



# 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*.



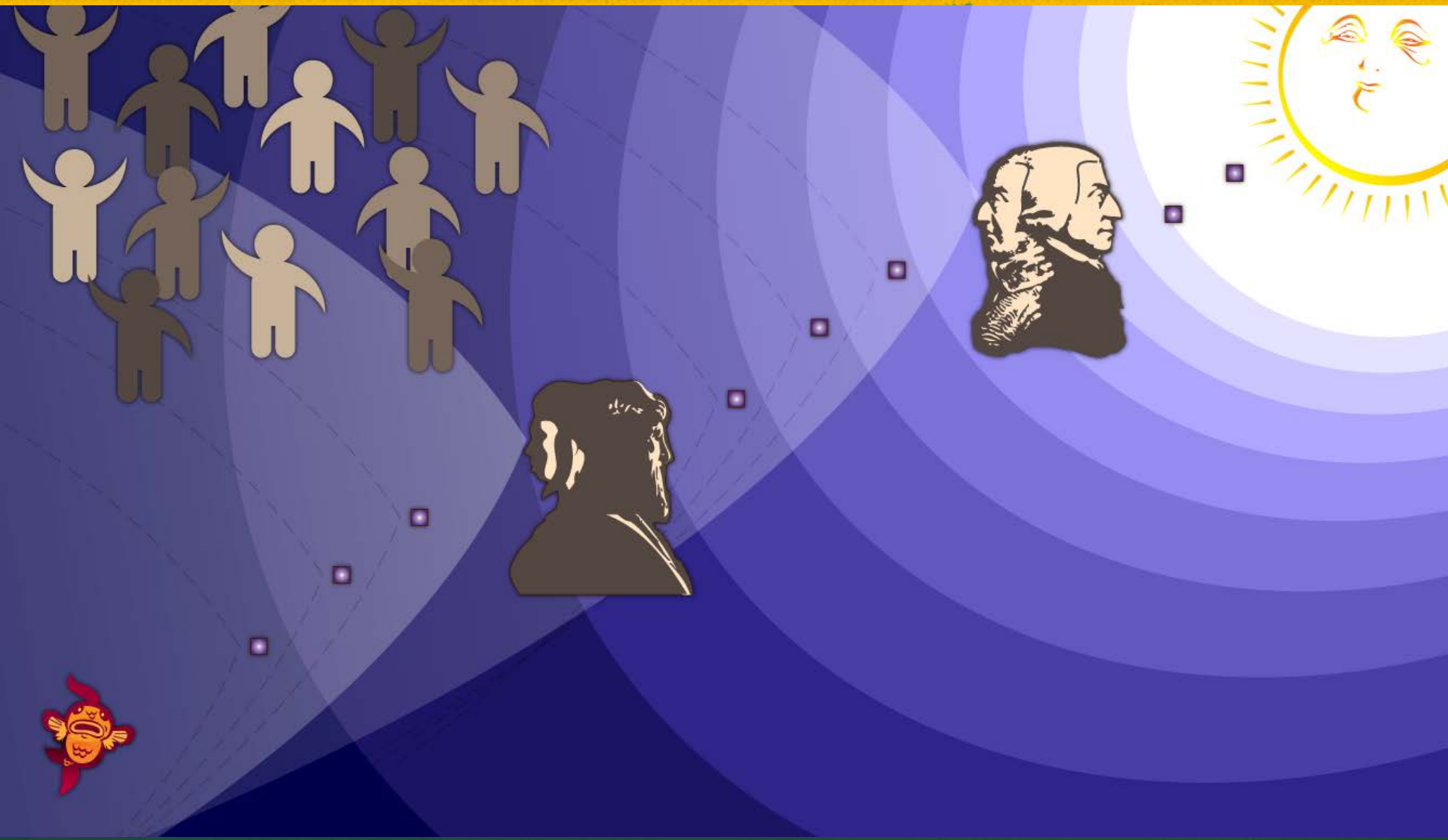
# The prudent man 215.11

“the man within the breast”

and

“the impartial spectator”

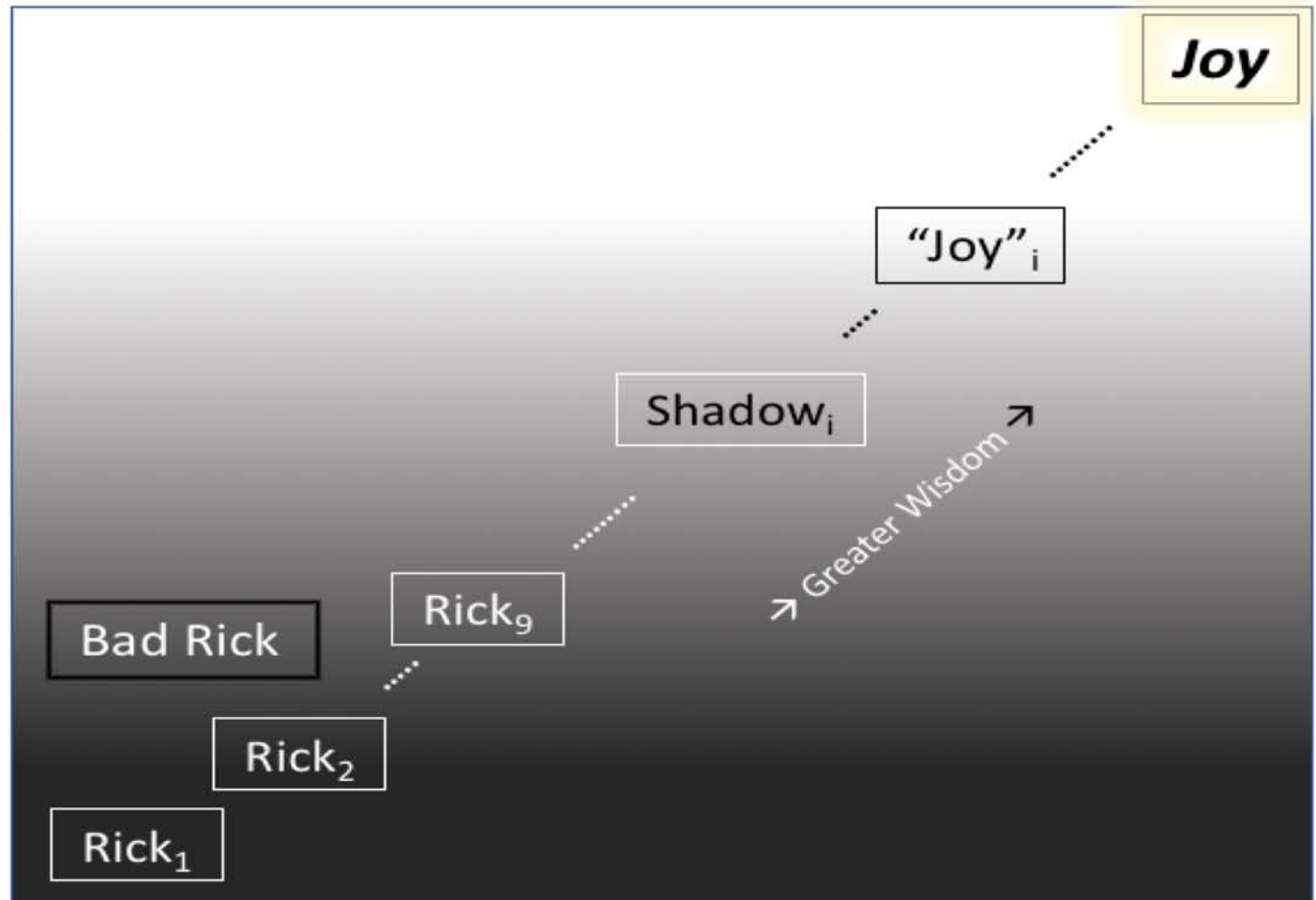
# MwB and Joy



# 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.








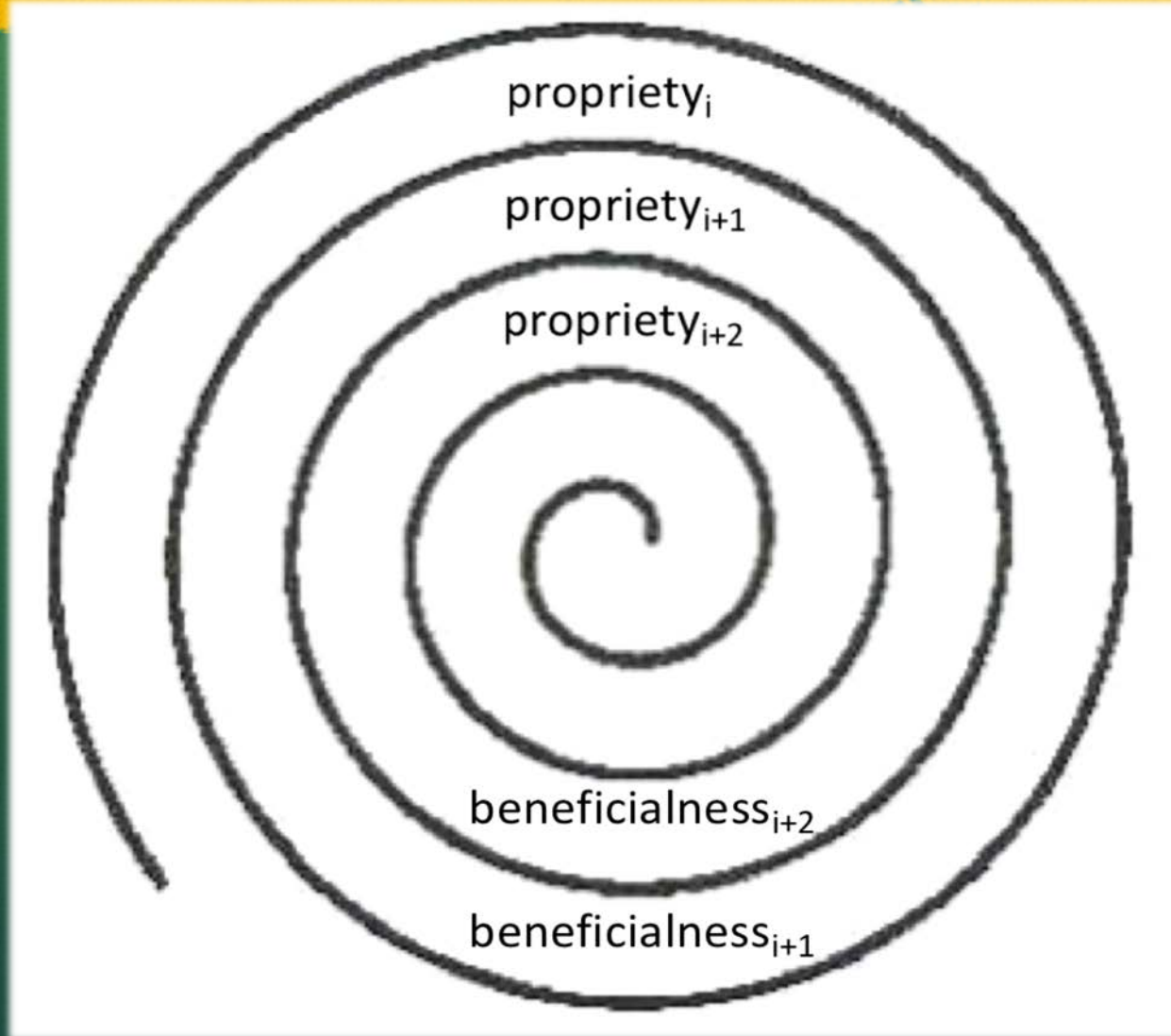
**With great power comes great responsibility.**



The image is a vertical composition. The top half features a large, glowing lion with a thick, golden-brown mane, appearing to be a spirit or a memory. He is set against a soft, ethereal sky with pastel colors of blue, purple, and yellow. The bottom half shows a smaller, darker lion with a black mane, seen from the side, looking up towards the glowing lion. He is in a savanna setting with tall green grass. The entire scene is framed by a yellow border at the top and green borders on the left and right sides.

"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*.

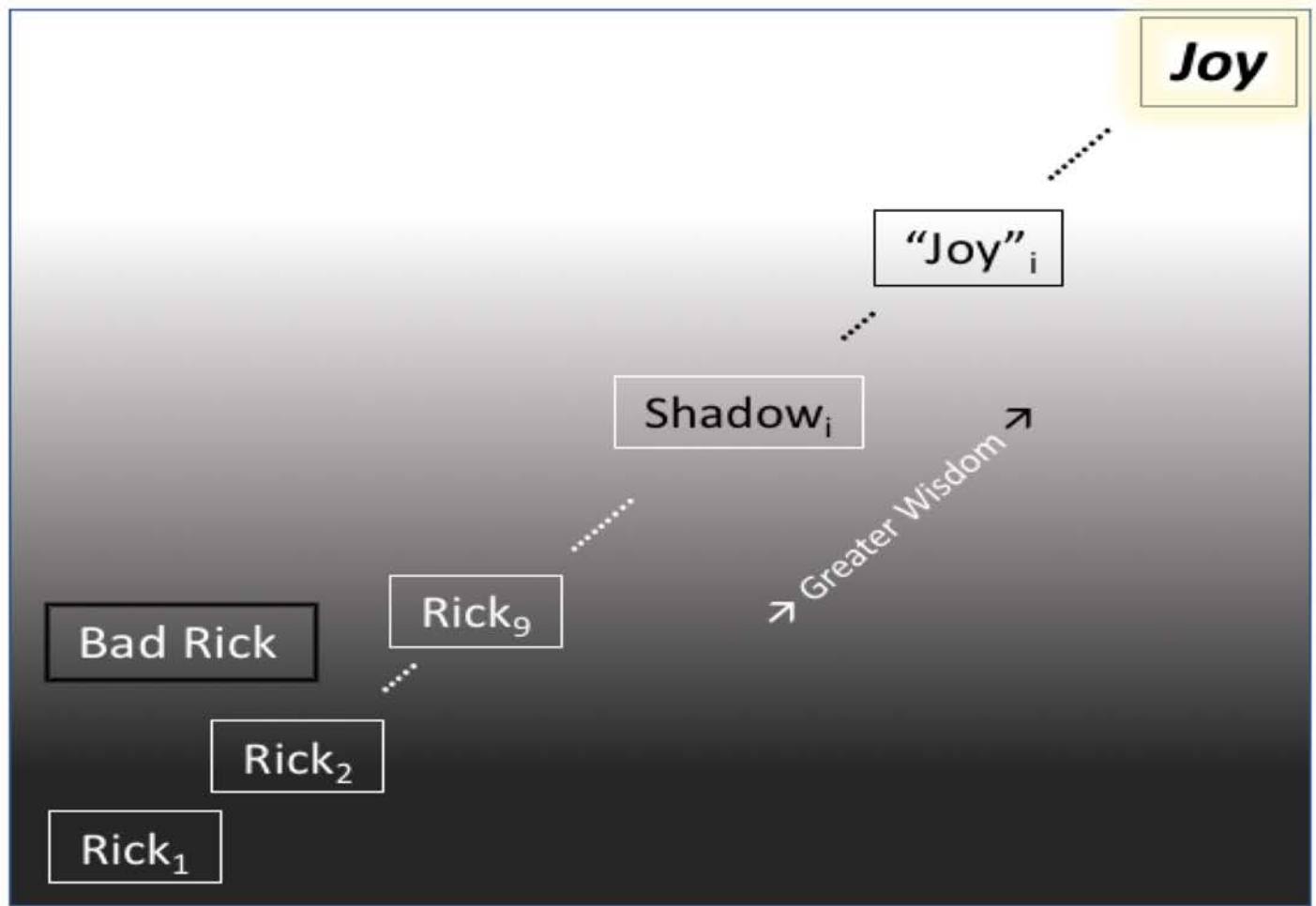
Beneficialness does not  
imply a lively feeling of  
benevolence.

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  
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# “Joy<sub>i</sub>”

*A characterization of Joy.*

Each person falls back on a supposition that “Joy<sub>i</sub>” would be aligned with any “Joy<sub>i+m</sub>” well enough to justify his proceeding with “Joy<sub>i</sub>”.

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.

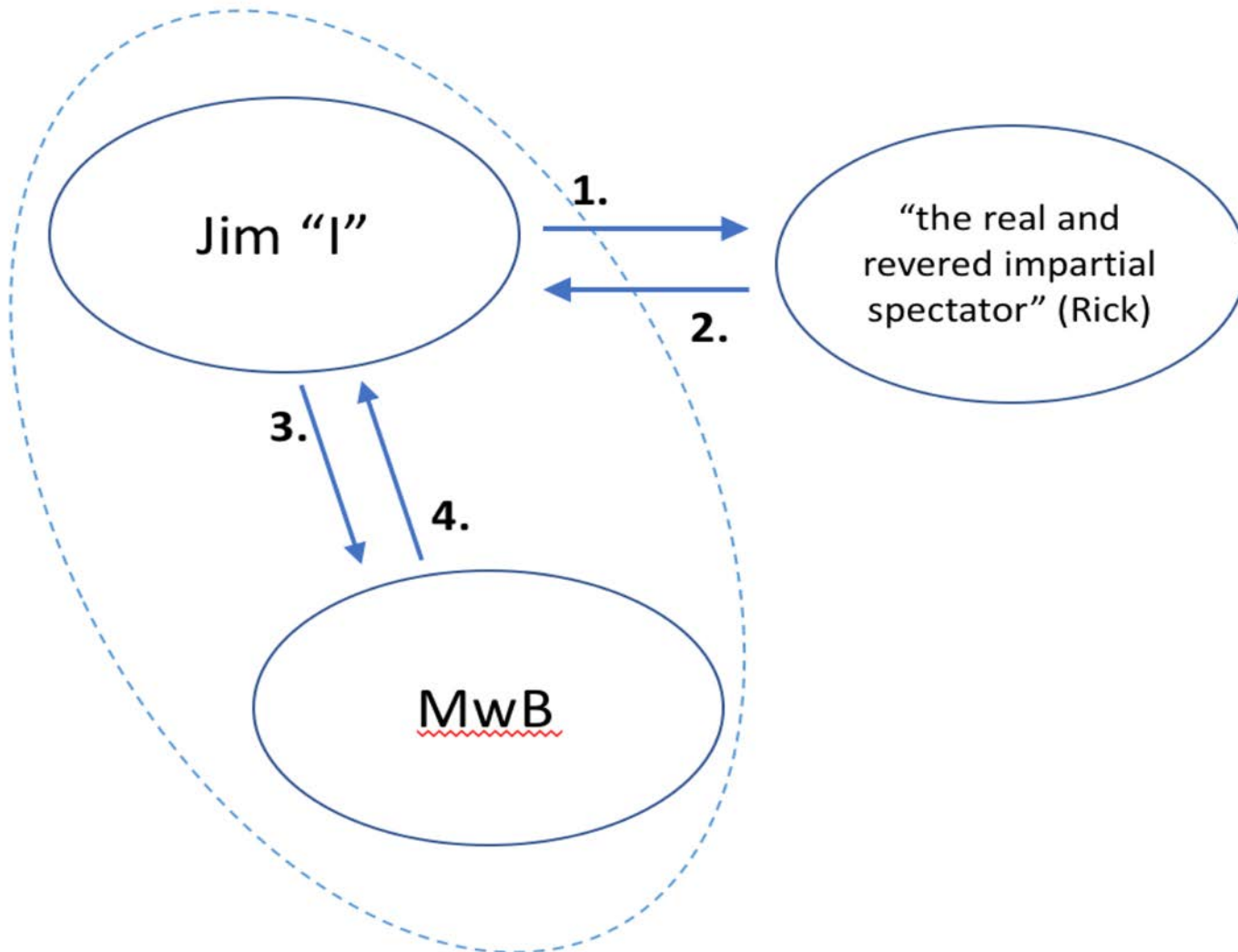
MwB: “supposed impartial  
spectator”

*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<sub>i</sub>” 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. Rick<sub>1</sub> – ordinary guy
  2. Rick<sub>9</sub> -- exemplar
  3. Man within the breast<sub>i</sub>
    - conscience<sub>i</sub>
    - representative of Joy/God
    - “the supposed impartial spectator”
  4. “Joy<sub>i</sub>”
  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!*