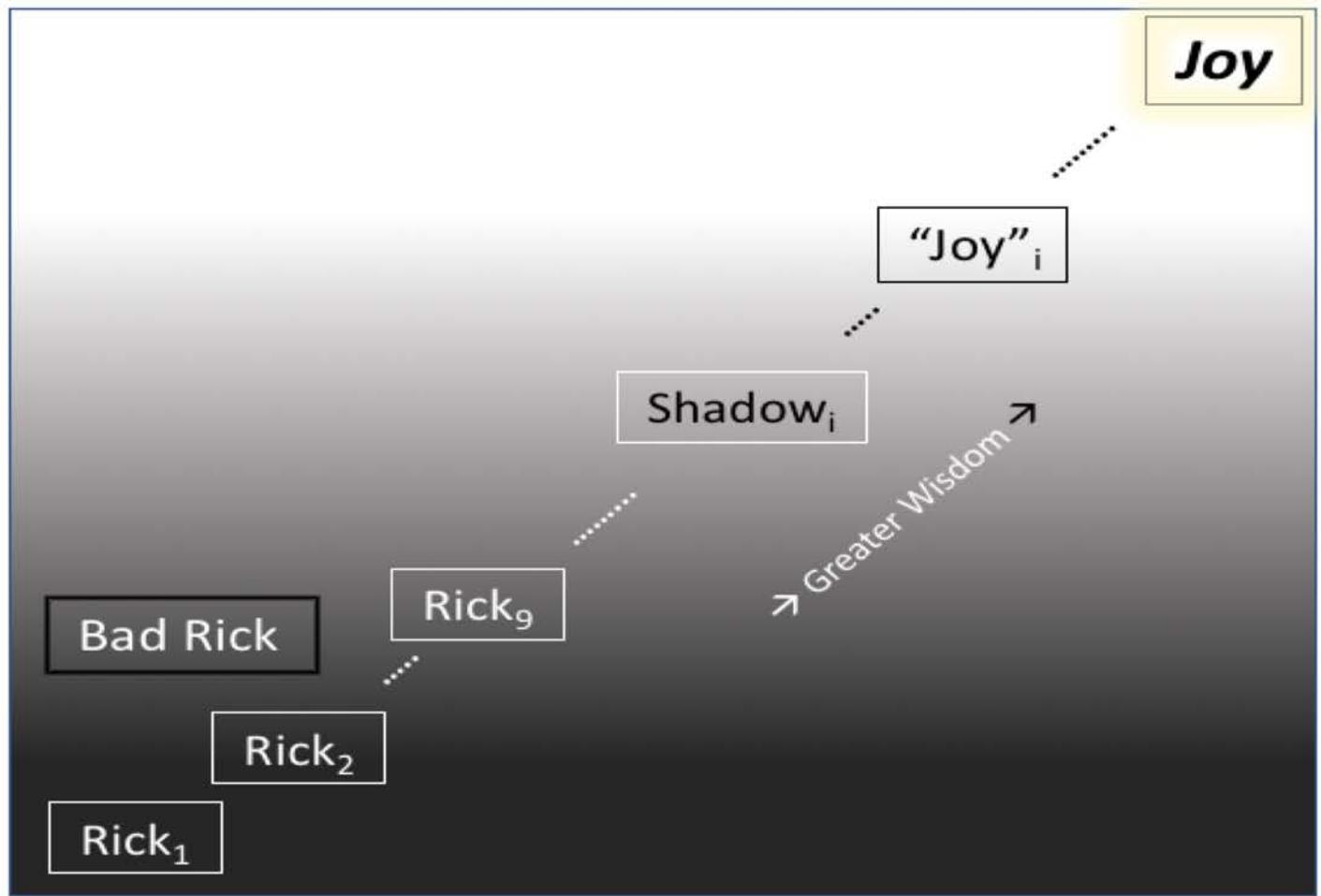
Beneficialness does not
imply a lively feeling of
benevolence.

Joy is universally
benevolent, we are not.

EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

More intelligent
about the
matter
at hand

Less intelligent
about the
matter
at hand



Less beneficial towards
larger wholes

More beneficial towards
larger wholes

“Joy_i”

A characterization of Joy.

Each person falls back on a supposition that “Joy_i” would be aligned with any “Joy_{i+m}” well enough to justify his proceeding with “Joy_i”.

It is a supposition of selfhood coherence, of being on a path toward improvement, of greater wisdom.

“The wise and virtuous man”

Smith describes the usual course of the wise and virtuous man:

‘It is the slow, gradual, and progressive work of the great demigod within the breast... Every day some feature is improved; every day some blemish is corrected’ 247.25.

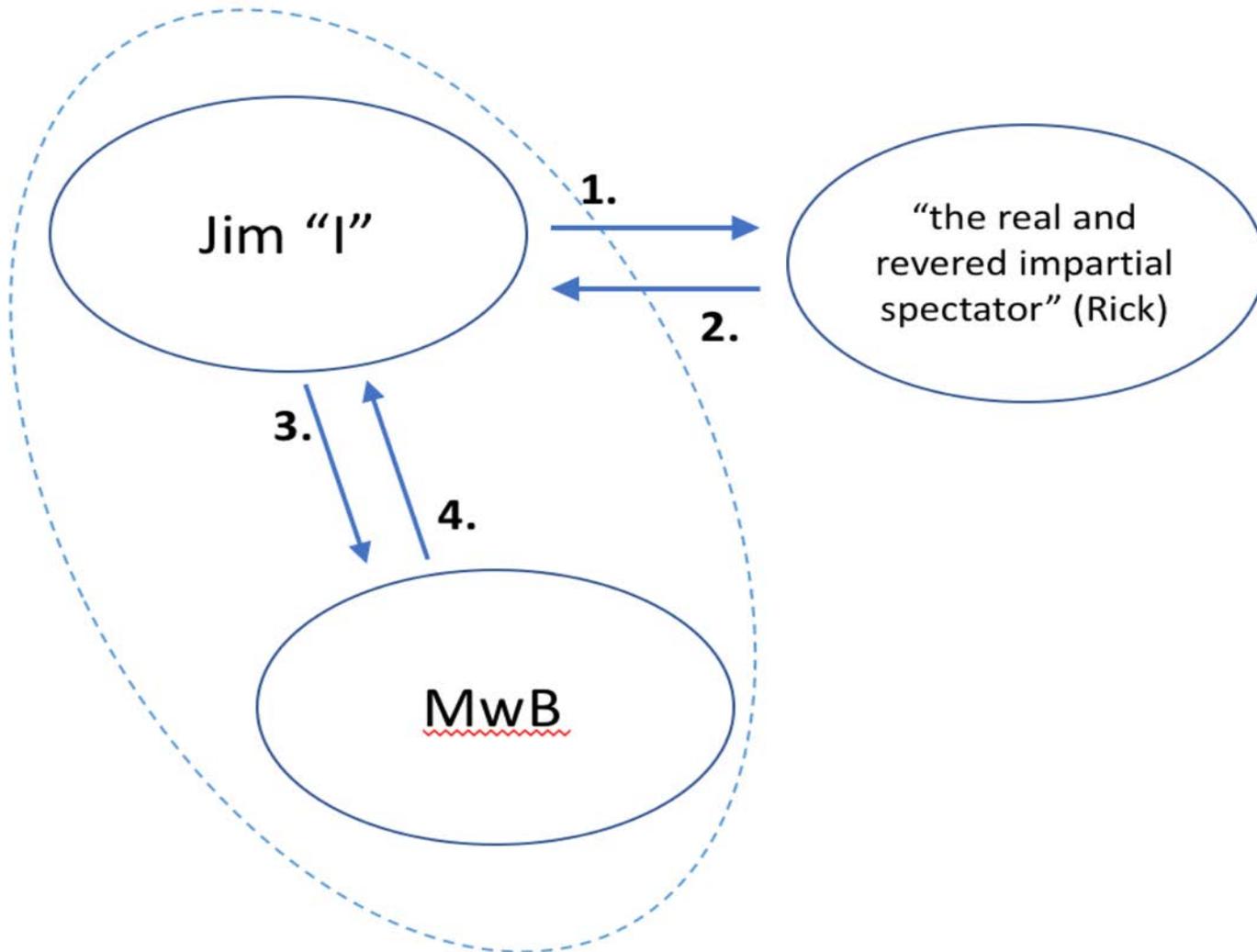
MwB: “supposed impartial
spectator”

Sup-pos'd - posited

Sup-po-sed – purported,
so-called

Self-deceit

156-7



Yikes!

However, one might arrive at a point at which he feels that he has erred drastically, that “Joy_i” is, not merely blemished, but faulty in a significant way.

He *backs up* to return to a former crucial fork in the road, and revise his moral outlook.

But one’s usual course in ethical reasoning is to maintain the supposition and carry on.

“real” and “ideal”

IDE'AL. *adj.* [from *idea.*] Mental; intellectual; not perceived by the senses.

There is a two-fold knowledge of material things; one real, when the thing, and the real impression thereof on our senses, is perceived; the other *ideal*, when the image or idea of a thing, absent in itself, is represented to and considered on the imagination. *Ch. yne's Phil. Prin.*

IDE'ALLY. *adv.* [from *ideal*] Intellectually; mentally.

A transmission is made materially from some parts, and *ideally* from every one. *Brown's Vulgar Errors.*

Polysemy: Meanings of “impartial spectator”

1. Rick₁ – ordinary guy
 2. Rick₉ -- exemplar
 3. Man within the breast_i
 - conscience_i
 - representative of Joy/God
 - “the supposed impartial spectator”
 4. “Joy_i”
 5. Joy
 6. God
- These two are impartial/wise all the way up by assumption/construction/faith

“the liberal plan”

- “the liberal plan of equality, liberty, and justice”
- “the liberal system”



*Thank you for
your attention!*