

His Memory Has Misled Him? Two Supposed Errors in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*¹

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Abstract: D.D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, the editors of the Glasgow Edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, document numerous errors made by Adam Smith. We examine two alleged errors, both regarding stories found in Cicero, to evaluate the extent to which they might be esoteric: one involving Parmenides and Plato, the other involving Ulysses. We argue there is good reason to suspect that the first error is deliberate and contains hidden meaning, but that, in the second case, Raphael and Macfie are mistaken in their claim that Smith erred. Finally, given Smith's discussion of dissimulation, we comment on his probable attitude toward defensive esotericism.

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Introduction

D.D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, the editors of the Glasgow Edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (referred to as TMS in this paper), document numerous errors Adam Smith makes throughout that text. They often attribute the errors to memory lapses by Smith: "Smith's

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memory has misled him.” Sometimes the error is a misquotation (Smith, 1982a, pp. 102 n.5, 259 n.34), sometimes it is an error of reference (242 n.9, 253 n.27, 322 n.1), sometimes they speculate about what Smith may have been alluding to and then argue that his allusions may be confused, conflated, or misremembered (14 n.1, 44 n.1, 242 n.9, 253 n.27, 254 n.30).

We build on the work done by Raphael and Macfie to examine two of these supposed errors to evaluate the degree to which they might have been deliberate and esoteric in nature. The first involves incorrectly substituting Parmenides for Antimachus into a story Cicero relates in his work *Brutus*, a story in which the only remaining auditor is Plato. The second involves the inclusion of Ulysses in a list of individuals Cicero gives in *De Officiis*. Both cases derive from texts by Cicero.

In his work *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing*, Arthur Melzer explains that “implausible blunders,” “errors of fact,” and “misquotations” have been common techniques of esoteric writing (Melzer, 2014, p.55). As he explains, however, the idea of demonstrating esotericism is problematic, since presenting hidden meanings in a way that can be revealed demonstratively may vitiate any purpose one might have in writing esoterically in the first place (Melzer, 2014). Our goal is to present the two errors we examine clearly, analyze them, and point to interesting aspects, not to insist that the errors are deliberate and esoteric. In each case, we comment on the likelihood Smith made the putative error by accident (that it was, for instance, a genuine lapse of memory), the likelihood that the error would be noticed by a superior reader, and possible meanings Smith may have intended, or motives Smith may have had, if he did make the error deliberately.

When we discuss the “superior reader,” we mean one of those readers who “love to think, those who, from an early age, could always be heard to say ‘now wait...don’t tell me’” (Melzer,

2014, p. 220). The superior reader is one who can recognize a puzzle and is tantalized by it. He wants to solve it himself rather than simply being handed the answer by the author. If the author is writing esoterically, he wants the superior reader to be rewarded with the puzzle's completion through the reader's skill. It creates a "friendly witness" for the author (*ibid*). The superior reader is one who: 1) recognizes a puzzle has been placed before him, 2) is enticed to solve said puzzle to get the underlying message, and 3) is able to solve the puzzle for himself.

In evaluating the likelihood of deliberateness, it may be valuable, firstly, to tally the instances in which Raphael and Macfie believe Smith misremembers or misrepresents a work he alludes to or cites.² We count 33 instances in all. A majority, 21 out of the 33 (63.6%), are concentrated in Parts VI and VII, which account for just 37.7% of the pages in the book. Fourteen of these errors (42.4%) appeared in the 6th edition for the first time. That the two supposed errors we examine are among these 14 may lead to a general suspicion that the errors resulted, first, from Smith's rush to finish the 6th edition, published just a few weeks prior to his death (Smith, 1982a, p. Intro. 34), and, second, from the fact that Smith's death precluded the possibility of correcting these errors in further editions.

Raphael and Macfie also provide a 32-page appendix in which they catalogue minor alterations and errata Smith made throughout the editions. Each page consists of 40 to 50 entries of such alterations, the whole appendix, therefore, lists approximately 1440 "minor variants." These variants consist mostly of changes of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. There are also variants in phraseology. There does not appear in this list any correction of an error of reference. In the 33 footnotes referred to above, however, Raphael and Macfie do catalogue several such cases that may be of interest.

² An Excel file documenting these errors is available upon request.

First, Smith misquotes Cardinal Retz and Samuel Butler and misattributes philosophical ideas to Hume and Hutcheson. Given that none of these errors appeared in the 6th edition for the first time, Smith had opportunity to edit them, but did not, which may indicate either that he found the errors relatively unimportant to alter or, more interestingly, that he was using these thinkers as useful though perhaps misleading foils against which he could contrast his own philosophy. Matson, Doran, and Klein (2019), in fact, argue just this regarding Smith's mischaracterizations of Hume in Part IV of TMS.

Second, when discussing historical episodes of suicide, Smith makes erroneous claims regarding the deaths of four historical figures (Smith, 1982a, pp. 284-286). He conflates two Greeks with similar sounding names and mis-identifies the form of death of the other three.

Third, he describes an ancient Scottish law, which, according to Raphael and Macfie, never existed (Smith, 1982a, p. 100.4). The remaining 27 footnotes consist of Raphael and Macfie speculating as to what Smith is referring to. In these cases they either cannot find the reference at all, or suggest that Smith has made a mistake on the assumption that they have identified the relevant reference.

Lastly, Smith removed a reference to La Rochefoucauld that he had earlier coupled with Mandeville and his "licentious system" (ibid, pp. 127n.12, 308-309 n.1). But this case seems, rather, to be a matter of interpreting the whole tenor of La Rochefoucauld differently, and accommodating a friendly descendant, rather than a mistake of reference (Smith, 1987 p. 233 n.4).

Next, we should note cases where Smith expresses opposition to leading people astray and to writing with a hidden, double doctrine. First, in his discussion of prudence, Smith writes:

The prudent man is always sincere, and he feels horror at the very thought of exposing himself to the disgrace which attends upon the detection of falsehood. But though always

sincere, he is not always frank and open; and though he never tells any thing but the truth, he does not always think himself bound, when not properly called upon, to tell the whole truth. (Smith, 1982a, p. 214.8)

Second, Smith writes that we are often mortified to lead others astray as a result of our own error, since it reveals some want of judgment. But he writes, “The man who sometimes misleads from mistake, however, is widely different from him who is capable of wilfully deceiving. The former may safely be trusted upon many occasions; the latter very seldom upon any” (Smith, 1982a, p. 337.27).

Third, in discussing the value of frankness and openness Smith continues, that they generate trust and confidence in others, while concealment results in the opposite:

We trust the man who seems willing to trust us. We see clearly, we think, the road by which he means to conduct us, and we abandon ourselves with pleasure to his guidance and direction. Reserve and concealment, on the contrary, call forth diffidence. We are afraid to follow the man who is going we do not know where. The great pleasure of conversation and society, besides arising from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds....But this most delightful harmony cannot be obtained unless there is a free communication of sentiments and opinions. (Smith, 1982a, 337.28)

Lastly, in a very unusual and exceedingly long footnote in his essay on the “History of Astronomy,” Smith writes that it is a “strange fancy” to imagine that in Plato’s writings, “there was a double doctrine; and that they were intended to seem to mean one thing, while at bottom they meant a very different, which the writings of no man in his senses ever were, or ever could be intended to do” (Smith, 1982b p.122, Smith’s footnote). In fact, Melzer counts Smith’s comments here to be one major exception to the belief, common in Smith’s time, that many sensible writers had, indeed, employed esoteric writing to do just what Smith denies (Melzer, 2014, p.28).³

³ For more nuance on Smith’s probable views on esoteric writing, see also Melzer’s footnotes 44 and 45.

We should finally note that Smith had an impressive knowledge of classical literature—a knowledge that was “far from being ornamental” (Scott, 1939, p. 3). He “learnt very many passages by heart,” which “till the end of his life, he could quote freely from memory” in competition, for instance, with his colleague at the customs-house, James Edgar (Scott, 1939, p. 5 and Vivenza, 2001, p.1). Smith had an especially close familiarity with Cicero (Vivenza, 2001, pp. 1-7), and that Smith could expect similarly cultivated contemporaries to share this familiarity supports the notion that Smith could use allusions to such literature to alert superior readers to puzzles via intentional mistakes. As Scott points out, on the other hand, Smith’s close familiarity with classical works also occasionally led Smith to write “titles of books or passages from [memory] without verification,” capturing the sense accurately, but failing to be “textually accurate.” It is, therefore, entirely possible that Smith’s familiarity with the passages we discuss led him to err unintentionally, either from overconfidence, or because he was concerned primarily with accuracy of sense and not with reproducing the original text (Scott, 1937, p.5).

Yet Smith considered himself a careful writer. Despite ill health, he wanted to leave TMS in the most perfect form he could before he died. In describing his “intense application” to drafting the 6th Edition of TMS in a letter to Thomas Cadell, Smith wrote that he took great care to craft every line of TMS to his satisfaction:

As I consider my tenure of this life as extremely precarious...the best thing, I think, I can do is leave those [works] I have already published in the best and most perfect state behind me. I am a slow a very slow workman, who do and undo everything I write at least half a dozen of times before I can be tolerably pleased with it.... (Smith, 1987, pp. 310-311)

We think a proper respect to Smith as a thinker and writer, therefore, invites us to consider the possibility that the two supposed errors we examine below were not instances of Homer nodding.

Upon examination, we come to the conclusion there is good reason to suspect the first supposed error is esoteric, while the second supposed error is no error of Smith's at all, but rather an error of interpretation by Raphael and Macfie. The contributions of this paper, therefore, are, first, to explicate the nature of a curious error in Smith that may be esoteric, and second, to correct an error of interpretation of Smith by Raphael and Macfie that deals with the question of when it is proper to dissimulate. Finally, as it deals with Smith's views on when it might be appropriate to dissimulate in cases of self-defense and just revenge, our discussion of the second error helps to shed light on Smith's probable attitude toward defensive esotericism.

The First Supposed Error: Parmenides and Plato

In Part VI, Section III, in responding to a possible misinterpretation of his theory of sympathy—that it promotes praise and the “applause of the multitude” as the standard of praiseworthiness—Smith writes:

To a real wise man the judicious and well-weighed approbation of a single wise man, gives more heartfelt satisfaction than all the noisy applauses of ten thousand ignorant though enthusiastic admirers.

He continues by telling a tale:

He [the real wise man] may say with Parmenides, who, upon reading a philosophical discourse before a public assembly at Athens, and observing, that, except Plato, the whole company had left him, continued, notwithstanding, to read on, and said that Plato alone was audience sufficient for him. (Smith, 1982a, p. 253.31)

One glaring problem is, there never could have been such a meeting and Smith would have known that. In their footnote, Raphael and Macfie write:

Smith's memory has misled him. Cicero, *Brutus*, li.91, tells the story about Antimachus reading a long poem before an audience that eventually consisted only of Plato. The philosopher Parmenides (even if in his old age he met the young Socrates, as Plato's

dialogue *Parmenides* supposes) must have died before Plato was born. (Smith, 1982a, p. 253 n.27)

Smith's thus makes two changes to the story: he substitutes Parmenides for Antimachus and "a philosophical discourse" for a poem.⁴ (See Appendix 1 for the relevant passage from Cicero's *Brutus*.)

It seems unlikely to us Smith would have made this error of mistaken identity. Anyone moderately familiar with Plato and Parmenides and their contexts would be struck by the incongruity of the story, if he were to stop to think about it.

Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* is interpreted to place Parmenides' birth at 515 BCE; Diogenes Laertius gives an even earlier date (540 BCE) (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 1983, p. 240). Using Plato's dialogue as the more conservative figure, and given Plato was born in 427 BCE, Parmenides would have been born 88 years prior to Plato. Figuring Plato would have to be 20 years old at least for Parmenides to have been able to consider him a worthy judge, Smith's rendition would have made Parmenides, as he addressed Plato, *at least 108 years old*.

An analogous experience for a modern reader would be if someone were to write that Adam Smith lectured to J. S. Mill and found Mill to be a worthy judge of Smith's own work! A general reader might miss the implausibility of such an episode, but someone aware of the history of political economy and philosophy would know that such a meeting could not have happened. (In fact, Smith and Mill were closer in age than Plato and Parmenides—a difference of 83 years versus 88).

⁴ We thank an anonymous reviewer who pointed out that Raphael and Macfie err in their footnote: the *Brutus* quotation comes from section 191, not 91. The same reviewer also made the useful point that Parmenides' famous "philosophical discourse", *The Way of Truth and the Way of Appearance*, was composed in the form of a poem, making Smith's latter change from Cicero's story more a matter of emphasis than an error.

That Smith would have been aware of the generational gap between Parmenides and Plato should be evident from the general erudition in philosophy and classical literature manifest throughout his writings. Smith not only possessed three complete works of Plato in his library, he also owned a stand-alone edition of Plato's *Parmenides* in Latin (*Platonis Parmenidis*), which may indicate a special interest in that dialogue and perhaps a particular familiarity with it (Mizuta, 1967). The *Parmenides* dialogue of Plato is one of the chief sources on Parmenides, and it is a very unusual dialogue, in that it gives Parmenides the senior and leading role usually given to Socrates, and Socrates the role of fledgling. Knowledge of Parmenides comes inseparably with knowledge that he was much senior to Socrates, and hence could never have lectured to Plato.

It might be argued that Smith may have used Plato's name as synonymous with that of Socrates, who is reported to have met Parmenides in Plato's dialogue. There is no evidence of Smith doing this elsewhere in his writings, however. General references to Socrates' dialogues or philosophy appear five times in Smith's writings: once in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Smith, 1982c, p. 123.138), twice in the *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Smith, 1982b, pp. 53.6 and 124.3), once in the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Smith, 1985, pp. 59-60.146), and once in TMS (Smith, 1982a, p. 251.28, see also footnote 14 on the same page). In each case, Smith explicitly distinguishes Socrates from Plato, using language such as the following: "Socrates in Plato is always made to say: having considered this thing, we are next to consider such another thing" (Smith, 1985, p. 60.146). Similarly, when referring to Plato, he does not seem to conflate Plato with Socrates.

Irrespective of Smith's familiarity with this particular dialogue of Plato, it would be bizarre for Smith to be ignorant of the generational gap between Parmenides and Plato, given

that he was a professor of moral philosophy. Smith explicitly writes in his *History of Astronomy* in the section on “The Origin of Philosophy” that Parmenides was one of the “antesocratic sages,” showing he was aware that Parmenides preceded Socrates, and also that Plato was of “the school of Socrates” indicating his awareness that Socrates was of a prior generation to Plato (Smith, 1982, p. 53.6).

Another possible explanation, again, is that Smith simply made an unwitting mistake. In the paragraph immediately following the Parmenides story, Smith has another case of mistaken identity. As an illustration of a point on excessive self-estimation, Smith tells the story of the Macedonian general Parmenio who served under Philip and Alexander the Great. Smith tells us of a quote by Philip: “Let us drink, my friends, we may do it with safety, for Parmenio never drinks” (Smith, 1982a, p. 254.32). In their footnote to this sentence, Raphael and Macfie write: “Smith’s memory has misled him. He seems to be conflating two similar remarks made by Philip, not about Parmenion, but about another one of his generals, Antipater” (ibid., n.30).

With this instance of a second error of mistaken identity shortly after the first, one might conclude this section was written in haste by Smith and there was not time to check his work as thoroughly as he might. Such an explanation is reasonable, but we think not as likely. The only similarity between these two errors is they are errors of mistaken identity. The oddity of the errors is not of the same order. Both Antipater and Parmenion existed at the same time: they were colleagues in the same army. Undoubtedly, they repeatedly show up in the same stories. To mistake one for the other would not be unusual. However, to mistake Parmenides and Antimachus in this story, is a much stranger error because of the timeline. Again, Parmenides and Plato were more than a generation apart, and Smith had elsewhere referred to Parmenides as an “antesocratic” sage.

For these same reasons, it is likely this error would be caught by someone Smith would have considered a superior reader.⁵ As Vivenza points out in her assessment of Adam Smith and the classics, during Smith's time, "classical culture was the common heritage of all cultivated individuals" who would be expected to recognize various allusions without modern standards of quotation or citation (Vivenza, 2001, p.2 n.5). Hutcheson, for instance, stated that "the educated reader would have been able to tell at once how much of his work was garnered from other sources, from Cicero and from Aristotle" (ibid.). Smith's "vast knowledge of the history of rhetoric and of literature was much admired" by his contemporaries; they would most likely have shared Griswold's view that "[a]ny connections between his rhetoric and the views he wished to communicate should be taken as deliberately crafted on his part" (1999, p.43).

But crucial to assessing whether the Parmenides error was deliberate is the matter of motive. What might have been Smith's motive for deliberately substituting in Parmenides for Antimachus? The story illustrates the contrast between the approval of an undiscerning crowd and a discerning individual. Smith's moral and aesthetic theory emphasizes the idea that man wants, not only to be approved of, but to be worthy of approval. And this worthiness is measured, not by the approval of just anyone, but by the approval of a wise, informed, and impartial spectator. It is not the actual approval of any living man that we most deeply desire. Rather, the wise man wants to be thought worthy by the best judges, those who *would* or ought to approve of our work, conduct, and character.

⁵ To our minds, Wightman and Bryce's (1982, p. 26) argument that Smith's contemporaries would have been less knowledgeable about the substance of Greek literature than were Humanist scholars of three centuries prior, does not bear directly on this claim. Nor does Vivenza's (2001, p.7) point that, while Smith had engaged in "a systematic, first-hand reading of Cicero," he lacked knowledge of Plato and Aristotle in the original Greek. Again, the kind of knowledge required on the part of Smith and his readers is not a deep familiarity with the details of Greek texts in their original, but with general knowledge of the gap in Parmenides' and Plato's ages in general or a familiarity with Cicero, a well-known Latin scholar, in particular.

In the relevant passage from *Brutus*, Cicero is discussing the various natures of messages to audiences. Antimachus' poem, he states, is for Plato rather than the masses because "a poem *full of obscure allusions* can from its nature only win the approbation of the few; an oration meant for a general public must aim to win the assent of the throng" (Cicero, 1939, p. 163. Emphasis added. See Appendix 1 for the full quotation). By highlighting, incorrectly—and in his own obscure allusion to a passage from Cicero—the first part of the story (Antimachus reading the poem) but not the second part (why and from whom the poem deserves approbation), Smith may be signaling to the superior reader to consider the allusions of Smith's own writing and ask the question: Whom is Smith writing for? The assent of the throng, or the approbation of the few? Who really is the wise man?

Smith's substitution presents Parmenides' work as being judged by Plato, the judge that Parmenides would most approve of being approved by, despite the fact that Parmenides could not have actually known Plato. By choosing a judge out of time, Smith could indicate that the best and most ideal judges of our lives and work, those against whose judgment we should seek to judge ourselves, may have come before us, or may judge us after we are gone.

We find it compelling to think Smith viewed Plato as exemplary of the kind of wise spectator he would wish to judge his own philosophical work. Smith shows great admiration for Plato throughout TMS (e.g. pp. 210, 270).⁶ That Smith would associate Plato's name with the model of the best judge is manifest in his discussion of the three senses of justice (Smith, 1982a, pp. 269-270.10). After discussing commutative and distributive justice, Smith discusses a third

⁶ In a long footnote in his *History of Ancient Logics and Metaphysics* (EPS 121-123n.), Smith exoterically says that Aristotle is "much superior" to Plato in everything but eloquence and appears, again, to reject the whole concept of esotericism. We are unsure what to make of this footnote. It could itself, of course, contain an esoteric meaning.

sense of the word, which Klein (Klein, Forthcoming) calls “estimative justice.” Such justice consists in:

valu[ing] any particular object [such as an action, a poem, or a philosophical tract] with that degree of esteem, or to pursue it with that degree of ardour which to the impartial spectator it may appear to deserved or to be naturally fitted for exciting....In this sense, what is called justice means the same thing with exact and perfect propriety of conduct and behavior.

Smith associates this last form of justice above all with the name Plato: “It is in this last sense that Plato evidently understands what he calls justice, and which, therefore, according to him, comprehends in it the perfection of every sort of virtue.” Smith goes so far as to claim that Plato’s account of virtue “coincides in every respect with what we have said above [in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*] concerning the propriety of conduct” (Smith, 1982a, p. 270.11).

Plato’s exalted position in the history of philosophy and in Smith’s own estimation, his wisdom, and his eloquence, make him an excellent representative of the impartial spectator for Smith, and a natural symbol for such a wise judge, wherever and whenever he might be in eternity’s coordinates. Just as a reader of Smith might ask “what would Smith do?” Smith might have asked himself “What would Plato do?” That Smith substitutes a philosopher (Parmenides) and a philosophical discourse as the object estimated by Plato in the story supports the idea that Smith intended the story to draw special attention to his own philosophical work as the object for estimation, punctuating his abstract discussion of that idea.

Beyond expressing this revelation of his admiration for Plato, and his hope that Plato would judge his work worthy, Smith’s story speaks to his desire to write for the ages and to speak to the most worthy judges of his writing, not only those from his own time, but after he is gone. Intentionally creating this incongruity would allow Smith to wink to a superior reader—a reader who read Smith’s work with care and attention and who possessed the requisite

knowledge to see the incongruity—that Smith cared for her judgment more than for that of those who would simply pass by such an error from ignorance or inattention. It would communicate to such a reader a deep longing to connect with other such superior readers as his judge, illustrating the very message Smith is trying to communicate in this part of TMS.

The Second Supposed Error: Ulysses and Solon

The second supposed error appears in Part VI, Section III. After discussing how self-command can be used in different ways, Smith lists cases in which people of “no contemptible judgment” have admired the strength of mind required for dissimulation of one’s true intent in times of “great provocation”:

The dissimulation of Catharine of Medicis is often celebrated by the profound historian Davila; that of Lord Digby, afterwards, Earl of Bristol, by the grave and conscientious Lord Clarendon; that of the first Ashley Earl of Shaftsbury, by the judicious Mr. Locke.

Smith then discusses how Cicero estimates such deceitful character and the examples Cicero gives:

Even Cicero seems to consider this deceitful character, not indeed as of the highest dignity, but as not unsuitable to a certain flexibility of manners, which, he thinks, may, notwithstanding, be, upon the whole, both agreeable and respectable. He exemplifies it by the characters of Homer’s Ulysses, of the Athenian Themistocles, of the Spartan Lysander, and of the Roman Marcus Crassus. (Smith, 1982a, p. 241.12)

The apparent error here is that Smith has inserted Ulysses into Cicero’s list of exemplars of a principle, where Cicero does not exactly refer to him. (See Appendix 2 for the relevant passage from Cicero’s *De Officiis*, or *On Duties*.)

As Raphael and Macfie note, Smith is referring to a passage in *De Officiis* (I.xxx.107-9) in which Cicero, “discussing general and particular propriety, distinguishes between universal and individual human characters” (TMS 241, n.9). These two “characters” refer to the nature or

roles we share as human beings in general and to our particular nature and roles as individuals, respectively. It implies that certain acts and qualities of character are proper to all, while others are proper to individuals in varying degrees. Smith's "flexibility of manners" refers, presumably, to the particularity of what the impartial spectator would find most proper in each instance in light of the particular personalities and circumstances of the situation. As Cicero writes, "There are innumerable other dissimilarities of nature and customs, which nonetheless must not be condemned in the least" (Cicero, 2016, p. 67). Dissimulation may, therefore, sometimes be proper in certain circumstances to certain degrees.

It is in the context of discussing the contingent propriety of dissimulation that Smith inserts Ulysses into Cicero's list next to Themistocles, Marcus Crassus, and Lysander. Raphael and Macfie describe the context of the passage:

Listing types of individual character, Cicero writes of shrewdness with an ability to conceal and dissimulate, citing Themistocles among his examples. He then speaks of a more extreme craftiness, with Marcus Crassus and Lysander as two of his examples. Cicero does not cite Ulysses in this chapter. (Smith, 1982a, p. 242, n.9)

Raphael and Macfie acknowledge, however, that Cicero does, in fact, cite Ulysses shortly after the passage in question (three sections, or about a page and a half later in Newton's translation). There Cicero discusses the particular propriety of Ulysses' patience and magnanimity in suffering insults on his journey and in his own household, compared to Ajax who would rather kill himself than bear such insults. Cicero's discussion of Ulysses and Ajax does serve as another illustration of the broader discussion of universal versus particular propriety, but not explicitly to exemplify deceitful character and dissimulation. (See Appendix 3 for the full quotation.) Raphael and Macfie write, while Cicero does not cite Ulysses in the passage in question, "in xxxi.113 he describes Ulysses as an example of endurance" (Smith, 1982a, p.242 n.9).

Raphael and Macfie suggest that Smith probably conflated a reference to Ulysses much later in *De Officiis*, and substitutes Ulysses for Solon, who does appear closely to the other names in Cicero's list. They find this conflation plausible because both references involve Ulysses and Solon feigning madness to achieve their purposes:

In III.xxvi.97, however, [Cicero] refers to the dissimulation of Ulysses in feigning madness to escape military service. Smith, writing from memory, has probably confused this last with what Cicero says, at I.xxx.108, of Solon, who was classed with Themistocles and is called 'especially crafty and shrewd in having feigned madness in order to save his life' and serve his state. (Smith, 1982a, 242 n.9)

Ulysses famously feigned madness to avoid being conscripted to go to Troy, until Palamedes placed his baby son, Telemachus, before his plow, causing him to have to stop and reveal he was perfectly sane. Solon pretended to be insane to avoid a law forbidding militaristic propaganda regarding the war with Salamis so he could write a poem promoting the war, which eventually won Athens possession of Salamis (Plutarch, 2001, p. 110).⁷

What is the likelihood Smith made such a substitution out of an error of memory, as the editors suggest?

Relying on the authority of Raphael and Macfie's footnote, this supposed error at first seemed to us a plausible candidate for esotericism. As with the first, the error appears in Cicero. Secondly, also like the first error, the content of the supposed error relates closely to the exoteric context in which the error appears—as to make such an error intentionally in this case would involve Smith in dissimulating about dissimulators and dissimulation! Operating on the assumption that the error might be esoteric, certain puzzles and incongruities seemed to appear to

⁷ Themistocles dissembled his true reason for investing the city's silver in naval power, because he thought his peers lacked his concern about the Persian threat (Plutarch, 2001, p. 149), and he used subterfuge to lure the Persians into a naval ambush and trap (Holland, 2005, pgs. 310-315). Lysander and Crassus were both military leaders known for their ability to use strategy and misdirections to achieve victory (Cicero, 2016, p. 66).

demand explanation. We developed an elaborate story to account for the meaning Smith might have intended by the error and how the superior reader might be expected to discover it. Our dissatisfaction with our account, however, led us—after advancing our first interpretation for several months—back to the evidence of the original texts. We ultimately came to the conclusion that Raphael and Macfie’s supposition that Smith erred in his allusion was incorrect. Our revised interpretation of Smith’s allusion is most easily explained by questioning how Raphael and Macfie saw the matter. In what follows, we correct Raphael and Macfie’s interpretation and clarify the relationship between Smith’s and Cicero’s views of Ulysses and the propriety of dissimulation.

To see where the editors err, it will be useful to highlight certain phrases Smith uses in the main body of the text directly before the supposed error, and to compare them to the Cicero text he alludes to:

The command of fear, *the command of anger*, are always great and noble powers when they are directed by justice and benevolence, they are not only great virtues, but increase the splendor of those other virtues. They may, however, sometimes be directed by very different motives; and in this case, though still respectable, they may be excessively dangerous. The most intrepid valour may be employed in the cause of the greatest injustice. *Amidst great provocations, apparent tranquility and good humour may sometimes conceal the most determined and cruel resolution to revenge. The strength of mind requisite for such dissimulation*, though always and necessarily contaminated by the baseness of falsehood, has, however, been often much admired by many people of no contemptable judgment. (Smith, 1982a, p. 241.12, emphasis added)

Smith follows this text with his discussion of the individuals cited above in Cicero’s list, and includes Ulysses.

Raphael and Macfie are essentially correct in their footnote that Cicero’s explicit purpose in citing Ulysses in Book 1 Section 113 of *De Officiis* shortly after the passage in question is to illustrate Ulysses’ “endurance” (Smith, 1982a, p. 241 n.9). But the context of this endurance as Cicero describes it includes the episode which occurred “at [Ulysses’] home” where “he bore the

insults of slaves and maidservants, all so that at some point he might achieve what he desired!” (Cicero, 2016, p.68). We interpret the episode Cicero describes to refer to Ulysses’ disguising his true identity as the head of the household and king of Ithaca upon his return from Troy in order to conceal his intentions of revenge against his wife Penelope’s parasitic suitors. Such concealment, of course, constitutes a “dissimulation” requiring “strength of mind” in “the command of anger” “amidst great provocations” in which “apparent tranquility and good humour” are used to “conceal the most determined and cruel resolution to revenge” (Smith, 1982a, p. 241.12). In other words, the meaning Cicero includes in his discussion of Ulysses in Section 113 conforms exactly to what Smith intends to illustrate by his reference to Cicero. And while Ulysses’ name does not appear contiguously with the other three individuals referred to in Cicero, it does appear shortly thereafter and includes precisely those qualities Smith intends to illustrate.

Smith’s allusion, thus, captures the sense of Cicero’s description perfectly, though he uses Cicero’s example differently than Cicero intends. This capturing of the spirit but not the exact text fits a broader pattern for Smith. As we noted in the introduction, Scott (1939) shows that Smith “occasionally wrote titles of books or passages from [memory] without verification, with the result that neither was textually accurate” (p.5). Scott illustrates this tendency with an example in which Smith misquotes a passage about “<<old Cato>> on tillage,” again from Cicero’s *De Officiis*, in the *Draft of the Wealth of Nations* (WN) (Scott 1939, p.5 and Smith, 1982c, p. 581). According to Scott, Smith’s “Latin gives the sense accurately, but it differs from the passage in *De Officiis*” (p.5). In the published version of WN, Smith chose, finally, to paraphrase Cicero in English instead of quoting the Latin from memory (Scott, 1937, p. 356, and Smith, 1981, p. 166.12). Smith’s reference to Ulysses here is similar to his error in the *Draft* in

that it accurately captures the substance of the original that is relevant to his purposes, while it departs in other ways from exact faithfulness to the original passage.

That Smith, in fact, does not err here, as Raphael and Macfie suppose, but captures the sense of the original accurately, seems to us to further certify Smith's *bona fides* regarding his knowledge of classical literature and of Cicero in particular.

Given that Smith does substitute Ulysses into a list of individuals Cicero approves of (for their strength of mind required for dissimulation), and that this might bring one to wonder whether Smith had conflated Cicero's later reference to Ulysses' dissimulation (to avoid going to Troy) with Solon in the original list, as Raphael and Macfie do in their footnote, is there any case to be made Smith is being esoteric here? Perhaps, but we do not believe it likely, given the simpler explanation we offer regarding Raphael and Macfie's interpretation. Several other reasons can also be marshalled to argue that Smith meant to refer, in particular, only to the first of Cicero's two references to Ulysses.

As noted above, within *De Officiis*, Cicero discusses instances of Ulysses dissimulating in Book I, Section 113 and again in Book III, Section 97 (Cicero, 2016, ps. 68, 161). In the first instance, Cicero approves of Ulysses' spirit and endurance, which are coupled with dissimulation, along his travels and when he is in disguise at home, bearing the insults and indignities from suitors and servants. In the second case, Cicero condemns Ulysses' dissimulating to avoid going to war in fairly harsh language: "I truly judge that such tranquility [that comes from avoiding war] must be despised and rejected, since what is not honorable is not even useful" (ibid p.162. See Appendix 4 for the full quotation). Cicero points out, however, with regard to Ulysses' plan to break his oath and avoid joining the war on Troy, "there is no

such suspicion of Ulysses found in *Homer*;" that suspicion derives, rather, from the works of the "tragic poets" (Cicero, 2016, p. 161, emphasis added).

Smith refers to Cicero's description of "*Homer's* Ulysses" in particular (Smith, 1982a, p. 241.12, emphasis added). By specifying that he means to praise Homer's Ulysses, and not necessarily other stories about Ulysses from other sources, Smith expresses approval for the Ulysses of the *Odyssey*, whom Cicero first approves of, not necessarily the Ulysses who feigns madness to dodge the war, whom Cicero later disapproves of.

That Smith approves of the first, and not necessarily the second Ulysses referred to in Cicero, is further supported by his comment in LRBL that, "there is nothing which is more apt to raise our admiration and gain our applause, than the hardships one has undergone with firmness and constancy, especially if they have at last been surmounted. . . . We admire Ulysses more for the great hardships he had to struggle with than if he had not been brought into such hazard" (Smith, 1985, p. 129). The hardships referred to by Smith here are clearly the hardships Ulysses faced in his journey home as described in Homer's *Odyssey*. Ulysses frequently lies during his odyssey to protect himself and his interests, from his first encounter with the Cyclops to his disguising himself from his family and his wife's suitors in Ithaca. Given Smith's statement that we admire Ulysses, he must admire these cases of dissimulation described by Homer as proper to Ulysses' character and situation.

Smith's approval of Homer's Ulysses appears to fit his discussion of promises made to highwaymen as a way of criticizing the project (identified by Smith as casuistry) of bringing all morality under the formulation of grammar-like rule-following (Smith, 1982a, pp. 330.9-333.14). By pointing to the looseness of the problem, Smith suggests, as he does in the passage about dissimulation in question, there is a certain "flexibility of morals" which goes beyond "precise

and accurate” rules (Smith, 1982a, pp. 327.1, 175.11). Smith believes, with Cicero, that justice does not obligate one to fulfill a promise exacted through extortion, but that there may be loose, vague, and indeterminate reasons one might still be obligated to fulfil such a promise, reasons such as regard for one’s own “dignity and honour” or “to the inviolable sacredness of that part of his character which makes him reverence the law of truth and abhor every thing that approaches to treachery and falsehood” (Smith, 1982a, pp. 330-331). Without good reason to break an oath, it seems unlikely Smith would approve of the Ulysses of the tragic poets whom Cicero also disapproves of.

Finally, approving of Odysseus’ dissimulation in his household is also fitting to Smith’s exoteric teaching. Such dissimulation could be interpreted as directed in the service of justice in the sense of commutative justice (CJ) and evidently in a way that is estimatively just in Smith’s eyes (Smith, 1982a, p. 241.12). Homer’s Ulysses disguises himself from self-defense along his journey and to revenge himself against the 108 suitors from his household who have been “messaging with his stuff,” eating his sustenance and abusing his wife and son.

The tragic poets, however, tell of Ulysses trying to avoid going to war. Could Smith admire this Ulysses for trying to avoid going to war with Troy? Although this might at first seem to be implied by his approbation of Ulysses’ dissimulation elsewhere, there are several tensions to consider. First, Smith generally admires the martial virtues both as a model of virtue (Smith, 1982, p. 239) and as a condition for the protection and perpetuation of a society (Smith, 1982, p. 539). He fears the commercial spirit may cause self-centered and materialistic interests to decay the martial virtues too much (Smith, 1981, pp. 786-787). Perhaps there is no tension here since Ulysses’ city of Ithaca is not in danger when he is called off to fight. Perhaps Ulysses sees that the war is a fool’s errand, and it is that that justifies his attempted draft dodging. But, as Cicero

argues, Ulysses voluntarily swore an oath with all of Helen's suitors to defend Helen's winning suitor from rivals who might take her (2016, p. 162). Given the importance of commutative justice to Smith, he presumably could not approve of this kind of promise-breaking and Ulysses would not receive Smith's approbation.

Smith thus seems to approve of Ulysses' character in Homer as an exemplification of that "dark and deep dissimulation" that:

occurs most commonly in times of great public disorder; amidst the violence of faction and civil war. When law has become in a great measure impotent, when the most perfect innocence cannot alone insure safety, regard to self-defense obliges the greater part of men to have recourse to dexterity, to address, and to apparent accommodation to whatever happens to be, at the moment, the prevailing party. (Smith, 1982a, p. 242.12)

So, while as we saw in the introduction of this paper, Smith thinks, as a general rule, one should not dissimulate, he also thinks it can be appropriate to violate such a rule in certain circumstances, though exactly when such a violation is appropriate is loose, vague, and indeterminate. His attitude toward dissimulation, therefore, seems analogous to his notion that it may sometimes be estimatively just for the juror superior to violate rules of commutative justice to avoid "gross disorders and shocking enormities," but that pushed too far such behavior by the juror superior is "destructive of all liberty, security, and justice" (Smith, 1982a, p. 81.8).

Similarly, he thinks dissimulation in service of self-defense and just revenge in extreme situations can be appropriate, but that "though it may sometimes be useful, it is at least equally liable to be excessively pernicious" (Smith, 1982a, p. 242.12).

Conclusion

We believe the evidence presented above provides good reason to suspect that Adam Smith is being esoteric in regards to the first error discussed in this paper. In that error, Smith

refers to an “obscure” poem (Cicero’s description) meant for a superior audience, and he substitutes a philosopher for a poet and emphasizes a “philosophical discourse” instead of a poem as the object of estimation. Smith’s substitution appears to be a strong, implicit gesture directing the reader to apply Smith’s general message in the context in which the error occurs back to Smith and his own work. The “error” prompts the superior reader, who knows that Parmenides could not have lectured to Plato, to go back and reflect deeply on Smith’s discussion of the wise man and who should be considered a proper and wise judge. By creating a special relationship between himself and the reader, Smith’s wink invites a heightened sympathy within the reader towards Smith and his message, which, in turn, may lead the reader to a deeper appreciation and practice of Smith’s teaching and to follow Smith’s example in trying to regard herself through the eyes of a superior judge as her impartial spectator.

The second supposed error we believe to be no error by Smith at all. Rather, the editors Raphael and Macfie err in interpreting Smith’s allusion. Examining the context of Smith’s allusion in Cicero reveals that he captured Cicero’s sense perfectly well, though he uses Cicero’s example differently from Cicero’s explicit intent and along with a different part of Cicero’s text than appears in the original. A common pattern for Smith is that he would paraphrase passages from memory, getting the substance of the quote correct but not necessarily preserving the verbiage, which is what happens in this case. The second error, thus, while seemingly curious at first becomes perfectly comprehensible and is no puzzle at all.

Examining these two supposed errors enables us to speculate about the character of Smith’s esotericism. First, neither of the two supposed errors implies that Smith used esotericism to communicate a double doctrine that diverges significantly from his exoteric teachings. Rather, Smith’s esotericism, if he is, indeed, esoteric in the way we examine in this paper, appears to be

more poetic, ironic, and pedagogical. We believe, however, Smith's discussion of the propriety of dissimulating in times of great provocation for the sake of self-defense suggests he would also implicitly approve of the use of a double doctrine in defensive esotericism in times of "great public disorder," "amidst the violence of faction and civil war," "when law has become in a great measure impotent," and when "the most perfect innocence cannot alone insure safety" (Smith, 1982a, pp. 241-242.12).

Finally, our experience working with the second supposed error illustrates two lessons about interpreting texts esoterically. First, it underscores the importance of Melzer's admonition that, "[o]ne must proceed—at least at the beginning and for a good long time—on the assumption that the book is *not* written esoterically" (Melzer, 2014, pp.297-298, original emphasis). Jumping too quickly to the presumption that there is a hidden meaning to find may lead to a self-reinforcing bias toward confirming that interpretation. Secondly, however, it demonstrates that interpretation open to esoteric dimensions, if it seeks first to wrestle honestly with the surface meaning of texts, need not lead one to become untethered from the truth. A commitment to understanding the surface meaning of texts can often falsify incorrect and speculative esoteric interpretations. As Leo Strauss writes, "The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things" (Strauss, 1978, p. 13).

Appendix 1: Passage about Antimachus and Plato from Cicero's *Brutus*:

"Why," said Brutus at this point, "do you instance others? In your own case have we not often seen the choice of clients, and the judgement of Hortensius himself? When he was associated in cases with you (I know because I was often present in your conferences) the concluding speech, where there was the greatest opportunity for effect, he always left to you."

"Yes, it is true," I replied; "his kindness of feeling toward me, I fancy, made him extravagant in doing me honour. What the popular judgement about me is I do not know; but of others I can affirm confidently, that those who in the opinion of the masses were accounted the

best speakers are the very ones who have been most approved by trained critics. Demosthenes could never have said what is reported of the famous poet Antimachus. When reading that long and well-known poem of his before an assembled audience in the very midst of his reading all his listeners left him but Plato: ‘I shall go on reading,’ he said ‘just the same; for me Plato alone is as good as a hundred thousand.’ And quite right; for a poem full of obscure allusions can from its nature only win the approbation of the few; an oration meant for a general public must aim to win the assent of the throng. If Demosthenes on the other hand had held only Plato as his auditor and was deserted by the rest, he could not have uttered a single word. And you, Brutus? Could you have done a thing if the whole assembly, as it did once with Curio, had deserted you?” (Cicero, 1939 pp. 161-163)

Appendix 2: Passage about Dissimilarities of Character in Cicero’s *On Duties*

It must also be understood that by nature we, as it were, assume the part of two roles. The first of these is common to us all insofar as we all partake of that reason and excellence in which we surpass the beasts, from which everything honorable and proper derives, and by means of which some reasoning is sought to discover what appropriate action is.⁸ But the second is strictly assigned to individuals. For as there are some great dissimilarities in people’s bodies—for example, we see some have great speed for running, others great speed for wrestling, likewise some have dignified figures, others attractive ones—so, too, does there exist a still greater variety of people’s spirits. So we are told Lucius Crassus and Lucius Philippus both had great charm; still greater, if more practiced, was the charm of Gaius Caesar, Lucius’s son; but, living at the same time, Marcus Scaurus and Marcus Drusus as adolescents were both singularly grave, Gaius Laelius cheerful, and his intimate Scipio greatly ambitious and prone to melancholy. Moreover, among the Greeks, we are told that Socrates was pleasant and witty, lively in Conversation, and a dissembler in all speech, which the Greeks call an ironic person; but, by contrast, that Pythagoras and Pericles achieved the highest authority without having the least cheerfulness. We hear Hannibal the Carthaginian and, among our leaders, Quintus Maximus were cunning, adept at concealment, reticent, dissemblers, insidious, and capable of forestalling enemy stratagems. In like manner, the Greeks prefer Themistocles and Jason of Pherae to others, and especially the adroit and cunning deed of Solon, who pretended insanity so as to make his own life more secure and his service to his commonwealth more beneficial.

There are others quite unlike these individuals, simple and forthright, who think that nothing ought to be done from hidden motives, nothing from treachery, supportive of the truth, hostile to fraud; and, likewise, still others who will endure anything and serve anyone, so long as their objectives are met, such as we saw with Sulla and Marcus Crassus. In like manner, we are told the cleverest and most patient Lacedaemonian was Lysander, while Callicratidas, who

⁸ In this translation, the translator opts to translate *officiis* as “appropriate action,” rather than the more traditional “duty”.

commanded the fleet immediately after Lysander, was the opposite. Again, there are some in conversation who, no matter how powerful, affect to seem to be one among many, as we saw with Catulus, both father and son, as well as Quintus Mucius. I am told that in an earlier generation, Publius Scipio Nasica had this same characteristic, but that his father, who avenged the pernicious designs of Tiberius Gracchus, was not the least bit genteel in conversation. And yet his father became great and famous despite this very characteristic. There are innumerable other dissimilarities of nature and customs, which nonetheless must not be condemned in the least. (Cicero, 2016, pp. 64-67)

Appendix 3: Passage about Ulysses' Endurance in Cicero's *On Duties*

How many things did Ulysses endure during that long odyssey when he was both subject to women—if Circe and Calypso can even be called “women”—and determined to be affable and pleasant to everyone in every conversation? In truth, even at home he bore the insults of slaves and maidservants, all so that at some point he might achieve what he desired! But such was Ajax's spirit, we are told, that he would have preferred to meet his death a thousand times over than endure those things. In contemplating such things, everyone ought to evaluate his own characteristics and moderate them, and not test whether others' characteristics might be proper for him; for what is most proper for each is what for each is most his own. (Cicero, 2016, p. 68)

Appendix 4: Passage about Ulysses' Trying to Evade War in Cicero's *On Duties*

Ulysses's plan seemed useful to him, as related by the tragic poets—for there is no such suspicion of Ulysses found in Homer, our best author—but in the tragedies he is accused of wishing to evade military service under the pretense of insanity.

“His plan was not honorable but useful,” perhaps someone might say, “insofar as he could continue to rule and live leisurely in Ithaca with his parents, with his wife, with his son. Do you think that any propriety such as consists in daily labors and dangers can compare with this tranquility?”

I truly judge that such tranquility must be despised and rejected, since what is not honorable is not even useful. (Cicero, 2016, pp. 161-162)

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