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Moral Beauty and Moral Taste From Shaftesbury to Hume

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

John Michael McAteer

March 2010

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Andrews Reath, Chairperson

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The Dissertation of John Michael McAteer is approved:

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Finally, I am grateful to my wife Stasi for personal support. Without you I may never have finished.

To Maggie

“I perceive I am now obliged to go far in the pursuit of beauty, which lies very absconded and deep, and, if so, I am well assured that my enjoyments hitherto have been very shallow.”

-Shaftesbury

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Moral Beauty and Moral Taste From Shaftesbury to Hume

by

John Michael McAteer

Doctory of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Philosophy
University of California, Riverside, March 2010
Dr. Andrews Reath, Chairperson

My dissertation is a historical study which attempts to recover the classical synthesis of aesthetics and ethics as expressed in the concepts of moral beauty and moral taste. I begin by observing how the ancients saw goodness and beauty as one concept such that moral goodness was conceived as an intrinsically attractive ideal. Next I show how, at the start of the modern era, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke shifted the basis of moral motivation from internal attractiveness to the external constraints of law, thus eliminating moral beauty from their accounts. I then trace the emergence of the modern moral taste view in the Cambridge Platonists (viz., Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, and Ralph Cudworth) and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and argue that Francis Hutcheson's moral sense theory diverged from this tradition in important ways. Here I draw a distinction within early modern sentimentalist views between moral taste theories (which build motivation into moral judgment) and moral sense theories (which do not). Finally I show that David Hume followed Shaftesbury's moral taste theory more closely than he followed Hutcheson's moral sense theory. I conclude that Hume's account is

superior to Hutcheson's insofar as the analogy with aesthetic taste emphasizes the importance of tradition, community, and intersubjective conversation whereas the analogy with sense perception appeals only to an ahistorical essentialism. Moreover Hume's account is superior to Shaftesbury's insofar as Hume's version of the moral taste doctrine is based on a naturalized account of moral beauty which does not rely on natural teleology and is therefore more accessible to us today than ancient Greek accounts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	ix
1. Introduction	1
2. The Classical Conception of Moral Beauty	24
3. Shaftesbury and Moral Realism	37
4. Moral Taste in the Cambridge Platonists	59
5. Moral Beauty and Moral Taste in Shaftesbury	77
6. Hutcheson as Moral Sense Theorist	109
7. Shaftesbury and the Intersubjectivity of Taste	138
8. Hume as Moral Taste Theorist	166
9. Hume on the Intersubjectivity of Taste	191
<i>Bibliography</i>	223

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ECHU Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), cited by book, chapter, and section numbers.
- EHU Hume, David. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (Oxford University Press, 2000), cited by section and paragraph number
- EIM Cudworth, Ralph. *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality in Moral Philosophy From Montaigne to Kant*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Oxford, 2003), cited by Book, chapter, and section numbers
- EPM Hume, David. *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (Oxford University Press, 1998), cited by section and paragraph number
- Essay* Hutcheson, Francis. *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett (Liberty Fund, 2002), cited by treatise, section, and article numbers.
- Essays* Hume, David. *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. F. Eugene Miller (Liberty Fund, 1987), cited by page number.
- IBV Hutcheson, Francis. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Liberty Fund, 2004), cited by treatise, section, and article numbers.
- Inquiry* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by part and section.
- Miscellany* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *Miscellaneous Reflections on the Preceding Treatises and Other Critical Subjects in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by miscellany, part and section.
- Moralists* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions,*

- Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by part and section.
- NE Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin. 2nd Ed. (Hackett, 1999), cited by Book, Chapter, and Section numbers followed by traditional marginal notation.
- Notion* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *A Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules in Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge University Press, 1914).
- Regimen* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Macmillan, 1900).
- Sensus Communis* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by part and section.
- Soliloquy* Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by part and section.
- T Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford University Press, 2000), cited by book, part, section, and paragraph numbers
- TMS Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), cited by Part, Section, Chapter, and Paragraph numbers.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I.

David Hume endorses without question the ancient analogy between beauty and virtue. In one of the clearest statements of the analogy, Hume writes:

It will naturally be expected, that the beauty of the body, as is supposed by all ancient moralists, will be similar, in some respects, to that of the mind; and that every kind of esteem, which is paid to a man, will have something similar in its origin, whether it arise from his mental endowments, or from the situation of his exterior circumstances. (EPM 6.23)

By “beauty ... of the mind” here Hume assumes his readers will understand him to mean “virtue”, though he only defines virtue later in a footnote: “It is the nature, and, indeed, the definition of virtue, that it is *a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved by every one, who considers or contemplates it*” (EPM 8.1n50). So, along with most of his contemporaries, Hume accepts the classical concept of “moral beauty” or, as he often puts it, “the beauty of virtue”, but he wants to naturalize this concept to bring it in line with his vision for “modern” philosophy:

On the other hand, our modern enquirers, though they also talk much of the beauty of virtue, and deformity of vice, yet have commonly endeavoured to account for these distinctions by metaphysical reasonings, and by deductions from the most abstract principles of the understanding. (EPM 1.2)

Hume wants to explain the beauty of virtue without recourse to the “abstract principles” of “metaphysical reasonings”. Instead, Hume will rely only on what survives his method of “mitigated skepticism”, which, “avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such objects as fall under daily practice and experience” (EHU

12.25).¹ This is how Hume’s account of “morals” meets his account of “human understanding”. If Hume’s skeptical epistemology undermines our confidence in the human mind to achieve understanding in the realm of metaphysics, then we will need an ethics that makes sense without metaphysics. For Hume this meant that we need a naturalized account of moral beauty.

The concept of moral beauty was ubiquitous in the 18th Century, but such a strong connection between aesthetics and ethics still sounds odd to the ears of philosophers trained in 20th Century analytic philosophy.² There has been some recent interest in “aesthetics and ethics”. Analytic philosophers have considered the ways in which our aesthetic judgments of artworks might be influenced by our ethical judgments,³ and, going in the other direction, how our ethical judgments might be influenced by our

¹ The passage continues: “philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected”. The opposition of abstract metaphysics to a philosophy of common life is a recurring theme in the first *Enquiry*. See EHU 5.2, 7.24, 8.36, 11.27, and 12.25.

² This remains true despite the fact that G.E. Moore, one of the founders of the analytic tradition, links beauty and goodness in the final chapter of his *Principia Ethica* (Chapter VI on “The Ideal”). Moore even uses the term “mental beauty” (§ 122) to mean “admirable mental qualities”, though he downplays the significance of the aesthetic aspect of mental qualities themselves (as opposed to the aesthetic aspect of the physical expression of those mental qualities). For Moore, a judgment of mental beauty always “involves reference to a purely material beauty” since it is “very difficult to imagine what the cognition of mental qualities *alone*, unaccompanied by *any* corporeal expression, would be like” (ibid). Thus, while Moore discusses goodness and beauty together as the two “intrinsic values”, he doesn’t seem to connect them in any deep way. Beauty, strictly speaking, applies to physical objects and only applies to mental objects by extension.

³ See, for example, the seminal anthology *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, edited by Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge, 1998).

aesthetic engagement with art.⁴ In other words, there has been discussion of the legitimacy of the moral evaluation of art and the role of art in moral development. In short, recent work on aesthetics and ethics has primarily been about the intersection of *art* and ethics,⁵ but there hasn't been much interest in the intersection of *beauty* and ethics.⁶ This latter project would entail consideration of the ways in which our ethical judgments are really aesthetic judgments. Given many contemporary accounts of aesthetic judgments, such a connection would *seem* to entail a morally problematic subjectivism or relativism. And yet that is not how the ancients viewed things. There is a long tradition – beginning even before Plato – of analyzing moral value as an objective “moral beauty” and thus creating a fundamental synthesis of aesthetics and ethics without falling into subjectivism or relativism. In order to recover this concept of moral beauty, some historical work needs to be done. One of the most interesting historical periods on this topic is the 18th Century, both the site of the emergence of modern philosophical aesthetics and the site of moral philosophy's divergence from aesthetics.

⁴ The seminal figure here is Martha Nussbaum. See, for example, her collection *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford, 1990).

⁵ One exception to this trend is Marcia Muelder Eaton. While Eaton's discussion of aesthetics and ethics does focus primarily on art examples, she also discusses environmental aesthetics and uses examples from nature. See her recent landmark book *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford, 2001). Also of interest here is the work of Emily Brady who uses natural beauty to ground an environmental ethic in *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh, 2003).

⁶ There are signs, however, that the concept of moral beauty is perhaps on the verge of seeing a rebirth, even among analytic philosophers. See, for example, Colin McGinn's *Moral Literacy*, 2nd Ed., (Hackett, 1992), p. 96 and *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford, 1997), p. 92ff.

The classical conception of moral beauty was still widely held all the way through the 18th Century, but it had been put into question by the new ethics of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Michael Gill has recently set up the debate between rationalists and sentimentalists among the 18th Century British Moralists as one about whether to accept the analogy between beauty and virtue. As Gill puts it, the debate centered on the question “Is morality more like math or beauty?”⁷ But this formulation is somewhat misleading since even a committed rationalist like John Balguy speaks of the “beauty of virtue”, though he conceives of beauty in mathematical terms as consisting in “necessary relations”.⁸ Balguy writes:

⁷ See his article "Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism: Is Morality More Like Math or Beauty?" *Philosophy Compass* 2:1 (January 2007).

⁸ It might be (a little bit) less misleading to say that the 18th Century debate was about whether *beauty itself* is like math, but even a sentimentalist like Francis Hutcheson talked about beauty as consisting in the objective proportions described by the quasi-mathematical formula of “uniformity amidst variety” (IBV I.ii.3, p. 28). With regard to morality, Hutcheson is even more explicit about its mathematical basis, going as far as to employ what he calls a “mathematical Calculation” (IBV II.iii.15, p. 132) to “compute the Morality of any Actions, with all their Circumstances” (IBV II.iii.9., p. 128). Consider this paragraph in which Hutcheson proposes “Axioms” for determining “the moral Importance” of an action’s consequences in terms of public good (M) and private interest (I) by calculating the “Ratio” between the agent’s natural (i.e, non-moral) abilities (A) and the agent’s complex of motives, consisting of benevolence (B) and/or self-love (S): “But as the natural consequences of our Actions are various, some good to our selves, and evil to the Publick; and others evil to our selves, and good to the Publick; or either useful both to our selves and others or pernicious to both; the entire Motive to good Actions is not always Benevolence alone; or Motive to Evil, Malice alone; (nay, this last is seldom any Motive at all) but in most Actions we must look upon Self-Love as another Force, sometimes conspiring with Benevolence, and assisting it, when we are excited by Views of private Interest, as well as publick Good; and sometimes opposing Benevolence, when the good Action is in any way difficult or painful in the Performance, or detrimental in its Consequences to the Agent. In the former Case, $M = (B + S) \times A = BA + SA$; and therefore $BA = M - SA = M - A$, and $B = (M - I) / A$. In the latter Case,

[A]ll Beauty, whether Moral or natural, is to be reckoned and reputed as a Species of Absolute Truth; as resulting from, or consisting in, the necessary Relations and unchangeable Congruities of ideas; and, by Consequence, that in order to the Perception of Beauty, no other Power need to be supposed, than what is merely intellectual.⁹

As a rationalist, Balguy does not reject the link between beauty and morality; rather he argues both beauty and morality must be conceived rationalistically. Thus the analogy with beauty was all but universal among the British moralists. Where a rationalist like Balguy would disagree with the sentimentalists is his rejection of the sentimentalist claim that we necessarily need a feeling of pleasure (as opposed to an understanding of a relation between ideas) to know when beauty is present. Even when, as in the case of George Berkeley, a thinker seemed to completely reject the concept of moral beauty, the real issue was pleasure. Berkeley alleged that appealing to beauty makes pleasure rather than virtue itself the “guide or rule” of morality and hence lacks the authority to prevent vice in cases where wrongdoing offers “the prospect of greater pleasure or profit”.¹⁰ What moralists on every side – rationalists and sentimentalists alike – all agreed on was the need to respond to those they considered “skeptics” who denied that morality was “real” and “natural”. On this latter point, Hume’s comments are instructive.

II.

$M = (B - S) \times A = BA - SA$; therefore $BA = M + SA = M + I$, and $B = (M + I) / A$ ” (IBV II.iii.11, p. 129).

⁹ Balguy, John. “Foundation of Moral Goodness” in *British Moralists*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Vol II, (Oxford, 1897) p. 71n1.

¹⁰ See Berkeley, George. *Alciphron*, ed. David Berman (Routledge, 1993), p. 61.

Hume opens his final work of moral philosophy, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, by ridiculing “those who have denied the reality of moral distinctions” (EPM 1.2).¹¹ Earlier, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume characterized the debate as over the question “*Whether these moral distinctions be founded on natural and original principles, or arise from interest and education?*” (T 2.1.7.2). He equates the former alternative with the view that “morality is something real, essential, and founded on nature” (T 2.1.7.5) and the latter alternative with the view that “all morality be founded on the pain or pleasure, which arises from the prospect of any loss or advantage” (T 2.1.7.4). So to deny the “reality” of moral distinctions means to make morality relative to individual self-interest rather than tied to any intrinsic feature of character or action.¹² In the 18th Century, this view (i.e., *hedonistic egoism*: grounding moral distinctions in pleasure and self-interest) was associated primarily with Thomas

¹¹ I say that EPM is Hume’s “final work of moral philosophy”, because, after writing EPM, Hume turned his attention, with the exception of revising *Treatise* Book 2 as *A Dissertation on the Passions*, to history and political theory. While Hume continued revising EPM the rest of his life, he never wrote a new work on ethics.

¹² My reading of Hume in this paragraph requires that we take Hume to believe that denying the “reality” of moral distinctions is the same as denying their foundation in “nature” and vice versa. Hume explicitly links the natural and the real (as opposed to artificial and conventional) at T 2.1.7.5 where he says some people “maintain morality is something real, essential, and founded on nature”. He also argues that we should acknowledge “a real distinction between vice and virtue” and “a real distinction between personal beauty and deformity” because “both these distinctions are founded in the natural sentiments of the human mind” (EHU 8.35). For a reading of Hume’s use of the terminology of “real” and “natural” similar to mine, See Norton, David Fate. *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982), p. 12n26 and p. 21-26.

Hobbes, whose views generated numerous passionate responses.¹³ Unlike his contemporaries, however, Hume refuses even to take these views seriously enough to refute: “The difference, which nature has placed between one man and another, is so wide” that “there is no scepticism so scrupulous, and scarce any assurance so determined, as absolutely to deny all distinction between them” (EPM 1.2). Hume simply dismisses the view he calls moral “scepticism” as “entirely disingenuous” (EPM 1.1).

Instead Hume wants to focus on another 18th Century debate: “There has been a controversy started of late much better worth examination, concerning the general foundation of MORALS; whether they be derived from REASON, or from SENTIMENT” (EPM 1.3). This debate is about whether we can “attain the knowledge of” moral distinctions “by a chain of argument and induction” or whether we must experience “an immediate feeling and finer internal sense” (ibid). As Hume characterizes it, what is at issue here is whether moral distinctions are *logically necessary* and hence “the same to every rational intelligent being” or whether they are *logically contingent* because “founded entirely on the particular fabric and constitution of the human species” (ibid). Today we call the former group moral *rationalists* and the latter group moral *sentimentalists*.

Hume admits that he finds both sides “plausible” (EPM 1.9). Both sides capture an essential element of the phenomenology of moral judgment. Rationalists point out that moral judgments are, in 20th Century terms, *cognitive*: moral judgments make claims about “what exists in the nature of things” (EPM 1.5), claims which might be either true

¹³ For a classic study of the seventeenth century response to Hobbes, see Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1962).

or false. Sentimentalists, on the other hand, point out that moral judgments are *affective* and *conative*: they are matters of feeling and desire. Rationalists argue that if morality were grounded only on “the standard of sentiment” then, like other sentiments such as judgments of beauty, morality would be noncognitive, merely a matter of “taste” and hence not susceptible to the kind of rational argument to which we standardly submit moral claims. “Truth is disputable; not taste”, claims the rationalist (ibid.).

Sentimentalists reply that if morality were discovered by “the cool assent of the understanding” (EPM 1.7), then morality would be nonconative, incapable of moving us to action and unable “to regulate our lives and actions” (EPM 1.8) as we expect it to.

Hume concludes that both sides seem correct: *moral judgments seem both cognitive and conative*. Moral judgments are motives to action while simultaneously being capable of rational dispute. Hume says: “I am apt to suspect, they may, the one as well as the other, be solid and satisfactory, and that reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions” (EPM 1.9).

Hume argues that since moral judgment “renders morality an active principle” (i.e., moral judgment moves us to action), then “it is probable” that “the final sentence” of moral deliberation is grounded in sentiment (ibid.). But that’s not the whole story.

It is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species. For what else can have an influence of this nature? But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. (ibid.)

Only passion and sentiment can move us to action, but we still need reason to help direct our sentiments toward the right objects. This point suggests to Hume an analogy with aesthetic judgment: He says that “some species of beauty” are indeed indisputable as the rationalists say.

Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance, command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment. (ibid.)

If someone disagrees with you about whether a particular tree or sunset is beautiful, it is hard to know what to say to them that could change their judgment. But not all beauty is beyond dispute in this way: “But in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection” (ibid.). When it comes to art, there is a difference between good taste and bad taste, and rational discussion is capable of moving us from the latter to the former. And this is the way moral judgment seems to work, too: “There are just grounds to conclude, that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind” (ibid.). Therefore the sentimentalists are right that action requires passion, but the rationalists are also right that moral judgment is disputable.

Here the aesthetic concept of *taste* has allowed Hume to bridge the gap between reason and sentiment by showing how both are necessary. The “perception of beauty and deformity” is clearly based on our embodied human “constitution” (EPM 1.3). But we are not slaves to the whims of sentiment. Our taste in art can be educated – “corrected by

argument and reflection” until our taste is no longer “false” but has “a proper discernment of its object” (EPM 1.9). Hume concludes that morality works the same way such that moral goodness should be conceived as *moral beauty* and moral judgment should be conceived as *moral taste*.

III.

As a predecessor of his view that moral judgment is analogous to aesthetic judgment, Hume points to “the elegant Lord Shaftesbury” who, Hume says “adhered to the principles of the ancients” in seeing “morals as deriving their existence from taste and sentiment” (EPM 1.4). Sometimes Shaftesbury and Hume, along with Francis Hutcheson, are said to be part of a philosophical tradition called “moral sense theory”.¹⁴ I argue that this grouping is misleading. The term “moral sense theory” as applied to a tradition of moral epistemology whose main members are supposed to be Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume seems to be due primarily to the influence of D.D. Raphael.¹⁵ This is not to say that Raphael invented the term “moral sense”, but that he encouraged the use of that term to refer to *a particular epistemological theory – a unified tradition or philosophical school*. This usage, I argue, obscures fundamental differences between

¹⁴ For a recent example of this view, see James Baille’s *Hume on Morality* (Routledge, 2000): “Philosophical taxonomists usually classify Hume as a *moral sense theorist*. This tradition originates with Lord Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury), although its influence on Hume came primarily from the writings of Francis Hutcheson” (p. 15-16).

¹⁵ See Raphael’s *The Moral Sense* (Oxford University Press, 1947) and his anthology *British Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

Hutcheson on the one hand and Shaftesbury and Hume on the other. The latter two thinkers are better thought of as moral taste theorists; only Hutcheson was a moral sense theorist. In general, *a moral taste theorist*, holds that moral judgments are analogous to aesthetic judgments in that someone with good moral taste has the acquired ability to discern and appreciate morally relevant qualities through the skillful use of perceptual and rational faculties. *A moral sense theorist*, on the other hand, holds that moral judgments are analogous to physical sense perception in that certain information (viz., knowledge of the presence of moral properties) enters the mind immediately when attention is directed at the relevant objects.

Before Raphael, there was some precedent for talking about “the moral sense theory”,¹⁶ but the more common term was L.A. Selby-Bigge’s “sentimentalist school”. Selby-Bigge does use the term “moral sense theory” in the introduction to his anthology *British Moralists*,¹⁷ but he limits its application to Hutcheson, using the term “sentimental theory of the moral faculty” (in contrast to “intellectual theory of the moral faculty”) for the broader tradition. This is closer to the way the terms were used in the 18th Century. Adam Smith is one of the clearest thinkers on this point during the period. Smith is careful to distinguish Hutcheson’s “moral sense” theory which posits “a peculiar power of perception” from the theory that virtue is “recommended to us ... by some other principle in human nature, such as a modification of sympathy, or the like” (TMS VII.i.4, p. 266). He calls the latter view “the theory of moral sentiments” and clearly has in mind

¹⁶ See James Bonar’s *Moral Sense* (Macmillan, 1930), p. 9

¹⁷ Selby-Bigge, L.A. *British Moralists* (Oxford University Press, 1897), Vol I, p. xlii

as paradigm proponents of this view not only himself but also Hume, his contemporary and friend.¹⁸ While Hume does use the term “moral sense” in the heading of *Treatise* 3.1.2 “Moral distinctions deriv’d from a moral sense”, this is not his preferred term.¹⁹ He only uses that term in one other place in the *Treatise* (T 3.3.1.25) – the very same section in which he says moral judgment “proceeds entirely from a moral taste, and from certain sentiments of pleasure and disgust” (T 3.3.1.15). By the time he wrote the second *Enquiry*, Hume is careful to avoid the misleading term “moral sense” altogether, using the more accurate term “moral sentiment” (as, for example, in the title to the first Appendix).

Both Stephen Darwall and Michael Gill have warned us against the misleading nature of Selbe-Bigge’s sentimentalist/rationalist distinction.²⁰ I suggest a similar wariness with regard to Raphael’s blanket use of the term “moral sense”. Writing after the advent of rational intuitionism, Raphael wanted to reassess the concept of an empirical faculty of moral sense with the agenda of demonstrating the superiority of a non-empirical faculty such as the one posited by intuitionists such as G.E. Moore. In *The*

¹⁸ The primary distinction Smith is making is whether moral judgments are made by a “peculiar faculty” or simply by our ordinary feelings and sentiments (TMS VII.iii.3.2-3, p. 321; cf. III.iv.5, p. 158).

¹⁹ Hume seems to use the term “moral sense” interchangeably with terms such as, for example, “conscience, or a sense of morals” (T 3.1.1.10), “sense of morality” (T 3.1.1.20), “sense of virtue” (T 3.1.2.3), “sentiment of morality” (T 3.1.2.8), “sentiment of right and wrong” (T 3.2.2.23), “moral sentiments” (T 3.2.6.3), “sentiment of approbation” (T 3.2.6.4), “sentiments of virtue” (T 3.3.1.21), “taste in morals” (T 3.2.8.8n80), “moral taste” (T 3.3.1.15), etc.

²⁰ See Darwall’s *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 20-1 and Gill’s “Shaftesbury’s Two Accounts of the Reason to Be Virtuous” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38:4 (October, 2000), p. 529n1.

Moral Sense he takes the issue in moral epistemology to be this: “When I judge that I ought to do a certain action, do I make this judgment on the basis of knowing, or of feeling, or of sensing something?” (p. 1). Later he makes clear that he recognizes only two alternatives in moral epistemology: “sense or feeling” on the one hand and “reason or knowledge” on the other (p. 2). If my arguments here are successful, then *taste* will emerge as a third alternative alongside *reason* and *sense* – a *via media*, in fact, to bridge the other two alternatives. In order to account for both the cognitive and conative aspects of moral judgment, there must be, as Hume puts it in the first Appendix to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principals of Morals*, “some internal *taste* or feeling, or whatever you may please to call it, which [both] *distinguishes* moral good and evil, and which *embraces* the one and rejects the other” (EPM Appx 1.20, my emphasis).

Since my distinction between moral taste theory and moral sense theory is not a standard distinction in the literature on the British Moralists, a few words of clarification are in order. In general, *moral sense theory* is the view that posits an innate faculty for detecting moral properties. There are three essential features of moral sense theory.²¹ First, the moral sense is a special faculty of the mind, usually conceived of as distinct from reason.²² Second, the moral sense is instinctive. Just as all healthy human beings

²¹ Perhaps no single definition could capture the way all historians use the term “moral sense theory”, but I claim that my analysis here identifies three features common to the most widely used definitions of moral sense theory. I draw especially from Chapter 1 of D.D. Raphael’s *The Moral Sense* and Selby-Bigge’s Introduction to his anthology *British Moralists*.

²² Actually, the only reason the moral sense would have to be conceived as distinct from reason is if the moral sense theorist was committed to empiricism and wanted to avoid positing innate ideas of good and evil. Thus moral sense theory is closely related to

are born with senses of sight, hearing, etc., so human beings are born with a fully functioning moral sense. Far from being necessary, education generally hurts our ability to make correct moral judgments. For example, Hutcheson thinks that we would all naturally agree in our moral judgments except that some of us have received bad philosophical education thus corrupting our ability to understand what our moral sense is telling us.²³ Third, and most importantly, the moral sense is cognitive and/or affective, but not conative. Like our other senses, the moral sense delivers information and feelings into the mind. We may or may not then feel a desire to pursue or avoid the object of our perception. But whether or not we do feel such a desire, that desire is distinct from the perception itself.

Moral taste theory is the view that moral judgments are analogous to aesthetic judgments in that someone with good taste has the acquired skill of discerning and

rational intuitionism. Frankena suggests that intuitionism is the broader category which can be subdivided into rational intuitionism and moral sense theory, conceived as empirical intuitionism. See William Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16:3 (June 1955), p. 357. Raphael makes a similar suggestion *The Moral Sense*, p. 2-3. But one could just as easily say that moral sense theory is the broader category which should be subdivided into empirical moral sense theory and rationalist moral sense theory (i.e., intuitionism). Mackie sees the distinction between intuitionism and moral sense theory in a slightly different way. He focuses on the question of whether our "faculty for drawing moral distinctions" detects "qualities" that are "objective" or "subjective". See J.L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (Routledge, 1980), p. 33. At one point he suggests that moral sense theory is the "subjective interpretation" of the analogy between moral judgment and perception, while intuitionism is the "objective" interpretation (p. 33). At another point he suggests that "moral sense" theory is the name of the genus whose "objectivist" species is "intuitionism" and whose subjectivist species is "sentimentalism" (p. 72).

²³ See Hutcheson *Inquiry* II.iv. Compare *Inquiry* I.vi in which Hutcheson claims that diversity in aesthetic judgment is entirely due to psychological associations which prevent us from having pure experiences of the objects in question.

appreciating certain qualities. Hence to speak of *moral* taste is to imply the existence of moral *beauty*. Moral sense theory, on the other hand, may, but need not, involve such a commitment to moral beauty. Moral taste theory contrasts with moral sense theory in each of the three essential features mentioned above. First, judgments of moral taste make use of our ordinary perceptual and rational faculties; they do not require any special faculty of the mind. Second, good moral taste is acquired, not instinctive. Good taste is the product of education. And third, the faculty of moral taste is simultaneously cognitive and conative, both detecting the presence of virtue and vice and motivating us to pursue or avoid them. The person with good moral taste is both good at knowing what to do and generally inclined toward doing the right thing – *and these facts are both grounded in the same source in the moral taste*. This last point will become clear as we explore the concept of taste in the next few pages.

When we speak of “taste” in art or ethics, we are, of course, using a metaphor drawn from our physical ability to detect flavors of food.²⁴ In its metaphorical use “taste” is primarily an aesthetic term referring to the faculty of discernment and appreciation of aesthetic properties.²⁵ When the metaphorical use of the term “taste” first

²⁴ For a nice discussion of the metaphorical use of the term “taste” in philosophical aesthetics, see Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 38-45.

²⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives this as the relevant definition of “taste”: “Mental perception of quality; judgment, discriminative faculty”. Compare this sub-definition which limits taste to the aesthetic realm: “The sense of what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful; *esp.* discernment and appreciation of the beautiful in nature or art; *spec.* the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like”. See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Ed. by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford, 1989).

rose to prominence in the 18th Century – the era George Dickie referred to as “the century of taste”²⁶ – it had a number of connotations all of which suggested some sort of *evaluation* involved in judgments of taste. The concept of taste was taken variously to have reference to objective value (as in “good taste”) and to have reference to subjective value (as in the phrase “a matter of taste”). This subjectivity could be taken individually or culturally as when writers of the period would refer, for example, to “European” or “modern tastes” in contrast to “Greek” or “ancient tastes”. (We will see below how the philosophers of taste might consistently affirm both the objectivity and the subjectivity of taste.) Moreover, to say that someone has, to use Hume’s term, a “delicate taste” is to ascribe a *virtue* to that person. A person with delicacy of taste has the valuable ability, analogous to a wine taster, to discern the presence of qualities unnoticed by other observers. The analogy with physical taste suggests evaluation in that physical taste is a universal faculty of human nature. If taste is part of the natural human physiological or psychological makeup, then all properly functioning human beings have the faculty taste. In other words, since aesthetic taste is analogous to a physical sense, then blindness to aesthetic properties should be seen as no less a disability than literal, physical blindness. At the same time taste was standardly thought to be an educable faculty as seen in the locution “an acquired taste”.

It may be difficult at first to understand how taste can be both objectively normative and subjectively relative. We will return to this question in future chapters.

²⁶ Dickie, George. *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 3

For now, let me suggest that the answer will have to do with intersubjectivity. To call something an intersubjective reality is to distinguish it both from objective and subjective reality. Something is *objective* if it is mind-independent, i.e., if it exists independently of all mental representation. Something is *subjective* if it is individually mind-dependent, i.e., if it exists only in one person's experience and is hence relative to that person's individual point of view. Something is *intersubjective* if it is collectively mind-dependent, i.e., if it exists in a group of people's experience such that it is relative to what Hume will call a "common" or "general" point of view. Take, for example, the claim that a particular object is red. If this statement is interpreted as a claim to objective reality, then it means (on a Lockean analysis, updated according to current understandings of physics) that the object has an atomic structure which reflects light of a certain wavelength. An object's color conceived thusly is something a blind person would be able to know if given certain facts about the object's physical structure. But if the statement is interpreted as a claim to subjective reality, then it means that the speaker is having on this particular occasion a certain qualitative experience – regardless of whether anyone else (or even the same speaker at a different time) would have that experience. This is an entirely private experience and is relative to the idiosyncrasies of the perceiver's point of view. For example, the perceiver might be colorblind or be wearing rose-colored glasses. Finally if the statement is interpreted as a claim to intersubjective reality, then it means that the object would generate a certain qualitative experience in a perceiver under socio-linguistically standard circumstances. In other words, anyone who uses the word "red" the way we do, has properly functioning perceptual faculties that operate the way ours do,

is perceiving the object under lighting conditions we consider normal, etc. will judge this object to be red.

On this scheme 18th Century rationalist John Balguy is giving an objective account of beauty when he says that “all Beauty, whether Moral or natural, is to be reckoned and reputed as a Species of Absolute Truth; as resulting from, or consisting in, the necessary Relations and unchangeable Congruities of ideas”.²⁷ Most other 18th Century philosophers, however, thought of aesthetic judgments as qualitative experiences of pleasure. On our classification, then, taste would be for these philosophers either subjective or intersubjective. Hobbes is claiming that moral judgments are subjective when he writes that “whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*” so that the “words Good, Evil, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves” (*Leviathan* 1.6, p. 39).²⁸ Moral properties are not in the objects themselves but are in the individual’s mind relative to his or her desires.²⁹ Hutcheson and Hume are claiming that moral facts are intersubjective when each of them compares

²⁷ Balguy, John. “Foundation of Moral Goodness” in *British Moralists*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Vol II, (Oxford University Press, 1897) p. 71n1.

²⁸ References to Hobbes are to Richard Tuck’s Revised Student Edition of *Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1996), cited by part and chapter numbers.

²⁹ Note that ultimately Hobbes does think there can be a common rule of good if the sovereign brings it about through legal sanctions. Nevertheless this common rule is a human construction that is not “taken from the nature of the objects themselves”.

moral facts (in somewhat different ways) to secondary qualities like color.³⁰ For these philosophers moral facts are not in an individual's mind but are relative to a social practice of attributing moral qualities to things. If judgments of taste are intersubjective in this way, then they could be essentially subjective experiences while still having a normative standard which has a kind of objectivity in that it is not relative to any individual person's thoughts, feelings, or desires. Moreover, cultural relativity could be explained with reference to various cultures' different ways of specifying the intersubjective standard conditions of moral perception. In other words, we could affirm that moral judgment is a "matter of taste" without denying that there is such a thing as "good taste" – moral judgment would not be *merely* a matter of taste. Both moral sense theory and moral taste theory can appeal to the intersubjectivity of moral judgment, but, as we will see in our discussion of Hutcheson and Hume, they generally do so in significantly different ways.

The last, and most important, connotation of the term "taste" is that taste is supposed to be a motivational faculty. As mentioned above, the analogy with taste implies a *conative* element. This is the key distinction between moral sense theories and moral taste theories. While the senses are often understood (especially by early modern British empiricists) as purely cognitive, the analogy with taste implies both cognitive and conative elements. Not only does good taste allow us to discern *information* about aesthetic properties, it also gives rise to a *desire* to experience those properties. The element of motivation comes out in the locution, used by both Shaftesbury and Hume, "to

³⁰ See, for example, Hutcheson's *Inquiry* I.i.17 and Hume's *Treatise* 3.1.1.26. We will return these and similar passages in future chapters.

have a taste for X". This locution is equivalent to a more common one: "to have a relish for X". As the synonym "relish" suggests, to have a taste for something is to desire it, i.e., to be motivated to pursue it.

In 20th Century terms, moral sense theory is compatible with *motivational externalism* while moral taste theory is committed to *motivational internalism*.

Internalism is the view that motivation is "internal" to moral judgment. But what does this mean? As a first approximation, let us say that internalism is a family of views each of which holds that there is (some sort of) necessary connection between moral properties (or facts) and an agent's motivation. Externalism, then, is the family of views according to which any connection between morality and motivation is contingent.³¹ As they stand, these definitions are rather vague. To make them more precise, we need some help from distinctions drawn by Stephen Darwall. The above definition of internalism is broad enough to include the view that judging an action to be morally obligatory *causes* a motive to do it. On this view, "although motive is in no way intrinsic to ethical facts themselves, it is a necessary consequence of *perceiving* or *knowing* them".³² Knowing an

³¹ The terms internalism and externalism originally derive from W.D. Falk "'Ought' and Motivation" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1947-8): 111-38, and William Frankena "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy" in A.I. Melden *Essays on Moral Philosophy* (University of Washington, 1958). Other important discussions include Thomas Nagel *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, 1978), and Bernard Williams "Internal and External Reasons" in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge, 1981). The version of the distinction I use follows Stephen Darwall, "Internalism and Agency" *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (1992), 155-74, which refines earlier distinctions made in Darwall's *Impartial Reason* (Cornell, 1983), pp. 51-61. Darwall's key advance is to distinguish between views which posit a moral *judgment*/motivation connection and those views which posit a moral *fact*/motivation connection.

³² *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought*, p. 10

ethical fact and being motivated to act on that knowledge always go together on this view, but this correlation is logically contingent. Knowledge and motivation remain distinct states of affairs. Most versions of the moral sense theory (including Hutcheson's) fall into this category. But Darwall reserves the term internalism for views according to which having a (certain kind of) motive to do something is what its rightness *consists in*. On this view "the existence of motive, perhaps of a certain kind or under certain circumstances, is (at least part of) what it is for a normative proposition to be true".³³ The process of practical deliberation results in an unqualified motive, and the existence of that motive constitutes normative moral obligation. Only on the latter view is motivation truly *internal* to moral judgment, rather than simply accompanying moral judgment. And this is how moral taste theory conceives of moral judgment. According to moral taste theory, engaging in moral judgment involves a process of aesthetic discrimination which, for the person of good moral taste, results in a motive to pursue or avoid a state of affairs, and that motivation itself is what constitutes the value of the state of affairs, because the morally beautiful action or character trait just is the action or trait which would be attractive to the person of good moral taste. Thus motivation is internal (in Darwall's sense) to judgments of taste.

To summarize the complex set of evaluational connotations which the term "taste" would suggest to contemporaries of Shaftesbury and Hume, aesthetic taste was thought to be: (1) an *aesthetic* faculty directed at beauty, whether of body or soul; (2) a

³³ Ibid., p. 11

*natural*³⁴ faculty in analogy to physical taste; (3) a *motivating* faculty as in “having a taste (or relish) for X”; (4) an *educable* faculty as in “an acquired taste”; (5) a *descriptively evaluable* faculty as in “delicacy of taste” (6) a *normatively evaluable* faculty as in “good taste”; (7) a *subjective* faculty as in “a matter of taste”; (8) a *culturally relative* faculty as in “European tastes”. The general features of moral taste theory which allow these seemingly contradictory connotations to be made consistent are moral taste theory’s commitment to *motivational internalism* and the *intersubjective theory of rationality*.

IV.

This dissertation is a historical study of the concepts of moral beauty and moral taste. It is an attempt to recover the concept of moral beauty, a concept central to ancient moral philosophy, which was put into question at the start of the modern era by Hobbes and, so Shaftesbury will argue, by Locke but was still important to many early modern British moralists including Hume. For the ancients, goodness and beauty were one concept such that moral goodness was conceived as an intrinsically attractive ideal, but Hobbes and Locke shifted the basis of moral motivation from internal attractiveness to the external constraints of law, thus eliminating moral beauty from their accounts. In the 17th and 18th Century British moralists there was a tradition of responding to Hobbes and Locke by appealing to the classical notion of moral beauty. Moral beauty is important for

³⁴ By “natural” in this context, I mean it only in the 18th Century sense as that which is grounded in human nature, leaving open the 20th Century question of whether moral properties are non-natural in the sense of G.E. Moore.

seeing the distinction between moral sense views and moral taste views. In Chapters 2-3, I will begin by setting out the classical concept of moral beauty, going on to show why Shaftesbury thought this concept had been threatened by Hobbes and Locke. Then, in Chapters 4-5, I will trace the emergence of the modern moral taste view in the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, and in Chapter 6 I will argue that Hutcheson's moral sense theory diverged from this tradition in important ways. Finally, in Chapters 7-9, I will show that Hume followed Shaftesbury's moral taste theory more closely than he followed Hutcheson's moral sense theory. Hume's account is superior to Hutcheson's insofar as the analogy with aesthetic taste emphasizes the importance of tradition, community, and intersubjective conversation whereas the analogy with sense perception appeals only to an ahistorical essentialism. And Hume's account is superior to Shaftesbury's insofar as Hume's version of the moral taste doctrine is based on a naturalized account of moral beauty which does not rely on natural teleology and is therefore more accessible to us today than ancient Greek accounts.

CHAPTER 2: THE CLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF MORAL BEAUTY

I.

In this chapter we examine some of the most important Greek and Roman antecedents to the 18th Century concept of moral beauty. It is well known that Hume's ethics is indebted to Francis Hutcheson who was, in turn, indebted to the Third Earl of Shaftesbury; so it should come as no surprise that Hume's concept of moral beauty also descended from Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. Both of these earlier thinkers refer to classical sources on this subject – most commonly Cicero³⁵, but also Plato and Aristotle. So what did the British moralists think the ancients were talking about? Today it is common to read the Greek term *ton kalon* as a term referring only to an aristocratic kind of quality³⁶ -- hence the widely used translation of *ton kalon* as “the noble”.³⁷ But members of the influential 17th Century philosophical school known as the Cambridge Platonists translated the phrase more literally as “the beautiful”.³⁸ Linking virtue with

³⁵ Important citations of Cicero on moral beauty include the quote on the title page of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* and Shaftesbury's citation in *Miscellany* III.2, p. 415n25.

³⁶ See Werner Jaeger's *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, (Oxford University Press, 1945) for an early influential argument supporting this sort of interpretation.

³⁷ This translation can be found, for example, in Terrence Irwin's widely used translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³⁸ *Ton kalon* is, in moral contexts, that kind of value which is choiceworthy for its own sake but not for the sake of anything else, and in non-moral contexts it is the ordinary Greek word for beauty. See Terrence Irwin's excellent glossary entry on “fine, beautiful, *kalos*”, p. 328-9 in his second edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett, 1999).

beauty allowed those in the classical Platonic-Aristotelian tradition to see morality in terms of character rather than duty. Whereas modern moral philosophy in the wake of Hobbes and Locke saw ethics as a matter of rules preventing conflict between self-interested individuals, classical moral philosophy saw ethics as a matter of attractive ideals which could serve as focal points for communities. Julia Annas puts it well: The “leading notions” of ancient ethics “are not those of obligation, duty and rule-following; instead of these ‘imperative’ notions it uses ‘attractive’ notions like those of goodness and worth”.³⁹ In other words, ethical inquiry in the ancient world (for the most part) revolved around ideals for what to *pursue* in order to achieve moral excellence rather than rules about how to *avoid* moral guilt and blame. It was this fundamental concept of attractive ideals which gave rise to the doctrine of moral beauty.

Moral beauty emerges as a central concept when one sees the Form of the Good in Plato’s *Republic* as being identical to the Form of the Beautiful in the *Symposium*. This is how Plotinus read Plato, and it was Plotinus (via Christian Platonists such as Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius) who bequeathed a large part of the moral beauty doctrine to early modern British Platonists. Plotinus writes that “Ugliness and evil are basically one. Goodness and beauty are also one (or, if you prefer, the Good and Beauty)” (*Enneads* I.vi.6, p. 40).⁴⁰ And his reading of the Platonic tradition is not without merit. There are several apparent similarities between the Good and the Beautiful as described by Plato.

³⁹ Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press: 1993), p. 4).

⁴⁰ Citations of Plotinus’s *Enneads* are from *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O’Brien, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1964), cited by Ennead, Treatise, and Section numbers, followed by page numbers.

Most strikingly, we come to know each form by “ascending” through various stages. In the *Republic* Plato compares the process of education as an “upward journey” out of a cave, leaving behind the visible “images” of sense perception and reaching up toward the “intelligible realm” of pure idea, a journey which leads to the Form of the Good as its highest point (*Republic* 517b).⁴¹ The Form of the Good is that to which all things owe “their existence and their being” – it is that which generates all “coming-to-be ... although it is not itself coming to be” (*Republic* 509b). Likewise, in the *Symposium* Plato says the Form of the Beautiful “always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away” (*Symposium* 211b)⁴², and he compares the search for the beauty to ascending “stairs” through various stages, leaving behind beautiful bodies in favor of beautiful souls until at last one reaches the Form of the Beautiful (*Symposium* 211c).

Moreover, at several points Plato explicitly links the Good and the Beautiful. In the *Republic* he argues that, because the Form of the Good is “the cause of knowledge and truth”, it is “more beautiful than they” (*Republic* 508e), later adding that the Good “is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything” (*Republic* 517c). And in the *Symposium* Plato speaks indiscriminately of love aiming at either beauty or goodness: love is both the guide to our journey toward beauty (*Symposium* 210a) and that which aims at “wanting to possess the good forever” (*Symposium* 206a). It is only after having risen beyond all sense perception to a contemplative vision of the Beautiful itself that it is

⁴¹ Citations of Plato’s *Republic* are to the C.D.C. Reeve translation (Hackett, 2004).

⁴² Citations of Plato’s *Symposium* are to the Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff translation (Hackett, 1989).

possible for a human being “to give birth not to images of virtue ... but to true virtue” (*Symposium* 212a).

This last point about the necessity of the Beautiful for knowledge of virtue recalls the *Republic*'s claim that the Form of the Good is like the sun in that it “gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower” (*Republic* 508e). It is “the most important thing to learn about” because

it is by their relation to [the good] that just things and the others become useful and beneficial. ... And if we do not know it, you know that even the fullest possible knowledge of other things is of no benefit to us, any more than if we acquire any possession without the good. Or do you think there is any benefit in possessing everything but the good? Or to know everything without knowing the good, thereby knowing nothing *kalon* or good? (*Republic* 505a-b)

Plato's point here seems to be that, while other knowledge gives you the ability to achieve various ends, only knowledge of the Good tells you *which* ends are worth pursuing. And if we identify the Good with the Beautiful we can see how this works: knowledge of the good/beautiful shows us which ends are *attractive*. Here the connection between goodness and beauty points us toward the importance of love or desire (Greek: *eros*) – the major theme of the *Symposium* as well as the *Phaedrus*. For Plato love is intrinsically related to beauty: love just is the desire to possess something the lover sees as beautiful/good (*Symposium* 204b-e).⁴³ Hence for Plato, ethical inquiry

⁴³ For a helpful conceptual analysis of Plato's term *eros* see Alan Soble's *The Philosophy of Sex and Love* (Paragon House, 1998) Chapter 5, especially p. 96-97 and 116-118. Soble, following Gregory Vlastos, nicely brings out the implication of Plato's view that “when person x loves person y, x does not really love y but only the goodness or virtue that y manifests, a goodness that has an independent existence of its own and for which y is only the vehicle” (p. 117). See also Vlastos, Gregory. “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato” in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973). Thus, on Plato's view, when I say

was as much a matter of desire as it was of knowledge: in modern terms it was *conative* as well as *cognitive*.

Another implication of seeing the Good as Beauty is that there is no *formula* for ethics. Ethics becomes a matter of what 18th Century moralists would call “taste”. This is a theme Plato’s student Aristotle developed in his concept of *phronesis* – virtue as skill and expert perception or taste which must be cultivated. Aristotle famously argued that virtue is a “mean” which is “intermediate” between two vices: virtue requires not only having the right feelings, but “having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, and in the right way” (NE II.vi.11, 1106b). Aristotle goes on to clarify his doctrine of the mean:

Virtue, then, is a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it. It is mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. (NE II.vi.15, 1107a)

Thus Aristotle defines virtue as relative to the judgment made by one who possesses the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, translated here as “prudence”, but also translatable as “practical wisdom”.⁴⁴

Now *phronesis* is a skill that must be acquired by experience. Aristotle warns us early in the *Ethics* not to expect “the same degree of exactness” in moral philosophy that

that a sunset is beautiful, this does not imply that I love or desire to possess the sunset itself. I couldn’t actually possess the sunset, and even if I could somehow possess it, its beauty is fleeting and so I could not possess it for long. Realizing this fact inspires me to the understanding that the sunset is only an “image” of beauty, not “beauty itself”. For Plato the only way I can possess beauty itself is for me to *become* beautiful myself.

⁴⁴ Christopher Rowe uses the latter translation in his and Sarah Broadie’s edition of *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2002); cf. Irwin’s glossary entry for *phronesis* on p. 345.

one would expect in mathematics (NE I.iii.1, 1094b; cf. I.vii.18, 1098a). Some questions are not susceptible to a “[general] account; for the judgment depends on particular cases, and [we make it] by perception” (NE IV.v.12, 1126b; cf. NE II.ix.8 1109b). Here perception (Greek: *aisthesis*) is the kind of expert perception that David Wiggins has called “situational appreciation”, a skill which allows us to recognize the morally salient features of a particular situation.⁴⁵ And the skill of prudent perception is acquired over time through real world experience not by memorizing rules:

A sign of what has been said [about the unclarity of what prudence requires] is the fact that whereas young people become accomplished in geometry and mathematics, and wise within these limits, young people with *phronesis* do not seem to be found. The reason is that *phronesis* is concerned with particulars as well as universals, and particulars become known from experience, but a young person lacks experience, since some length of time is needed to produce it. (NE VI.viii.5, 1142a)

For Aristotle to say that *phronesis* is concerned with particulars and not universals is to say that morality is not reducible to universal laws and formulae. Rather the skill of moral judgment is “an object of *aisthesis*, not scientific knowledge [*episteme*]” (NE VI.viii.9, 1142a).

The nonformulaic nature of morality is evident in Plato, too. As much as Plato talks about mathematics, he seems also to think that morality involves skills that cannot be reduced to formulaic rules. The role of mathematics in the *Republic* is as a spiritual discipline designed to train “the soul to turn itself around” away from physical things and toward ideas (*Republic* 526d), thereby “purifying” the soul (*Republic* 527d) and correcting the damage years of sensual pleasure-seeking (*Republic* 519b) has caused on

⁴⁵ Wiggins, David. “Deliberation and Practical Reason”, reprinted in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (UC Press, 1980), p 233.

“the eye of the soul” and its ability to perceive the good (*Republic* 533d). It is not merely incidental that, when the character of Glaucon asks Socrates to give the same sort of account of the Good that he gave of justice, Socrates begs off: “I am afraid that I won’t be up to it and that I will disgrace myself and look ridiculous by trying” (*Republic* 506d). Instead of attempting a philosophical definition of the Good, Plato has Socrates give us a series of images – the sun, the divided line, and the cave – all of which rely on the analogies with sight and perception. The implication is that virtuous person must have a *vision* – not a definition – of the Good in order to know how to live well.⁴⁶ Here again we see the classical emphasis on attractive ideals over imperative rules. Morality is about learning to see (and desire) the world in a certain way.

The importance of vision was emphasized by later Platonists such as Plotinus and Augustine who restated in mystical and religious terms Plato’s ascent toward Beauty (now: the Divine) through the power of *eros*. Plotinus insists on the necessity of love and a vision of the Beautiful for those who wish to live well by “going higher” than physical pleasure:

But there are beauties more lofty than [the beauties of the realm of sense], imperceptible to sense, that the soul without the aid of sense perceives and proclaims. To perceive them we must go higher, leaving sensation behind on its own low level. It is impossible to talk about bodily beauty if one, like one born blind, has never seen and known bodily beauty. In the same way, it is impossible to talk about the “luster” of right living and of learning and of the like if one has never cared for such thing, never beheld “the face of justice” and temperance and seen it to be “beyond the beauty of evening or morning star.” Seeing of this sort is done only with the eye of the soul. And, seeing thus, one undergoes joy, a wonder, and a distress

⁴⁶ On the connection between vision and the indefinability of the Good in Plato see Iris Murdoch’s *The Sovereignty of the Good* (Routledge, 1970), *passim* but see especially p. 97ff and cf. p. 42.

more deep than any other because here one touches truth. Such emotion all beauty must induce – an astonishment, a delicious wonderment, a longing, a love, a trembling that is all delight. (*Enneads* I.vi.4, p. 37-8)

For Plotinus, as for Plato, the life of philosophy is a search for “the source of all reality, namely the Good and the One” (*Enneads* VI.ix.3, p. 76). And love of “the divinity” is “innate in our souls” (*Enneads* VI.ix.9, p. 85) such that “when we look at [the divine One], we then attain the end of our desires and find rest” (*Enneads* VI.ix.8, p. 84). But we cannot achieve contemplative vision of the One by reason: “the act and faculty of vision is not reason but something greater than, prior and superior to, reason” (*Enneads* VI.ix.10, p. 86; cf VI.ix.4, p. 78). True philosophy or “dialectic” is about more than logic and formulae: “it is not just abstract theories and rules. ... Dialectic, accordingly, has no knowledge of propositions as such (they are to it as letters are to words); but it knows the propositions in knowing the truth ” (*Enneads* I.iii.5. p. 122-3).

The same themes recur in Christianized form in Augustine’s *Confessions*.⁴⁷ At the end of the biographical work, Augustine summarizes his philosophical journey, emphasizing the theme of love for divine Beauty which transcends physical beauty while being the ground of all existence:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within me and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into these lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you.

⁴⁷ References to Augustine’s *Confessions* are to Henry Chadwick’s translation (Oxford, 1991), cited by Book, Chapter, and Paragraph numbers.

You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.
(*Confessions* X.xxvii.38, 201)

Elsewhere Augustine describes his mystical vision of God in terms reminiscent of the ascent toward the Form of Beauty that Plato describes in the *Symposium*. “Step by step I ascended from bodies to the soul which perceives through the body”, reports Augustine, describing the stages of contemplation beyond the senses until “in the flash of a trembling glance [my soul] attained to that which is” (*Confessions* VII.xvii.23, p. 127; cf. a similar mystical experience described at IX.x.24, p. 171). In these passages we have all the familiar Platonic apparatus – love/desire for the vision of a supreme Being that is the ground of existence, beauty, and goodness – with the added idea that all things are inherently structured to play a role in God’s creation. Augustine opens the *Confessions* by recalling Plotinus on our innate longing for the divine. Addressing God, Augustine writes: “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (*Confessions* I.i.1, p. 3).

Here we find the final aspect of the classical doctrine of moral beauty: its *teleological* form. In the *Republic* Plato argues that morality consists in the “harmony” between the parts of a soul which obtains when each part serves its own distinctive teleological goal or function (*ergon*): The just person

does not allow the elements in him each to do the *ergon* of some other, or the three sorts of elements in his soul to meddle with one another. Instead, he regulates well what is really his own, rules himself, puts himself in order, becomes his own friend, and harmonizes the three elements together. (*Republic* 443d)

When each individual person has harmonized his or her own soul internally, then each person’s external actions will be harmonized with other people’s actions such that “the

one in whom each of the elements does its own *ergon* will be just and do his own *ergon*” (*Republic* 441d). In this way, society as a whole (“the city”) will have the virtue of justice as well (*ibid*) and will embody a moral condition analogous to health, conceived of as a state of “order” in which the body’s elements are related to one another “according to nature” (*Republic* 444d). This harmonized natural order is described as morally beautiful: “fine [*kalon*] and good” (*ibid*).

Later, in the *Timeaus*,⁴⁸ Plato extends the concepts of harmony and moral beauty from individuals and societies to the universe as a whole. According to Plato’s myth, when the divine craftsman (or Demiurge) created the physical universe, he modeled it on the eternal reality accessible only to pure reason, resulting in a *kosmos* (an ordered whole) whose parts fit together beautifully (*Timeaus* 28a-29a). This creator God was “supremely good” and ordered the world in the best possible way (*Timeaus* 29e-30b). Plato conceives of the universe as a “truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence” (*Timeaus* 30c; cf. 34c ff). The Creator “assigned tasks” to each being (*Timeaus*, 42e) and set the whole universe into beautifully ordered “dancing movements” (*Timeaus*, 40c). On this view everything that exists has a proper place within the order of the universe and finds its own goodness/beauty (while contributing to the goodness/beauty of the whole) in fulfilling that natural role. The purpose of philosophy, then, is “to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so bring into conformity with its objects our faculty of understanding” (*Timeaus*, 90d).

⁴⁸ Citations of Plato’s *Timaeus* are to the Donald J. Zeyl translation included in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett, 1997).

With Stoicism the theme of natural teleology came into its own. Marcus Aurelius summarizes the Stoic view well, drawing out, especially, its relation to the terms of Plato's *Timeaus*:

One should continually think of the universe as one living being, with one substance and one soul – how all it contains falls under its one unitary perception, how all its actions derive from one impulse, how all things together cause all that happens, and the nature of the resulting web and pattern of events. (*Meditations* IV.40)⁴⁹

For the Stoics, as for Plato, “out of all bodies the universe is composed into one harmonious body” (*Meditations* V.8) governed by “Reason” (*Meditations* VI.1). And these eternal rational principles work together for the good of the Whole such that “nothing evil is in accord with nature” (*Meditations* II.17): “That which is brought by the nature of the Whole, and preserves it, is good for every part” (*Meditations* II.3).

Continuing in the classical moral beauty tradition, Marcus affirms “the essential beauty of good and the essential ugliness of evil” (*Meditations* II.1), arguing that we ought to acquire a “distaste” for vice (*Meditations* IX.2). But, when combined with the doctrine of natural teleology, this view yields the consequence that even things that seem ugly, disgusting, frightening or otherwise unattractive “in themselves” are recognized as beautiful when seen in the context of “Nature as a whole” (*Meditations* III.2). For example, even insects “perform their proper task and contribute, as far as in them lies, to the order of the universe” (*Meditations* V.1). Therefore, the goal of morality is “to be genuinely at home with Nature and her works” (*Meditations* III.2), understanding “the nature of the universe, the usefulness of each thing within it, and the value of each in

⁴⁹ Citations of Marcus's *Meditations* are to the G.M.A. Grube translation (Hackett, 1983), cited by Book and Section numbers.

relation to the Whole and in relation to man as citizen of that Whole” (*Meditations* III.11).

For the Stoics, only in proper harmony with Nature can human beings acquire the *honestum*, a Latin word literally translated as “honorableness” but which often has a sense closer to “moral goodness” or, better, “moral beauty”.⁵⁰ When attempting to translate Stoic philosophy from Greek into Latin, Cicero says, “By *honestum*, then, I mean that which can justly be esteemed on its own account, independently of any utility, and of any reward or profit that may accrue” (*De Finibus* II.45).⁵¹ Importantly Cicero goes on to say that what makes something moral “is its possession of a character that renders it praiseworthy in virtue of its own beauty and form” (*De Finibus* II.49). Hence, *honestum* can be seen as Cicero’s translation of *ton kalon*; “moral beauty”.⁵²

⁵⁰ The *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare (Oxford, 1982), defines *honestum* as “That which is (morally) honourable, virtue, rectitude (transl. Gk. *to kalon*).”

⁵¹ References to Cicero are to either *On Moral Ends*, ed. Julia Annas, trans. Raphael Woolf (Cambridge, 2001) or to *On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), both cited under their Latin titles (i.e., *De Finibus* and *De Officiis*, respectively) by Book and Section numbers.

⁵² Compare the passage from Cicero which Hutcheson quoted on the title page of his *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*: “No other animal, therefore, perceives the beauty, the loveliness, and the congruence of the parts, of the things that sight perceives. Nature and reason transfer this by analogy from the eyes to the mind, thinking that *beauty, constancy and order should be preserved, and much more so, in one’s decisions and in one’s deeds*. They are careful also to do nothing in an unseemly or effeminate way, in all their opinions and actions thinking and doing nothing licentiously. The *honestum* that we seek is created from and accomplished by these things. Even if it is not accorded acclaim, it is still honorable, and, as we truly claim, even if no one praises it, it is by nature worthy of praise. You are seeing, my son, the very face and form, so to speak, of the *honestum*; if it could be seen with the eyes, as Plato says, it would inspire an amazing love of wisdom” (*De Officiis* I.14-15, my emphasis).

In summary, the classical tradition involved five component doctrines: (1) a link between beauty and goodness, (2) the importance of ideals, (3) an emphasis on the conative element of moral judgment, (4) moral perception as a cultivated skill, and (5) natural teleology. The first four of these doctrines are the same as those I identified in Chapter 1 as the essential elements of the moral taste theory. The fifth doctrine is part of what Hume had in mind as the “metaphysical reasonings” which led “the elegant Lord Shaftesbury” and other “modern enquirers” into “confusion” (EPM 1.4). It will be up to Hume to ground the normativity of moral beauty without natural teleology.

CHAPTER 3: SHAFTESBURY AND MORAL REALISM

I.

As noted in the previous chapter, rationalists and sentimentalists agreed on the need to respond to those they considered “skeptics” who denied that morality was “real” and “natural”. The most notorious of these alleged moral skeptics was Thomas Hobbes, but the Earl of Shaftesbury argued that John Locke belonged in this category, too.¹ The rationalists, moreover, objected that in appealing to a feeling of pleasure sentimentalists reduced moral judgment to a matter of “taste” (here conceived as personal preference). In other words, rationalists accused sentimentalists of being moral skeptics. In this chapter I argue that Shaftesbury inherited an intellectual context in which the rejection of moral realism was often connected to the concept of “taste”, but that Shaftesbury wanted to protect moral realism by returning to a classical unity of aesthetics and ethics according to which there is such a thing as objectively good taste in morals.

As a child, Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, had been tutored by John Locke who was a close friend of Shaftesbury’s grandfather (the first Earl of Shaftesbury).² As he grew up, however, Shaftesbury came to reject the moral skepticism that he thought followed from Locke’s empiricism and voluntaristic divine

¹ Hume also links Hobbes and Locke together as those “among the moderns ... who maintained the selfish system of morals” established in antiquity by Epicurus (EPM Appx 2.3).

² For the standard biography of Shaftesbury, see Robert Voitle’s *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

command theory. In a letter to his own protégé Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury argues that Locke's moral philosophy is not significantly different from Hobbes's:

In general truly it has happened, that all those they call "free writers" now-a-days have espoused those principles which Mr. Hobbes set a-foot in this last age. Mr. Locke, as much as I honour him on account of other writings (viz., on government, policy, trade, coin, education, toleration, &c.), and as well as I knew him, and can answer for his sincerity as a most zealous "Christian" and believer, did, however, go in the self-same tract and is followed by the Tindals, and all the other ingenious free authors of our time.³

The reference to Matthew Tindal, author of *Christianity Old As Creation*, makes clear that the "free writers" Shaftesbury has in mind are the English deists.⁴ Shaftesbury himself is usually counted as one of the early deistic philosophers,⁵ but there are important differences between Shaftesbury and the canonical deists such as Tindal, John Toland, Anthony Collins, *et al.* Like the "free thinkers", Shaftesbury defended freedom of thought and expression and the toleration of religious diversity. But, unlike

³ Letter to Michael Ainsworth, dated June 3, 1709 in *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Macmillan, 1900), p 403.

⁴ For the term "free thinking" see Robertson, John M. *A Short History of Freethought, Ancient and Modern* (Macmillan, 1899). When it first appeared in the late 17th Century, the term referred simply to the freedom of philosophy and science to doubt traditional religious doctrines, but by 1713 Anthony Collins's *A Discourse of Free-Thinking occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Freethinkers* "gave the word a universal notoriety, and brought it into established currency in controversy, with the normal significance of 'Deist'" (p. 4).

⁵ For the classic study on this topic, see A.O. Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto" *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series 41:2 (June, 1951).

Shaftesbury, the free thinkers also tended to reject natural teleology in favor of a mechanistic physics – following the “self-same tract” of Hobbes.⁶

Shaftesbury goes on to argue that Locke was in fact more dangerous than Hobbes because, unlike Hobbes whose political and religious ideas distracted readers from his metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, Locke was able to make the mechanistic position attractive to a wide audience.⁷ His letter to Ainsworth continues:

It was Mr. Locke that struck the home blow: for Mr. Hobbes’s character and base slavish principles in government took off the poison of his philosophy. ’Twas Mr. Locke that struck at all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world, and made the very ideas of these (which are the same as those of God) “unnatural”, and without foundation in our minds.⁸

Hence on Shaftesbury’s view it was Locke, not least because of his devastating refutation of the doctrine of innate ideas, who had succeeded in convincing many of the British moralists to give up the idea of morality as natural rather than as socially constructed:

⁶ Stanley Grean aptly describes Shaftesbury as “a Deist with a difference”. Grean, Stanley. *Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics* (Ohio University Press, 1967), p. 61-3.

⁷ In our time, J.B. Schneewind has given a similar reading of the relationship between Hobbes and Locke: “Locke’s failure drew attention to the moral consequences of empiricism more forcibly than previous empiricist ethics had done. Hobbes had argued for the elements of an empiricist ethic, but his epistemology was massively overshadowed by his extremely contentious political views, and his views on religion were in any case scandalous. His work therefore raised problems more urgent than any that might arise from a connection between empiricism and voluntarism. ... With Locke it was different. Locke was more interested in the epistemology of natural law than in working out a code. As a result the connection between voluntarism and empiricism stood out more starkly in his view of ethics, fragmentary though it was....” See *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 159.

⁸ *Op cit*, p. 403.

“Thus virtue, according to Mr. Locke, has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom. . . . And thus neither right nor wrong, virtue nor vice, are anything in themselves”.⁹ Therefore it was against Locke that Shaftesbury thought morality most needed to be defended.¹⁰

Now, how, according to Shaftesbury, had this crisis come about? How had England been lured from the mechanistic physics and empirical epistemology of Hobbes and Locke (doctrines which might seem ethically neutral) to what Shaftesbury saw as the total denial of moral truth? In the beginning of British Empiricism (so Shaftesbury’s story goes), when Hobbes and Locke were attempting to naturalize philosophical inquiry, classical moral systems such as natural law theory and ethical rationalism came under attack.¹¹ These theories required the existence of metaphysical entities to which, the empiricists argued, we could have no epistemological access. For many philosophers, the natural next move in this context was the attempt to generate a moral philosophy out of hedonism, since pleasure is an (perhaps the only) empirically and naturalistically acceptable source of action. But Shaftesbury couldn’t accept the hedonistic turn. The

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 404

¹⁰ There is reason to doubt whether Shaftesbury was correct to read both (or either) Hobbes and Locke as rejecting the view that morality is, in some sense, a function of eternal natural laws. We will examine below the extent to which Shaftesbury might have misunderstood Hobbes and/or Locke.

¹¹ When I say that Hobbes and Locke wanted to “naturalize” philosophy, I do not mean to imply that they were engaged in the same project Quine would later call “epistemology naturalized”. I mean only that they wanted to rid philosophy of justificatory appeals to religious dogma and supernatural revelation and to philosophize instead using the same sort of empirical method used by natural science.

problem with hedonism, he thought, is that it seems to reduce to egoism: if every action is motivated by pleasure, then the agent can only act self-interestedly. Moreover, if egoism is true then morality seems to be a product of external pressure (i.e., people must be coerced into being good by appeals to their self-interest) such that altruistic moral action becomes (in 18th Century terminology) “unnatural” and moral distinctions are not “real”.

The two major early empiricist philosophers, Hobbes and Locke, accepted this egoistic implication. On Hobbes’s mechanistic picture, all “voluntary motion” is deterministically “caused” by the perception of an object the agent desires (*Leviathan* I.6, p. 38), and all desires are simply “small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man” (ibid.) toward objects the perception of which causes a sensation of “Pleasure or Delight” (*Leviathan* I.6, p. 40). So all desires are aimed at pleasure. And on this view happiness or “felicity” is simply the state of desire-satisfaction: “*Continuall successe* in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continuall prospering, is that men call FELICITY” (*Leviathan* I.6, p. 46). If all desires are aimed at the sensation of pleasure, and if happiness is the satisfaction of desire, then it follows that happiness is simply the sensation of pleasure which constitutes the state of desire-satisfaction. In short, Hobbes affirmed both hedonism and egoism. And Locke concurred. Like Hobbes, Locke defined value hedonistically: “That we call *Good*, which is *apt to cause or increase Pleasure, or diminish Pain in us*” (ECHU II.xx.2; cf. II.xxi.42 and II.xxviii.5). And Locke’s theory of action was egoistic in that, for him as for Hobbes, all voluntary action was grounded in desire-satisfaction conceived hedonistically: “that which immediately determines the *Will*, from time to time, to every voluntary Action, is the

uneasiness of desire, fixed on some absent good, either negative, as indolency to one in pain; or positive, as enjoyment of pleasure” (ECHU II.xxi.33).

What bothered Shaftesbury and many of his contemporaries was the empiricists’ apparent rejection of the “reality” of virtue. Shaftesbury (in the voice of Theocles, his primary spokesman in the dialogue *The Moralists*) says that the author of “a certain fair *Inquiry*” (i.e., Shaftesbury’s own *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*) argued against a specifically religious basis for ethics:

For being, in respect of *virtue*, what you lately called a realist, he endeavours to show that *it is really something in itself and in the nature of things, not arbitrary or factitious (if I may so speak), not constituted from without or dependent on custom, fancy or will, not even on the supreme will itself, which can no way govern it but, being necessarily good, is governed by it and ever uniform with it.* (*The Moralists*, II.3, p. 266-7)¹²

Here a “realist” about virtue is someone who holds the view that morality is “in the nature of things”. On this scheme, then, moral *realism* is opposed not only to *relativism* (the view that morality is constituted by “custom”) and *subjectivism* (the view that morality is constituted by an individual’s “fancy”) but also to *voluntarism* (the view that morality is constituted by the “will” of a sovereign, whether Locke’s God or Hobbes’s Leviathan). So, for some early modern moralists at least, to give morality a subjective basis in individual self-interest (even if one then attempted to construct on this subjective basis a set of objective and universal moral laws), rather than an objective basis in some

¹² The “you” in this passage is the character Philocles who earlier in the dialogue had distinguished two ways modern religious philosophers defended the link between religion and morality: “Some of them hold zealously for virtue, and are *realists* in the point. Others, one may say, are only *nominal moralists* by making virtue nothing in itself, a creature of will only or a mere name of fashion” (*The Moralists*, II.2, p. 262, my emphasis).

intrinsic feature of character or action, is to deny the *reality* of moral distinctions, a position synonymous in the early modern mind with moral *skepticism*.¹³ Conversely, to call morality “real” was to commit oneself to what Shaftesbury’s predecessor Ralph Cudworth called “eternal and immutable” principles of morality.¹⁴

Cudworth opens his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* by lamenting the existence of “pretended philosophers in all ages who have asserted nothing to be good and evil, just and unjust, ‘naturally and immutably;’ but that all these things were positive, arbitrary, and factitious only” (EIM, I.i.1). Here Cudworth is taking a stand against the view that would later come to be called *voluntarism*. In current philosophical theology voluntarism (as opposed to *intellectualism*) is the view that (to use a formulation inspired by a modernized version of Plato’s Euthyphro dilemma) God’s commands are morally good because God chooses to command them.¹⁵ On this view God does not (as intellectualism claims) command something because God knew it to be morally good independent of God’s choice. The implication of voluntarism is that God’s commands are *logically contingent* such that God could have chosen otherwise and these

¹³ See my earlier discussion of Hume’s understanding of moral realism and moral skepticism in Chapter 1, Section II above.

¹⁴ For a nice discussion of Cudworth’s influence on Shaftesbury, see J.A. Passmore’s *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 96-100

¹⁵ In his “Sermon Preached Before the Honorable House of Commons” Cudworth stated the intellectualist view thus: “Virtue and holiness in creatures, as Plato well discourseth in his *Euthyphro*, are not therefore good because God loveth them and will have them be accounted such, but rather God therefore loveth them because they are in themselves simply good.” See Gerald R. Cragg, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists* (Oxford, 1968), p. 384.

counterfactual commands would have been morally good simply because God chose them. The voluntarist denies that moral principles are, in Cudworth's terms, "immutably" true. For example, the voluntarist claims that God could have chosen to make rape morally acceptable, while the intellectualist claims that there is something intrinsic to the concept of rape such that it is *necessarily* morally wrong. In other words, the intellectualist claims that it is part of the *nature* of rape that it is wrong.

Wishing to show that morality does not depend on revealed religion,¹⁶ Shaftesbury shifted the debate about moral realism from the specifically theological issue of divine voluntarism to the more secularly relevant issue of whether morality is in the nature of things. Three-quarters of a century after Cudworth wrote *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Hume characterized the debate "of late years" as over the question "*Whether these moral distinctions be founded on natural and original principles, or arise from interest and education?*" (T 2.1.7.2). He equates the former alternative with the view that "morality is something real, essential, and founded on nature" (T 2.1.7.5) and the latter alternative with the view that "all morality be founded on the pain or pleasure, which arises from the prospect of any loss or advantage" (T 2.1.7.4). Hume's own view is that some moral distinctions are "natural" and others are "artificial" (T 3.2.1.1), though, as we will see in a future chapter, he argues that even the former are grounded in contingent facts about human nature and are hence "natural" without being "eternal and immutable" in Cudworth's sense. What is important here is Hume's statement of the

¹⁶ See, for example, *Inquiry* III.1, p. 177-9. For a recent discussion of this secularizing tendency in Shaftesbury's thought, see Michael Gill's *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 83ff.

widely held 18th Century understanding that the hedonistic egoism of Hobbes and Locke (those who ground morality in “interest” and “pleasure”) is opposed to the view I have called moral realism (i.e., that morality has, in Hume’s words, a “foundation in nature”).

Hobbes himself is clear in his rejection of moral realism and his consequent affirmation of what 20th century metaethicists would later classify as subjectivism or relativism:

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; And of his Contempt, *Vile* and *Inconsiderable*. For these words Good, Evil, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-wealth;) or, (in a Common-wealth,) from the Person that representeth it; or from an Arbitrator or Judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the Rule thereof.
(*Leviathan* 1.6, p. 39)

Nothing is “absolutely” good or evil in “the nature of the objects themselves”; rather good and evil are inventions of collective human society generated out of individual self-interest. The individual person “where there is no Common-wealth”, the condition which later political philosophers would call “the state of nature” (= “the natural condition of Mankind”, see *Leviathan* I.13, p. 86ff), decides for him or herself what is good or evil, but with the advent of the “Common-wealth” wherein people must share resources, society establishes an absolute monarch who, by enforcing rewards and punishments is able “to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the Common Benefit” (*Leviathan* II.17, p. 120). In other words, the government’s job is to be “the common Rule of Good and Evil” by causing everyone to experience pleasure and pain in the same actions,

thereby creating a single set of desires and aversions and thus a univocal definition of good and evil. In this way Hobbes hopes to escape subjectivism and relativism: in the commonwealth the commands of the Sovereign are absolute.

On these points, again, Locke follows closely behind Hobbes:

[T]he various and contrary choices, that Men make in the World, do not argue, that they do not all pursue Good; but that the same thing is not good to every Man alike. This variety of pursuits shews, that every one does not place his happiness in the same thing, or chuse the same way to it. ... [T]he greatest happiness consists, in the having those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure; and in the absence of those, which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now these, to different Men, are very different things. (ECHU II.xxi.54-55)

Here Locke affirms the subjectivity of value. Actions in and of themselves are neither good nor bad, but value exists only in relation to the pleasure or pain of an agent. And like Hobbes (though in a different way), Locke then tries to mitigate the subjectivism of his view. Locke argues that it is possible to make “wrong judgments” about our own happiness because we often fail to “compare present Pleasure or Pain with future” (II.xxi.63), specifically the “future state” in which God rewards and punishes our actions with “endless Happiness, or exquisite Misery”: “To him, I say, who hath a prospect of the different State of perfect Happiness or Misery, that attends all Men after this Life, depending on their Behavior here, the measures of Good and Evil, that govern his choice, are mightily changed” (ECHU II.xxi.60). For some of Locke’s contemporaries, this was enough to distinguish him from Hobbes and to secure Locke’s orthodoxy. Shaftesbury, however, thought that Locke had essentially the same position as Hobbes, only he had substituted God for Hobbes’s earthly monarch.

Now it is not entirely clear that Shaftesbury's assessment of Hobbes and Locke is correct. He wanted to call them moral skeptics. Locke certainly wouldn't have accepted that label. And even Hobbes thought of himself as *saving* morality from mechanistic empiricism by showing how the two are compatible. Notice two interesting points that follow from Hobbes's egoistic theory of action. First, since, in the state of nature, everyone deterministically pursues his or her own individual pleasure, then the natural condition of humanity is a struggle between selfish individuals: "during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (*Leviathan* I.13, p. 88). But, second, even in the state of nature there is a "generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life" (*Leviathan* I.14, p. 91). If all rational action is motivated by self-interest, then it is always irrational to harm oneself. When combined these points generate what Hobbes calls a "Fundamentall Law of Nature": "*to seek peace*" with others as much as possible (*Leviathan* I.14, p. 92). It is in each individual's rational self-interest to set up a government to enforce the peace. And Hobbes even claims that this law of nature (along with the other laws "derived" from it) is "Immutable and Eternall" and constitutes "the true and onely Moral Philosophy" because "it can never be that Warre shall preserve life, and Peace destroy it" (*Leviathan* I.15, p. 110). In other words Hobbes thought he had found a way to ground absolute social norms in nothing but personal subjectivism.

Locke is engaged in the same project. Like Hobbes, Locke thinks "the measures of right and wrong" in morality are "*capable of Demonstration* ... from self-evident

Propositions, by necessary Consequences, as incontestable as those in Mathematics” (ECHU IV.iii.18). This is because moral ideas are what Locke calls “mixed modes”, i.e., complex combinations of simpler ideas. Whereas simple ideas are gained directly through sense experience, mixed modes are constructed by the human mind (ECHU II.xxii.1). And, after we analyze moral concepts into their component ideas, logical argument can establish necessary relations between the component ideas of one moral concept and the component ideas of another moral concept in the same way that we can establish necessary relations between mathematical concepts (ECHU II.xi.16). For example

Where there is no Property, there is no Injustice, is a Proposition as certain as any Demonstration in *Euclid*: For the *Idea* of *Property*, being a right to any thing; and the *Idea* to which the Name *Injustice* is given, being the Invasion or Violation of that right; it is evident, that these *Ideas* being thus established, and these Names annexed to them, I can as certainly know this Proposition to be true, as that a Triangle has three Angles equal to two right ones. (ECHU IV.iii.18)

In this way Locke can show that there is a necessary connection between the concept of property and the concept of justice. If property exists, then it logically follows that justice exists.¹⁷

¹⁷ Notice, however, that, contrary to Locke’s apparent assumption, there is no obvious way to logically establish the antecedent, i.e., that anyone has a “right” to anything at all. Locke attempts just this sort of *a priori* demonstration of the natural existence of property in Chapter 5 of his *Second Treatise of Government*. See *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), p. 286ff. But it is far from clear that his arguments there are successful. Moreover, given Locke’s account of moral concepts in the *Essay*, we should not expect his *Second Treatise* demonstration to succeed. This follows from the fact that property, like all moral concepts, is a mixed mode, and is thus a social construction. Locke himself explicitly concedes that mixed modes are constructed by the mind for pragmatic purposes and are thus culturally relative: “For the several Fashions, Customs, and Manners, of one Nation, making several Combinations of *Ideas* familiar and necessary in one, which another people have had never any occasion to make” (ECHU II.xxii.6).

Moreover, like Hobbes, Locke says that the function of government is to construct a shared morality by rewarding and punishing certain behaviors:

Morally Good and Evil then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good or Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker; which Good and evil, Pleasure or Pain, attending our observance, or breach of the Law, by the Decree of the Law-maker, is what we call *Reward* and *Punishment*. (ECHU II.xxviii.5)

It might seem that this view would make morality relative to the positive law of particular societies, but, as we have seen, Locke blocks this result by appealing to the culture-transcending law of God. Even though good and evil are “nothing but Pleasure or Pain” (ECHU II.xxviii.5), this does not mean that individual persons or particular societies can pursue anything whatsoever they find pleasant, for God alone is the “righteous Judge” whose “endless” and “perfectly durable” rewards and punishments become the only “measures of Good and Evil” that matter (ECHU II.xxi.60). In this way, Locke, like Hobbes, grounds the motivation to absolute morality on the subjective basis of personal self-interest.

Thus Hobbes and Locke have both developed a political system in which a single public conception of justice (or “the right”) puts constraints on individuals’ pursuit of their (irreducibly pluralistic) private conceptions of the good. This distinction between the right and the good, unknown to the ancients, is a watershed moment that put modernity on the path toward political liberalism.¹⁸ But, as Shaftesbury saw, the divorce of rightness and goodness is also the death of the moral beauty tradition. No longer is ethics a matter of attractive ideals which could serve as focal points for communities. For

¹⁸ Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Harvard, 1999), p. 393-6.

Hobbes and Locke ethics has become a matter of rules preventing conflict between self-interested individuals. When notions of the right gain priority over notions of the good, then ethical inquiry turns from ideals to obligations and permissions.¹⁹ The moral questions become, *What must I do to avoid moral blame?*, and *What am I allowed to do without moral blame?*. The question of moral beauty, *What kind of life is attractive for its own sake?*, never arises. It is no accident that Hobbes forms his summary of “the Laws of Nature” in the negative: “*Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe*” (*Leviathan* I.15, p. 109). The positive formulation of this law, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”²⁰ has become supererogatory – beautiful, maybe, but beyond the demands of morality.

In summary: Hobbes and Locke moved from empiricism to hedonism to egoism, and then attempted to build a system of social morality on an egoistic foundation via the idea of a social contract, thereby making morality an invention of human culture and an artificial imposition onto the natural state of human existence. But Shaftesbury was not happy with what he saw as the egoistic darkness these philosophers had placed at the heart of human nature. Arguing from empirically acceptable principles, Shaftesbury rejected egoism, pointing to the observable fact of disinterested motives. And he argued that if empiricism is true, then there must be something like a “sense” or a “mental taste” which gives rise to moral ideas and motivates us to act on them.

¹⁹ MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, 1984), p. 244-255, esp. p. 250.

²⁰ From the New Testament, Matthew 7:12.

II.

Shaftesbury, is primarily known in the history of philosophy for two things. To moral philosophers he is known as the father of moral sense theory²¹; and to philosophers of art, he is known as “the first great aesthete that England produced”.²² But neither of these is what Shaftesbury himself thought was most important about his work.

Shaftesbury wasn't simply working out an epistemology of ethics or an account of aesthetic experience. He did examine both of these issues, but his more direct interest was in protecting the classical synthesis of ethics and aesthetics. To use Shaftesbury's own terms, the chief aim of his work was to defend the “reality” and “reasonableness” of moral beauty and moral taste to eighteenth-century British society. In the *Miscellaneous*

²¹ See for example D.D. Raphael's *The Moral Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 16. For a recent statement of this view, see James Baille's *Hume on Morality* (Routledge, 2000), p. 15-16.

²² Cassirer, Ernst. *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James P. Pettegrove. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), p. 166. The passage continues: “Shaftesbury is the first for whom the problem of aesthetic form becomes all-embracing and fundamental problem, as he is the first in whose writings the concept of artistic genius attains universal significance.” Yet it is not clear that “aesthetic form” or “artistic genius” were as important to Shaftesbury as they were to the later English Romantics upon whom Cassirer is concerned to demonstrate Shaftesbury's influence. Nevertheless it remains true that Shaftesbury was one of the first English-speaking philosophers to give sustained attention to questions of beauty and to the phenomenon 20th Century philosophers called “aesthetic experience”. For a spectrum of interpretations of Shaftesbury's relation to the history of modern aesthetics, see Stolnitz, Jerome. “On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 11:43 (April 1961); Townsend, Dabney. “Shaftesbury's Aesthetic Theory” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41:2 (Winter 1982); Arregui, Jorge V. and Pablo Arnau. “Shaftesbury: Father or Critic of Modern Aesthetics?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34:4 (October 1994); Glauser, Richard and Anthony Seville. “Aesthetic Experience in Shaftesbury” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement* 76 (2002).

Reflections section V.iii (the final chapter of Shaftesbury's major work, the *Characteristics*²³) Shaftesbury sums up his overall project: "It has been the main scope and principle end of these volumes to assert the reality of a beauty and charm in moral as well as natural subjects, and to demonstrate the reasonableness of a proportionate taste and determinate choice in life and manners" (*Miscellany* V.iii, p. 466). Earlier in the *Miscellaneous Reflections* Shaftesbury (writing about himself in the third person) says the author of the *Characteristics* has the design

to advance something new, or at least something different, from what is commonly current in philosophy and morals. To support this design of his, he seems intent chiefly on this single point, *to discover how we may to best advantage form within ourselves what in the polite world is called a relish or good taste.* (*Miscellany* III.i, 404, italics in original)

This link between moral philosophy and the "polite world" of the well-bred English gentility is developed a few pages later:

To philosophize, in a just signification, is but to carry good breeding a step higher. For the accomplishment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts, and the sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature and the order of the world. It is not wit merely but a temper which must form the well-bred man. In the same manner, it is not a head merely but a heart and resolution which must complete the real philosopher. Both characters aim at what is excellent, aspire to a just taste and carry in view the model of what is beautiful and becoming. (*Miscellany* III.i, p. 407)

²³ Shaftesbury's major work *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (first edition published 1711) is an anthology of five previously published essays [*A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708); *Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor* (1709); *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (1710); *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699); and *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709)] along with five "miscellaneous reflections" roughly corresponding to the five essays which attempt to bring some coherence to the collection by commenting on and qualifying Shaftesbury's earlier views.

In short, it seems safe to conclude that defending moral beauty and moral taste are Shaftesbury's chief concern. And, as we have seen, Shaftesbury thought the primary threat to the notions of beauty and taste came from Hobbes and Locke.

It may even have been Locke himself who suggested to Shaftesbury the relevance of the term "taste" to moral judgment. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke had argued that although everyone pursues what he takes to be good and what he thinks will make him happy, "the same thing is not good to every Man alike" because "every one does not place his happiness in the same thing" (ECHU, II.xxi.54).²⁴ Goodness, thought Locke, is relative to what gives a person happiness. But, as we have seen, Locke conceives happiness hedonistically. And happiness conceived hedonistically varies widely among persons since different things give different people pleasure. Therefore, nothing is absolutely good except pleasure; and goodness turns out to be relative to individual preference (ibid). For example, there is not a "right" answer to the question of whether it is better for an alcoholic to give up drinking or to go blind from continued over-indulgence. Locke says "if you have more pleasure in the taste of wine than in the use of your sight, wine is good for you; but if the pleasure of seeing be greater to you than that of drinking, wine is naught" (ibid). Now this subjectivity and relativity of goodness suggested to Locke an analogy with taste:

The mind has a different relish, as well as the palate; and you will as fruitlessly endeavour to delight all men with riches or glory (which yet some men place their happiness in) as you would to satisfy all men's

²⁴ My discussion of Locke's moral philosophy has been helped by the work of J.B. Schneewind, especially Chapter 8 of his *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge, 1998), but also his introduction to the material on Locke included in his *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (Cambridge, 2003).

hunger with cheese or lobsters; which though very agreeable and delicious fare to some, are to others extremely nauseous and offensive: and many people would with reason prefer the griping of an hungry belly, to those dishes which are a feast to others. Hence it was, I think, that the philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether *summum bonum* consisted in riches or bodily delights, or virtue, or contemplation: and they might have as reasonably disputed whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums, or nuts; and have divided themselves into sect upon it. For as pleasant tastes depend not on the things themselves, but their agreeableness to this or that particular palate, wherein there is great variety: so the greatest happiness consists in having those things which produce the greatest pleasure; and in the absence of those which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now these to different men are very different things. (ECHU, II.xxi.55)

It is this analogy with taste that Shaftesbury picks up – there is a “relish” of the “mind ... as well as the palate”. But Shaftesbury’s goal is to show that not every preference is equally appropriate to human nature – there is such a thing as *good* taste.

Shaftesbury might also have encountered the challenge to the possibility of good taste in Montaigne.²⁵ In his essay titled “That the taste of good and evil things depends in large

²⁵ J.B. Schneewind’s research in *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) suggests that the source of the taste analogy could be Montaigne. Because of his overall focus on the history of theological voluntarism and its attendant motivational externalism, Schneewind traces the origins of the 17th Century moral crisis to Montaigne’s Christian skepticism (i.e., fideism) where Schneewind finds an early version of the taste analogy: “Suppose that Christian moral doctrine, or something like it, represents the content of morality: then, said the skeptics, you may or may not find that way of life to your taste. If you do not, there is nothing in it that will motivate you to live as it directs. Thus Montaigne holds that he must be guided by his own inner form, which is unlikely to be the same as that of anyone else” (p. 379; cf. 50-1). Thus motivational externalism leaves us with a morality that is simply a matter of taste, a view which, Schneewind’s study implicitly suggests led down a slippery slope to de Sade (see p. 425). Schneewind goes on to point out a link (or at least a similarity) between Montaigne’s belief in the relativity of moral taste and the voluntaristic themes in Hobbes and Locke (on Hobbes see p. 86, and on Locke see p. 143). Now, Schneewind doesn’t discuss the theme of moral taste in Shaftesbury, so he offers no suggestion of influence from Montaigne. Such influence is not out of the question, though, since Shaftesbury has at least some familiarity with Montaigne (see his explicit mention at *Sensus Communis*

part on the opinion we have of them” Montaigne argues that “a case can be made for evil not being an evil in itself or (since it amounts to the same) whether at last it is up to us to endow it with a different savour and aspect” (*Essais* I.14, p. 52).²⁶ Montaigne is reflecting on “an old Greek saying” by Epictetus who, in Montaigne’s words, taught “that men are tormented not by things themselves but by what they think about them” (*ibid.*), a view Shaftesbury had also read in Shakespeare who wrote that “there is nothing either good or // bad, but thinking makes it so” (*Hamlet*, Act 2, scene 2).²⁷ For Epictetus, a Stoic, the point was that everything works for the good of the whole and any seemingly bad event can be understood as good when seen in the broader perspective of natural teleology.²⁸ In other words, while we can’t control our external circumstances, we can control our beliefs and feelings about them. Montaigne, however, goes further, claiming that nature is morally neutral and we invest it with our own perspective, “Fortune simply furnishing us with the matter and leaving it to us to supply the form” such that we may “endow” our experiences with either “a bad and bitter taste” or “a pleasant one” (*Essais* I.14, p. 52).

And again:

III.iii, p. 56n29). In any event, Schneewind and I agree about the important point here: Shaftesbury inherited an intellectual context in which the rejection of moral realism was often connected to the concept of taste (here meaning personal preference).

²⁶ References to Montaigne are to *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (Penguin, 1991), cited as *Essais* by book, essay, and page number.

²⁷ For Shaftesbury’s qualified admiration of Shakespeare in general and *Hamlet* in particular, see *Soliloquy* II.3, p. 124.

²⁸ See my discussion of the Stoics in Chapter 2 above. On Epictetus, compare his *Encheiridion* Ch 5 (which Montaigne is citing) and Ch 31 (on providence and natural teleology).

Whatever comes to us from outside takes its savour and its colour from our internal attributes, just as our garments warm us not with their heat but ours, which they serve to preserve and sustain. Shelter a cold body under them and it will draw similar services from them for its coldness: that is how we conserve snow and ice. (*Essais* I.14, p. 71)

The warmth of our heart – not anything inherent in nature itself – determines the “savour” we give our experience in judgments of good and evil. The point is clearest in Montaigne’s comments about moral sentiments:

The laws of conscience which we say are born of Nature are born of custom; since man inwardly venerates the opinions and the manners approved and received about him, he cannot without remorse free himself from them nor apply himself to them without self-approbation. (*Essais* I.23, p. 130)

Our conscience is determined by custom, not nature. Hence Montaigne concludes that giving our soul “a taste of the perpetual diversity of the forms of human nature” is the best “school for forming our life” (*Essais* III.9, p. 1101): experiencing culture diversity inoculates our soul against the “vanity” of rational philosophical inquiry into universal truth (*Essais* III.9, p. 1118ff). From the traditional Stoic doctrine that suffering is due to false judgments about appearances, Montaigne has arrived at the relativistic position that good and evil are merely matters of taste.

In contrast to Locke and Shaftesbury, Shaftesbury wants to show that not only is there a “foundation of a right and wrong taste” in morals, but that it is “in the very nature of things” (*Soliloquy* III.iii.150). Note that in the passage quoted above Locke claims that disputing whether money or virtue is preferable is as *unreasonable* as disputing whether apples or plums taste better (ECHU, II.xxi.55). As we have seen, morality does turn out to be reasonable for Locke, but only because of God’s arbitrary choice to grant

an eternally pleasurable afterlife to those people who follow God's equally arbitrary moral commands.²⁹ And it is this voluntaristic divine command theory that Shaftesbury vigorously rejects. As he puts it in the passage already cited above, Shaftesbury wants to “demonstrate the *reasonableness* of a proportionate taste and determinate choice in life and manners” – in other words, to defend the preferableness of “what in the polite world is called a relish or good taste”.³⁰

Moreover, for Shaftesbury, cultivating good moral taste is the very purpose of philosophy. As Douglas J. Den Uyl notes, Shaftesbury's goal is to help his readers *actually develop* good moral taste, not merely to theorize about it.³¹ Philosophy is a practical way of life: philosophy is “in its prime sense ... *mastership in life and manners*” (*Miscellany* III.i, 406). Hence Shaftesbury says “as for metaphysics, and that which in the schools is taught for logic or for ethics, I shall willingly allow it to pass for philosophy

²⁹ On Locke's view, God's choice is strictly *arbitrary* since, as Schneewind explains, there is nothing in either law or nature that can constrain God's choice: “Moral goodness, on Locke's account, is what we predicate of action that complies with a law backed by sanctions. No one could impose such a law on God, so his actions could not be morally good or evil. ... In several places, moreover, Locke insists that there is nothing in nature that corresponds to our mixed-mode moral ideas (III.ix.5, p. 477; III.ix.11, p. 481; III.xi.9, p. 513). There can be nothing in nature, then, to set a moral limit to God's will. If neither law nor nature can constrain Locke's God, then Locke is taking the voluntarist position, that God's will is the origin of moral attributes.” See *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 149-50.

³⁰ For a detailed study of Shaftesbury's relation to “polite” society, see Klein, Lawrence E. *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³¹ Of course, as Den Uyl himself goes on to point out, it does not follow from this fact that there is nothing of interest for moral theorists to learn from Shaftesbury. See his “Shaftesbury and the Modern Problem of Virtue” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 15:1 (Winter 1998), 275-316.

when by any real effects it is proved capable to refine our spirits, improve our understandings, or mend our manners” (*Soliloquy* III.i, 129).³² It is, in part, this emphasis on the need to cultivate proper sentiment rather than to memorize intellectual principles that marks Shaftesbury as a moral taste theorist. We will examine the details of Shaftesbury’s concept of moral beauty and moral taste in Chapter 5. But first (in Chapter 4) we will examine the pre-Shaftesburean use of moral taste principles in the Cambridge Platonists.

³² Stanley Grean gives a nice discussion of this point in “Philosophy: True and False”, the first chapter of his book on Shaftesbury (*Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Ohio University Press, 1967)).

CHAPTER 4: MORAL TASTE IN THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS

So far I have claimed that Shaftesbury is the source of the modern moral taste theory. But the Cambridge Platonists were clearly an influence on Shaftesbury.¹ Not only are his ideas similar to those developed by the Cambridge circle, Shaftesbury explicitly cites core figures Ralph Cudworth and Henry More as predecessors to his own views², and Shaftesbury's first publication was a collection of sermons by the group's senior member Benjamin Whichcote³. Starting with Whichcote and filtering down through Cudworth and More, we see the gradual emergence of a distinct faculty of moral taste. At first Whichcote is merely drawing an analogy between metaphysics of morality and the metaphysics of knowledge. His important point is that we can "feel" our soul's conformity to the moral law.

¹ The Cambridge Platonists was a loose-knit group of philosophers working in Cambridge, England from about the 1630s to the 1680s. Their views were developed in interaction with one another and hence are often quite similar, though not always identical. Usually the core of the group is thought to have been Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More. Sometimes others such as Anne Conway, Nathaniel Culverwell, John Norris, George Rust, Peter Sterry, and John Worthington are included as peripheral figures. The group was centered initially at Emmanuel College, Cambridge where Whichcote was a fellow and served as tutor for Cudworth and Smith (as well as many of the minor figures) and later at Christ's College, Cambridge where More was a fellow and Cudworth was appointed as Master (after More declined the promotion). See the biographical sketches in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C.A. Patrides (Harvard, 1970), p. xxix-xxx. For a nice, brief introduction to the Cambridge Platonists, see Hutton, Sarah. "The Cambridge Platonists" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2008 Edition).

² For example, both are discussed in *Miscellany* II.2 (p. 365ff).

³ Whichcote, Benjamin. *Select Sermons of Benjamin Whichcot.*, ed. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (London: A & J Churchill, 1698).

In "Whatsoever Things Are True", a sermon based on the New Testament text Philipians 4:8,⁴ Whichcote exhorts his congregation to live their lives according to what is "true". To explain how to do this, he first sets out a correspondence theory of truth according to which a judgment is true if it "agrees" with reality. In other words, we have the truth "when we conceive of things as they are; and if we think otherwise, then there is a lie in our understandings" (Cragg, 410).⁵ Whichcote then draws an analogy between epistemology and ethics. His suggestion is that, just as a judgment is true if it corresponds to reality, so our actions can also be called "true" if they are "suitable" to reality: "Our judgment and apprehension are to be conformable to the reality and existence of things; and when our affections and actions are suitable to such a judgment and sense of our minds, we are then in the truth, and never else"(Cragg, 410). Therefore, Whichcote concludes that "if a man would make himself worthy and valuable, then he is to charge himself that his apprehension of things be according to the reality of things, and then that his election and choice and affections be guided by such apprehension..." (Cragg, 417).⁶

⁴"Whatsoever Things Are True" is the first of a series of thirteen sermons Whichcote preached on Philipians 4:8. In the King James Authorized Version (first published in 1611), the passage is translated thus: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." These sermons were preached at Trinity Church in Cambridge some time in the 1640s and first published in 1698.

⁵Page numbers are to either Gerald R. Cragg, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists* (Oxford, 1968) or C.A. Patrides, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists* (Harvard, 1970).

⁶Compare also Whichcote's Aphorism #590: "Morality is the congruity and proportion that is between the actions of rational beings and the objects of those actions."

Whichcote's application of the terms "truth" and "lie" to actions was picked up by later moral rationalists, most notably William Wollaston (whose arguments Hume ridicules at T 3.1.1.15n68), but an element of this view entered into Shaftesbury's sentimentalist theory through Whichcote's account of how we can *go about* performing true action. The question becomes: How exactly can we make sure our actions are "guided by" true apprehension of reality? Whichcote's answer: We must live according to reason rather than passion or arbitrary will. For Whichcote, when we simply follow the impulses of our passions rather than the directions of reason, we risk living a "lie" in the sense that we could become out of touch with reality.

Hence Whichcote says it is "below reason and short of virtue" to "live after a mere temper. ... For man, under God, hath a kind of sovereignty over himself. A man hath power to use diligence, that he may attain to right apprehensions of things; and then he hath power to execute and perform, according to his apprehensions"(Cragg, 414). Here, living by a "mere temper" means doing what comes naturally, without rationally reflecting on whether that is a good way to live. For in the thirteenth sermon in the same series on Phil. 4:8, Whichcote equates a man's "temper" with his "frame" of mind, or the "disposition of his mind, the settled complexion and constitution of his soul" (Cragg, 63). Taken by itself, then, the claim in the first sermon might seem to conflict with Whichcote's commitment to classical Platonic and Aristotelian sources. In Sermon #1 Whichcote seems to be saying that anything done from one's "temper" (= "the settled complexion and constitution" of one's soul) is "short of virtue" – a claim which would imply that doing what is right by a temper would also be short of virtue – whereas for the

Greeks, something is not a virtue at all if it is *not* done out of a settled disposition of soul.

But this reading would be a mistake. In Sermon #13, far from decrying a moral temper,

Whichcote is actually exhorting us to become the kind of person for whom living

according to the truth of reason "should become natural to you":

Now this is what I recommend to you, not only that these things [i.e., things such as integrity, justice, piety, nobility, virtue, praiseworthiness, etc.] should have an obligation upon you at some times (for that is but dull), but that you should be reconciled to all these things in the reason of your minds, that these things should become natural to you, a frame and temper, a complexion and constitution of soul. Apply these things in the reason of your minds and you cannot but be convinced of the reasonableness of them; for the materials of religion do exercise, teach, and satisfy. (Cragg, p. 63)

Taken together, then, the Sermons reveal that Whichcote thinks we ought to have a

rational temper, though not a *mere* temper. So Whichcote is implying that it is "short of

virtue" to do unreflectively what comes naturally, even if what came naturally for us

happened to be morally correct. Rather in Whichcote's view, just as in Aristotle's, virtue

has two necessary conditions: we must do what is right from a settled disposition, but we

must also do what is right *because we recognize that it is right*.⁷ Acting without rational

reflection, even if it leads to right action, would be only *accidentally* living according to

the truth; and this would be to risk falling into a "lie".

⁷ For Aristotle's distinction between genuinely virtuous actions and actions accidentally in accordance with virtue, see NE II.iv.3, 1105a: "for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state." In other words, genuinely virtuous actions are (1) intentional, (2) chosen for their own sake, and (3) habitual.

Although this view sounds quite a bit like pure rationalism, Whichcote does take an important step toward empiricist sentimentalism. In a sermon on Romans 1:18⁸, Whichcote reveals that being rational just means adhering to the "self-evident" first principles as they are "seen in their own Light, and are perceived by an inward Power of Nature" (Patrides, 47). So we *just see* by natural intuition which laws we should give ourselves. This is simply rationalism, but Whichcote goes on to anticipate sentimentalism when he treats the intuitive faculty as a kind of inner sense which, by feeling a "complacency in Good" (and an "antipathy" in evil), detects the "secret Harmony" one's soul has when one is living according to "the Rule of Righteousness"(Patrides, 48). Whichcote does not explain what he means by the feeling of "complacency", but as we will see, Henry More interprets this in a very empiricist way as a species of pleasure. Whatever Whichcote means here, he does *not* represent conscience as directing us by merely introducing intuitive conceptual information into our intellect. Rather he seems to characterize conscience as an inner sense which causes us to actually *feel* something in our soul like the ordinary outer senses do. Later in the same sermon Whichcote writes: "They who are in any degree Spiritual or Intellectual, and are not altogether sunk down into a brutish Spirit and sensual Affection; find, and *feel*, within themselves, Divine Suggestions, Motions and Inspirations" (Patrides, 58, italics in original). Thus we see the emergence of a kind of cognitive faculty of moral

⁸Reprinted as "The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion" in Patrides. Romans 1:18 reads: "For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Whichcote's sermon expounds this "holding truth in unrighteousness" as a failure to follow the dictates of one's conscience which he sees as a form of divine revelation.

perception (compatible with either moral sense or moral taste) as an epistemological mechanism by which we know if we are living according to the truth of the rational law.

The link between judging truth and living truth is further developed when Whichcote claims in classic Platonic-Augustinian fashion that you must *be* good to competently *judge* good: "Men of holy hearts and lives best understand holy doctrines and things. Those who have not the temper of religion are not competent judges of the things of religion" (Cragg, 425, Aphorism 285). For Whichcote we can only be sure we are correctly *judging* moral truth if we are *living* by moral truth such that we have a moral temper.

How is this supposed to work? Isn't the process circular as described so far? Whichcote seems to be saying that I can't judge the truth unless I am already living by the truth, but how can I live by the truth if I don't already know what the truth is? Two of Whichcote's aphorisms are helpful on this subject: "Great evil is introduced by a little departure from our right judgment. It is harder to return judgment than to have stood out with it, and every vicious act weakens a right judgment" (Cragg, 428, Aphorism 506) and "Sin hardens the hearts of men, spoils the modesty of intellectual nature, and disposes men for evil" (Cragg, 429, Aphorism 571). It is "hard" to break vicious habits which "weaken" our judgment and "dispose" us to wrongdoing. These facts do not imply it is *impossible* for a less-than-virtuous person to recognize the good, but only that it is *more difficult* for that person to recognize the good than it is for the virtuous person to recognize it. Recognizing the good is a skill that develops gradually as I grow in virtue. And each time I do something wrong (especially if I know it to be wrong), I take a step

toward vice and away from virtue thereby making it harder for me to recognize the good next time. In short, developing a moral temper strengthens our ability to make correct moral judgments, developing an immoral temper weakens it.

Note that this process is not entirely cognitive. A moral temper not only allows me to recognize the good, it also allows me to *desire* it. For Whichcote, working within the classical tradition, there is a link between the cognitive (knowledge of the good) and the conative (love of the good).

The link between cognition and conation is a theme that was further developed by Whichcote's students, most notably Ralph Cudworth and Henry More. In his *Sermon Preached Before the Honorable House of Commons*⁹, Cudworth argues that:

virtue cannot be taught by any certain rules or precepts. Men and books may propound some directions to us, that may set us in such a way of life and practice, as in which we shall at last find it within ourselves, and be experimentally acquainted with it; but they cannot teach it us like a mechanic art or trade. No, surely, 'there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding'. But we shall not meet with this spirit any where but in the way of obedience: the knowledge of Christ, and the keeping of his commandments, must always go together and be mutual causes of one another. (Cragg, 375)¹⁰

Knowledge is connected to obedient action. And Cudworth goes on to clarify why this would be so:

And, indeed, nothing is more ordinary than for us to shape out such monstrous and deformed notions of God unto ourselves, by looking upon him through the colored medium of our own corrupt hearts, and having the eye of our soul tintured by the suffusions of our own lusts. (Cragg, 382)

⁹ The text of the sermon is 1 John 2:3-4: "And hereby we do know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, 'I know him', and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The sermon was preached in 1647.

¹⁰ The quotation is of the Biblical book of Job 32:8.

As with Whichcote we see that our temper determines how we see the world and whether we have a correct perception of the good. What Cudworth has added is an emphasis on the inadequacy of “rules or precepts”. For later moralists such as Shaftesbury the lack of rules in morality will become an analogy with art since there is no formula for deciding whether an artwork is or is not beautiful. “I am persuaded that to be a virtuoso [i.e., aesthete]”, says Shaftesbury, “is a higher step towards the becoming a man of virtue and good sense than the being what in this age we call a scholar”, because the only requirements for being one of the latter is possessing “improved sophistry and pedantic learning” (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p. 148-9). More than a scholar’s pedantic application of “rigid rules” (*Miscellany* V.ii, p. 454), it takes a virtuoso’s good taste to discern artistic value, and those who have good taste can’t explain it to those who don’t.¹¹ Likewise, claims the moral taste theorist, morality is not a matter of memorizing and applying rules. Acting rightly requires a delicacy of taste, an ability to discern the *je ne sais quoi* of virtue.

In his unpublished manuscripts Cudworth actually employs an explicit use of the metaphor of taste to explain his view that moral judgment requires us to go beyond “rules or precepts”. He says

As the first spring of vital action is not from the speculative understanding, so neither is dry and insipid ratiocination the only measure and rule of good and evil. Ends and good are all one, for good is nothing but what is agreeable to ends, which proceed from a more simple nature in us than that of ratiocination; for which cause the Platonists make *agathon*

¹¹ For a nice discussion of Shaftesbury’s complex attitude toward aesthetic rules, see Richard Woodfield’s “The Freedom of Shaftesbury’s Classicism” in *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 15:3 (Summer, 1975), especially p. 261ff.

in order of nature to be superior to *nous* or intellect. It is not sapless speculative knowledge that is the proper rule or judge of good and evil untinged by any thing else but vital touches, *tastes and savors*. The speculative understanding alone by itself wants a principle to discern them and judge them by. It is here but like the moon which shines with a borrowed and derivative light. The first principle by which good and evil are distinguished is vital, not notional.¹²

We “judge” morality by “taste” not by “ratiocination”. Passmore offers a good analysis of this passage:

This is far more an anticipation of [a sentimentalist like] Shaftesbury than it is of [a rationalist like] Clarke; the knowledge of good and evil is a ‘taste’, not merely an intellectual apprehension of the difference between congruity and incongruity. But, at the same time, this taste is not a ‘sense’, as writers like Hutcheson would define a sense; it is not a faculty for apprehending moral distinctions, which reacts to their presence as the eye does to light. Our judgments of good and evil are part of our manner of life.¹³

According to Passmore what distinguishes Cudworth’s moral taste view from Hutcheson’s moral sense theory is that for Hutcheson moral judgment is instinctive while for Cudworth it is acquired.¹⁴ In other words Cudworth does not portray good moral judgment as something we’re born with the way we’re born being able to use our physical senses. Rather Cudworth says moral judgment is a matter of having the correct “vital disposition” or, as Passmore puts it, “manner of life”. Cudworth writes that

¹² Cudworth, Ralph. British Library Additional Manuscript #4982, p. 8-9, emphasis is mine. An abridged quotation of this passage can be found in J.A. Passmore’s *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 66. My deepest thanks are due to Richard Dees for sending me the unabridged transcript he made of Cudworth’s manuscripts while working on a research grant for Stephen Darwall (as mentioned in *British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’*, p. 115 n13).

¹³ Passmore, op cit, p. 66.

¹⁴ We will discuss this point in Chapter 6 below.

“According as every man’s vital dispositions is, so is a man’s judgment diversified concerning ends and goods”.¹⁵ And, as Passmore explains, there are two basic vital dispositions: the “animal” and the “spiritual”: “The animal appetites are egoistic, Utilitarian, where spirit is disinterested (though not uninterested); its concern is with the common life of men, not with individual gain”.¹⁶ Cudworth is claiming that those with the wrong conative desires – those whose “habitual dispositions”¹⁷ are to act according to their egoistic “animal appetites” – will be cognitively incapable of making correct moral judgments. Only those whose desires are “spiritual” can develop the habitual vital dispositions which constitute good moral taste.

By the time Henry More published his *Enchiridion Ethicum*¹⁸ (twenty years after Cudworth preached his sermon to the House of Commons), Whichcote's original epistemological analogy had been developed into a full-blown moral “faculty” which More calls the “Boniform Faculty”.¹⁹ Chapter I of More’s *Enchiridion* (entitled “What Ethics or Morals Are”) begins with this statement: “Ethics are defined to be *the Art of*

¹⁵ Cudworth Add. Ms. 4982, p. 9, quoted in Passmore p. 66

¹⁶ Passmore p. 57. Passmore is getting the language of “two theories of life” from Cudworth Add. Ms. 4982, p. 28. (See Passmore p. 55 n4.) On the animal vs. the spiritual (AKA “divine”), see also Darwall’s discussion in *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 137-8.

¹⁷ Cudworth Add Ms. 4982, p. 110, quoted in Passmore, p. 64.

¹⁸ The *Enchiridion Ethicum* was originally published in Latin in 1666. Quotations are from the English translation by Edward Southwell published under the title *An Account of Virtue* (London, 1690), cited by Book, Chapter, Section and page numbers.

¹⁹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “boniform” is a neo-Latinism coined by More himself “to denote a faculty by which moral goodness is appreciated” (op cit, vol 2, p. 387).

Living Well and Happily” (*Enchiridion* I.i.1, p. 1). More goes on to discuss the debate in Hellenistic philosophy about the relationship between living well (being virtuous) and happiness. Then he proposes to solve the problem by defining happiness, conceived of as pleasure, in terms of virtue: “Happiness is that pleasure which the mind takes in from a sense of virtue, and a conscience of well-doing, and of conforming in all things to the rules of both” (*Enchiridion* I.ii.2, p. 4). Here virtue is doing the right thing, and happiness is taking pleasure in doing the right thing. That faculty of mind which perceives this moral pleasure is what, according to More, Aristotle called an inward “*Sense and Feeling*” which allows us “*to make a Judgment of the Passions*”, a faculty about which More says “I confess I should rather have called, *The Boniform Faculty of the Soul*” (*Enchiridion* I.iii.7, p. 16).

In the course of defending his essentially hedonist view of happiness (viz., that happiness is a species of pleasure), More argues, like Hume, that if happiness were purely intellectual, then it wouldn’t motivate us to act. Merely *conceiving* of an object does not produce a desire or motive to obtain the object. A desire is only produced if we conceive the object *as good*, i.e, as tending to produce pleasure:

it must be agreed, that the Desires of the Soul fly not to their object, as it is intelligible, but as it is good or congruous, or grateful, or at least tending to these ends; and so filling the mind with all the Joys and Pleasure it can comprehend. Hence it is plain, that supreme Happiness is not barely to be placed in the Intellect; but her proper Seat must be called *the Boniform Faculty of the Soul*: namely, a Faculty of that divine Composition, and supernatural Texture, as enables us to distinguish not only what is simply and absolutely the best, but to relish it, and to have pleasure in that alone. Which Faculty much resembles that part of the Will which moves towards that which we judge to be absolutely the best, when, as it were with an unquenchable thirst and affection it is hurried on towards so pleasing an Object; and being in possession of it, is swallowed up in satisfaction that cannot be exprest. (*Enchiridion* I.ii.5, p. 6)

Here we have an early statement of a faculty of moral taste. The boniform faculty not only allows us to “distinguish” the good, it allows us to “relish” it. It is thus not only (“barely”) a function of the intellect; it also “resembles” the motivating function of the will.²⁰ The boniform faculty is both cognitive and conative.

Yet despite this enormous shift toward sentimentalism, More, like the other Cambridge Platonists, remains essentially a rationalist. Having defined happiness as a pleasure that motivates us toward virtue, he goes on to define virtue as “an intellectual power of the soul, by which it overrules the animal impressions or bodily passions; so as in every action it easily pursues what is absolutely and simply the best” (*Enchiridion* I.iii.1, p. 11) where what is “the best” is determined by “right reason”:

that certainly is absolutely and simply the best, which according to the circumstances of the case in question comes up closest to right reason or is rather consentaneous with it. For right reason, which is in man, is a sort of copy or transcript of that reason or law eternal which is registered in the mind divine. However this law is not by nature made otherwise known unto us, than as 'tis communicated and reflected on our minds by the same right reason, and so shines forth. But by how much it shines forth, by so much doth it oblige the Conscience, even as a Law Divine inscribed in our Hearts. (*Enchiridion* I.iii.5, p. 14-15)

²⁰ On the connection between pleasure and desire, compare *Enchiridion* I.viii.8-9, p. 59 where More describes our natural feelings of sympathy (though he doesn't use that word) with others. Observing others in pain causes a feeling of “compassion” in us, and observing others in pleasure causes an “agreeable” feeling in us. These feelings have been “by Nature instituted, as a Bait of Allurement, to draw on mutual Complacency, and to create a desire towards the Contentation of each other.” In other words, benevolence is a natural instinct. Thus *feeling pleasure or pain* at the thought of others' situations naturally *gives rise to a desire* to act so as to bring about a positive change in their situations. More concludes: “Wherefore as to *Love* and *Hatred*, *Grief* and *Joy*, the *Interpretation* of them is this, That we do, as much as in us lies, purchase Good to our selves and others; Next, that we hurt no Man, but on the contrary drive away Evil most industriously and affectionately from others as well as our selves” (*Enchiridion* I.viii.9, p. 60).

Here we have a more or less standard 17th Century rationalist account of moral epistemology.

So what is the relationship between right reason and the boniform faculty? Why do we need both? More argues that appeals to “right reason” are too vague to be helpful without a cognitive “standard” (as he calls it at *Enchiridion* II.ix.13, p. 154) by which to judge which claims to right reason are correct. This standard he finds in the boniform faculty:

Yet after all, as *Aristotle* himself is fain often to confess, tho it be easie to agree this Best to be that which to Right Reason is consonant; yet what this Right Reason is, or what is the measure of it, seems a more difficult matter truly to resolve. The Philosopher having (in his great Morals) brought in one who demands, what Right Reason was, and where to be found?²¹ The Answer is but darkly thus, *That unless a man have within himself a Sense of things of this Nature, there is nothing to be done*. It was indeed the Answer which a Physician gave to one who asked how he should distinguish, which was the paleness that argued a man to be ill of an Ague. But the same Philosopher preferably subjoins, *That it was the like Case, as to make a Judgment of the Passions; namely, That by some Sense and Feeling of them, the Conjecture was to be made*. So that in short the final Judgment upon this matter, is all referred to *inward Sense*, which I confess I should rather have called, *The Boniform Faculty of the Soul*. (*Enchiridion* I.iii.7, p. 15-16)

Here More might seem to be ridiculing Aristotle’s view of moral judgment as expert perception (*phronesis*). He says Aristotle’s notion of prudence is obscure (the question is “darkly” answered) because it offers us no way to adjudicate competing claims. And if More is rejecting acquired expert judgment in favor of an innate “inner sense”, then More would turn out to be closer to a moral sense theorist than a moral taste theorist. Actually, however, while More does believe the *capacity* for moral judgment (the boniform faculty

²¹ Here More’s marginal note cites Aristotle’s *Magna Moralia* II.10.

itself) is innate, he agrees with Aristotle that education is required in that this capacity must be *developed* before it can be effectively put to use. Recalling Whichcote's claim that one must be good in order to know the good, More says that the boniform faculty must be "awakened in you" (*Enchiridion* I.ii.9, p. 9) such that "no man can feel the Motives and Dictates of this Divine Faculty, but one who hath attained to it by diligent application" (*Enchiridion* I.iii.4, p. 14) at which point you "taste the Pleasures" of virtue and "grow enamoured" of it (*Enchiridion* I.ii.9, p. 9).

More thinks that ultimately Aristotle is correct when he "resolves" right reason into an "inner sense" rather than "into any certain and distinct Principles":

The Philosopher, in another place defines *Right Reason* thus, *That such Reason was right, as was conformable to Prudence.*²² Now whereas *Prudence* itself is nothing but that natural *Sagacity*, or well cultivated *Diligence* of the Mind; which he elsewhere calls, *The very Eye of the Soul*: this only brings back the same answer as before; resolving right Reason rather into an *inward Sense*, or an *inward Faculty* of Divination; than into any certain and distinct Principles, by which a Man might judge of that which in everything were the best. (*Enchiridion* I.iii.8, p. 17).

But note the tone of disapproval in this passage. More does agree with the view he attributes to Aristotle about the "*inward Faculty* of Divination". Because the boniform faculty is a cognitive standard (i.e., because it gives us information about moral truth), the boniform faculty could, without any appeal to reason, correctly direct our actions. But without actual "Principles, by which a Man might judge", we would be acting blindly. We would be living by a "mere temper" as Whichcote put it, rather than by a rational understanding of *why* these actions are best. More continues:

²² More cites Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* V.13

However, as *Aristotle* somewhere notes,²³ of men who by a sort of Violence, and without Reason, are hurried on to good, I must own, that whoever is so affected, differs but little from them who are inspired. And certainly this Principle which I call the *Boniform Faculty*, is the most divine thing within us, but hath nothing in it that so much as savours of Fanaticism.

In other words, blindly and “fanatically” following the boniform faculty (i.e., acting on an “inspiration” which is “without Reason”) would be equivalent to submitting to the “violence” of our passions. Fortunately, however, this is impossible since the boniform faculty is immune to fanaticism, because, as we have seen, God made it impossible to access our boniform faculty without the “diligent application (*Enchiridion* I.iii.4, p. 14) of prior moral discipline. Only after reason has brought our passions under the mastery of some basic moral principles will we feel the pleasure of the boniform faculty confirming those and other general principles as well as the virtue of the particular actions which are in accord with those principles.

So More must insist on the necessity of rational moral principles because not everyone is capable of accessing the information supplied by the boniform faculty. In addition to those in whom the boniform faculty is “not as yet awakened” (*Enchiridion* I.ii.9, p. 9), More also says that “there is a Race of Men in the World, who are quite seared up as to God (*Enchiridion* I.iv.1, p. 19)” – a reference to the New Testament passage which says that due to habitual wrongdoing, some people have had “their conscience seared with a hot iron”.²⁴ “To such as these,” More writes, “we must proceed

²³ More cites Aristotle’s *Magna Moralia* X.8

²⁴ Cragg has this footnote regarding the term “seared”: “A metaphorical expression, derived from 1 Timothy 4:2, and commonly used in the sixteenth and seventeenth

by other steps than what are already set down. For we must not talk of our *Boniform Faculty*, as the measure of Right Reason, and flowing from the Divine part of the Soul, but merely insist with them upon what refers to the Intellect” (*Enchiridion* I.iv.1, p. 20). Hence More attempts to formulate self-evident *noemata* – a word he coins from the Greek word for intellect (*nous*) to “signify Rules intellectual” – which he claims are “such Principles, as being immediately and irresistibly true, need no proof” and will therefore be accepted even without the testimony of the boniform faculty (*Enchiridion* I.iv.2, p. 20).

What seems to be going on in More's scheme is this: we make judgments with our intellect about what is the best course of action in our present case. We do this based on general ethical principles. Without such general principles we would not be fully virtuous because we would have no understanding of why a particular action was best. But rules alone are not enough, because they neither motivate us to act nor are they self-interpreting (i.e., they don't tell us which general rules apply in which particular situations). Therefore we must test our moral judgments (i.e., our particular applications of general rules) against our boniform faculty.²⁵ The view here is that if we have judged rightly and have discerned "Right Reason", then our judgment will be approved by our boniform faculty in the form of a feeling of pleasure. Hence, the boniform faculty becomes what More calls a “middle Principle to serve as *Mercury* did of old, and be an

centuries to describe a conscience rendered incapable of feeling. Cf. O.E.D.” (Cragg, p. 266 n7).

²⁵ Contra Schneewind, More's insistence on the inadequacy of rules does not make him a “consequentialist” (*Invention of Autonomy*, p. 205). If we need a modern pigeonhole, More's theory is a particularist version of intuitionism along the lines of W.D. Ross.

Interpreter between God and Man” (*Enchiridion* 1.iii.4, p. 14), i.e., to translate between the merely intellectual and the truly divine. In other words, this is a way to know what the eternal law requires of us and thus to allow us to conform our lives to that law. This reading is confirmed by More's own summary of Chs 1-4 at the start of Ch 5, a summary which extends the metaphor of taste:

It is now manifest, there is something which is simply and absolutely good, which in all human Actions is to be sought for. That it's Nature, Essence, and Truth are to be judged of by Right Reason; but that the relish and delectation thereof, is to be taken in by the Boniform Faculty. Also that all Moral Good, properly so called, is Intellectual and Divine: Intellectual, as the Truth and Essence of it is defined and comprehended by the Intellect: and Divine, as the Savour and Complacency thereof, is most effectually tasted through that high Faculty, by which we are lifted up and cleave unto God. (p. 28)

While reason might tell us what is right, the boniform faculty in its conative function must teach us to “relish” the “savor” of virtue. It is important to remember, however, that the boniform faculty – not reason – is the final cognitive standard of moral truth.

Without the pleasure of the boniform faculty to point us toward virtue, we could never be sure that our reason was giving us the right guidance or adjudicate between competing claims to right reason. Hence the boniform faculty has both cognitive and conative functions.²⁶ Thus from Whichocete’s fairly orthodox Platonist view that we must love the good in order to be competent moral judges, we have arrived at More’s assertion of a genuine faculty of moral taste.

²⁶ Of the boniform faculty Schneewind writes “What exactly that faculty is remains somewhat of a mystery even at the end of the book. But it is at least a love of the highest good as well as an insight into it” (*Invention of Autonomy*, p. 203). So Schneewind confirms “at least” my reading of the boniform faculty as both conative (involving “love”) and cognitive (giving “insight”).

A year before More's ethics was published in English, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* appeared. The latter, as discussed in Chapter 3, presented a forceful challenge to the classical viewpoint of the Cambridge Platonists, arguing for a kind of relativism about moral taste. Shaftesbury assumes the existence of a faculty of moral taste and conceives its functioning along the lines described by More, but then attempts to block the relativistic implications drawn out of the analogy with taste by Locke. Shaftesbury's strategy for blocking relativism was to argue for the reality and objectivity of moral beauty. It is this theory of moral beauty to which we turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: MORAL BEAUTY AND MORAL TASTE IN SHAFTESBURY

Taste, as a faculty of discernment and appreciation, is an aesthetic faculty. Hence to speak of moral taste is to imply the existence of moral beauty as that which moral taste discerns and appreciates. And to argue that moral taste is not purely subjective (i.e., to argue for the reality of *good* taste, as Shaftesbury wants to do) requires an argument that moral beauty is not purely subjective. Hume will show us that a rejection of the subjectivity of taste need not rely on a metaphysically realist account of beauty. But Shaftesbury and Hutcheson still believe they must defend an objective metaphysics of beauty. In this chapter and the next we look at these metaphysical accounts.

By way of introduction, the outlines of Shaftesbury's view are as follows. Shaftesbury thinks of moral judgment as self-reflection. First we have motives, and then we reflect on those motives resulting in a feeling of moral approval or condemnation (*Inquiry* I.ii.3, p. 172). The process is the same when evaluating other agents: we reflect on their motives and feel approval or condemnation. In Shaftesbury's aesthetic language, the state of having the morally correct motives is the state of being "morally beautiful", and the state of approving the morally correct motives upon reflection is the state of having "good moral taste". Shaftesbury argues that the morally correct motives which constitute moral beauty turn out to be those motives which are aimed at the good of one's society as a whole. This good is understood teleologically (*Moralists* III.i, p. 302-3). Furthermore Shaftesbury argues that both the ability to know the good of one's society

and the reflective approval of the motivation toward this good are innate capacities which must nevertheless be developed by proper socialization (*Miscellany* III.ii, p. 408).

Throughout the *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury argues that moral beauty is a “beauty of the sentiments, the grace of actions, the turn of characters, and the proportions of a human mind” (*Sensus Communis* IV.ii, p. 62). In general, for Shaftesbury, beauty is a matter of harmonious proportion or “numbers”. The “beauties of the human soul”, then, are “the harmony and numbers of an inward kind” (*Sensus Communis* IV.ii, p. 63). They are an “inward anatomy” of soul which, like the outward anatomy of the body, must be brought into the “order or symmetry” that is constitutive of beauty and health (*Inquiry* 2.I.ii, p. 194).

Shaftesbury locates himself in the classical tradition when he uses the term “honesty” to refer to this inner moral beauty: “the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth” (*Sensus Communis* IV.iii, p. 65). When Shaftesbury uses the word “honesty” here and elsewhere, he does not mean merely the virtue of truth-telling. Elsewhere Shaftesbury says that “honesty itself” is the “highest” object of moral perception and consists of an “inward character, the harmony and numbers of the heart and beauty of the affections, which form the manners and conduct of a truly social life” (*Miscellany* II.i, p. 353). In other words, “honesty” is a synonym for “moral beauty”. Thus Shaftesbury is intentionally recalling the Latin word *honestum*.¹ Shaftesbury himself explicitly equates *honestum* with moral beauty: “what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable, what is harmonious and proportionable is true, and what is at once

¹ On the *honestum* see my discussion of Cicero in Chapter 2 above.

both beautiful and true is, of consequence, agreeable and good” and in a footnote says that this unity of goodness-truth-beauty is what the Romans called *honestum* and the Greeks called *ton kalon* (*Miscellany* III.ii, p. 415). “Moral beauty”, then, is Shaftesbury’s name for what he elsewhere calls the “last or ultimate end in man” or *summum bonum* in Latin (*Regimen*, p. 48). And it is this ancient concept of the unity of the intrinsic values of beauty and goodness that Shaftesbury took it as one of his life projects to (re-)introduce to the English speaking world as an antidote to the “poison” of Hobbesian and Lockean hedonism.

For Shaftesbury, the concept of moral beauty is not merely a metaphorical comparison between ethics and aesthetics. Rather beauty and goodness are “one and the same” (*The Moralists* III.ii, p. 320) such that moral or mental beauty turns out to be more fundamental than physical beauty. Beauty, Shaftesbury argues, is primarily a property of souls or minds, not of bodies at all. In his essay *A Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules*,² he distinguishes two kinds of beauty a painting might attempt to represent, “moral” and “merely natural”. In the long quote that follows, he discusses the two kinds of beauty and the relationship between them. For our purposes here, Shaftesbury’s advice on how to create a balanced painting is not important. What is of interest is how

² The *Notion* was originally a set of instructions for a painting Shaftesbury had commissioned. Shaftesbury planned to include it in a projected sequel to the *Characteristics* called *Second Characters*, but he died before the project could be completed. The *Notion* was subsequently included in the posthumous 1714 edition of the *Characteristics*. My citations are to Benjamin Rand’s attempt to reconstruct the unfinished sequel based on Shaftesbury’s notes. See *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge University Press, 1914).

Shaftesbury distinguishes moral beauty from natural beauty while equating both with the representation of “life”:

A just design, or tablature, should at first view, discover what nature it is designed to imitate; what life, whether of the higher or lower kind, it aims chiefly to represent. The piece must by no means be equivocal or dubious; but must with ease distinguish itself, either as historical and moral, or as perspective and merely natural. If it be the latter of these beauties which we desire to see delineated according to its perfection, then the former must give place. The higher life must be allayed, and in a manner discountenanced and obscured; whilst the lower displays itself and is exhibited as principal. Even that which according to a term of art we commonly call still-life, and is in reality of the last and lowest degree of painting, must have its superiority and just preference in a tablature of its own species. It is the same in animal pieces, where beasts or fowl are represented. In landscape, inanimates are principal: it is the earth, the water, the stones and rocks which live. All other life becomes subordinate. Humanity, sense, manners, must in this place yield, and become inferior. It would be a fault even to aim at the expression of any real beauty in this kind, or go about to animate or heighten in any considerable degree the accompanying figures of men or deities which are accidentally introduced, as appendices or ornaments in such a piece. But if, on the contrary, the human species be that which first presents itself in a picture; if it be the intelligent life which is set to view; it is the other species, the other life, which then must surrender and become subservient. The merely natural must pay homage to the historical or moral. Every beauty, every grace must be sacrificed to the real beauty or the first and highest order. For nothing can be more deformed than a confusion of many beauties: and confusion becomes inevitable where the subjection is not complete.
(*Notion V.ix*, p. 53)

Here we see that for Shaftesbury only living things can be beautiful. But all of nature is living for Shaftesbury: the beauty of a landscape painting is found in “the earth, the water, the stones and rocks *which live*” (my emphasis). This is because Shaftesbury, following Plato’s *Timeaus* and its elaboration in ancient Stoicism, thinks of the world as a unified organism infused by the immanent living “soul” or “mind” of God without which

the natural world would be dead and hence could not be beautiful.³ As this passage from the *Notion* makes clear, all “real beauty” ultimately has its source in “intelligent life”. Thus the natural beauty of a still-life, an animal piece, or a landscape is a “lower” beauty than moral beauty. And in these lower forms of artistic representation “it would be a fault even to aim at the expression of any real beauty”. Moral beauty – capable of being pictured in art through the representation of “humanity, sense, manners” – is the real beauty. And in the highest forms of painting, “the merely natural must pay homage to the historical or moral. Every beauty, every grace must be sacrificed to the real beauty of the first and highest order.”

In the *Characteristics* Shaftesbury discusses this hierarchy of beauty most fully in his dialogue *The Moralists* where the character Theocles (Shaftesbury’s primary spokesman) says:

The beautifying not the beautified, is the really beautiful. . . . *The beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter but in the art and design, never in the body itself but in the form or forming power.* Does not the beautiful form confess this and speak the beauty of the design whenever it strikes you? What is it but the design which strikes? What is it you admire but mind or the effect of mind? It is mind alone which forms. All which is void of mind is horrid, and matter formless is deformity itself. (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 322)

When we judge a body to be beautiful we are really judging the act of designing and creating the body to be beautiful. Theocles argues for this conclusion by pointing out that when we say a statue is beautiful, we aren’t admiring the “matter” (the marble or bronze

³ See my discussion of Stoicism in Chapter 2 above. We will examine Shaftesbury’s concept of God in more detail below.

or whatever) but the “art and design” which Shaftesbury calls “the form or forming power”.

At this point Shaftesbury’s characters notice that terms like “design” and “form” can be either nouns or verbs. That is, we can speak either of the *form* of an object or the act of *forming* the object. Theocles concludes, “Here therefore is a double beauty. For here is both the form, the effect of mind, and mind itself” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 323). He calls the passive objects “*dead forms* ... which bear a fashion and are formed, whether by man or nature, but have no forming power, no action or intelligence”, and he calls the active subjects variously “living forms”, “forming forms”, or “*the forms which form*, that is, which have intelligence, action and operation”. Thus Theocles distinguishes these as two distinct “degrees or orders of beauty” before going on to argue for a third order of beauty

which forms not only such as we call mere forms but even the forms which form. For we ourselves are notable architects in matter and can show lifeless bodies brought into form and fashioned by our own hands, but that which fashions even minds themselves contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by those minds and is consequently the principle, source and fountain of all beauty. ... Therefore, whatever beauty appears in our second order of forms or whatever is derived or produced from thence, all this is eminently, principally and originally in this last order of supreme and sovereign beauty. (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 323-4)

Hence we have these three orders of beauty: first the dead forms, second the forming forms, and third the supreme form. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear what things or features of things Shaftesbury is distinguishing with Theocles’s three kinds of “forms”. In what follows, we shall see that the three forms seem to be natural beauty, moral beauty, and the beauty of God.

We must be careful in distinguishing the first two orders of beauty, i.e., the dead forms and the forming forms. It would be easy to mistakenly read Shaftesbury as equating the “dead forms” with the “matter” of an object.⁴ This, however, would mean that the dead forms are not genuinely beautiful. Now, this reading is not entirely implausible. Theocles does deny that beauty is in “the metal or matter” of statue, affirming instead that beauty is “never in the matter but in the art and design, never in body itself but in the form or forming power” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 322); and he does go on to equate “the dead forms of nature” with “the metals and stones” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 323). So there is some textual support for reading Shaftesbury as equating the matter of a thing with its dead form. But this reading seems less plausible when Shaftesbury has Theocles go on to explain the first two orders of beauty:

Here therefore is double beauty. For here is both the form, the effect of mind, and mind itself. The first kind low and despicable in respect of this other, from whence the dead form receives its lustre and force of beauty. For what is a mere body, though a human one and ever so exactly fashioned, if inward form be wanting and the mind be monstrous or imperfect, as in an idiot or savage? (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 323)

For Shaftesbury, saying that the mind of an “idiot” is defective is another way of saying that the inward form of the idiot’s body is defective or ugly. And this ugliness of mind diminishes the beauty of the body, even if the body’s outward form would otherwise be perfect. Here Shaftesbury does seem to be comparing his “living form” to what Douglas Den Uyl calls “the personality behind the smile”, but he does not seem to be saying that the dead form is merely matter. Instead he calls the dead form “the effect of mind” and

⁴ Douglas J. Den Uyl seems to be giving this sort of reading in his “Shaftesbury and the Modern Problem of Virtue” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 15:1 (Winter 1998), p. 295.

the living form “mind itself”. The dead form is the shape of the body, although for Shaftesbury this shape is not independent of the mind which animates the body – the outward form is an embodiment of the inward form. In the example of a statue, the effect of mind is not the mere *matter* of the statue, but the form or *design* of the matter. Matter devoid of form would be (for example) a lump of clay, not a statue at all. And that lump would not be beautiful in any way, even as a first order of beauty.⁵ To attain even the first order of beauty, a bit of matter must have some form – if only a “dead” form. This point helps us see why it is wrong to equate dead forms with mere matter. Shaftesbury says

⁵ This example is a bit artificial because, for Shaftesbury, everything that exists has some form, even lumps of clay. And hence everything has some minimal degree of beauty and goodness. Nothing is absolutely ugly. In *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* Shaftesbury claims that “we cannot say of any being that it is wholly and absolutely ill, unless we can positively show and ascertain that what we call ‘ill’ is nowhere good besides, in any other system or with respect to any other order or economy whatsoever” (*Inquiry* II.i, p. 169). Thus, as Den Uyl points out in a footnote (296n60), Shaftesbury is committed to the view that everything natural (even “a dunghill or heap of seeming vile and horrid matter”) is beautiful when seen in relation to the whole World since everything is designed and organized by God, the Supreme Mind. But it only follows from this that everything is beautiful when it is in its *natural* relation to the world. For Shaftesbury, it does not follow that it is impossible for things to become dislocated from their natural and God-ordained relations, hence becoming genuinely bad or ugly (if not absolutely so). Shaftesbury’s account, of course, raises the problem of evil. If the world is analogous to God’s body such that everything is infused with the mind or soul of God, then why *doesn’t* it follow that nothing can become dislocated from its natural and God-ordained relation to the world? My own body can become disordered (broken, sick, etc.) despite being infused by my soul, but how could something infused with the soul of an omnipotent Being ever become disordered? This is a serious problem (and a common criticism by Shaftesbury’s commentators, both among his contemporaries and today) and one which Shaftesbury did not directly address. He seems to have held something like a standard “free will theodicy” in which nature would be perfectly ordered except for human intervention. Whether and how Shaftesbury can give a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil remains to be seen. My point here is only that Shaftesbury did in fact believe there is such a thing as evil and ugliness. Thanks to Paul Hoffman for pressing me on this point. For more on Shaftesbury and the problem of evil see Grean’s Chapter 5 “Optimism and Evil”.

mere matter is not beautiful at all (“the beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter”), while he calls the dead forms the first order of beauty. Therefore the dead forms cannot be mere matter.⁶ In the end we are forced to conclude that the first order of beauty is the sensible pattern, structure, or design of a thing.

Now if the first order of beauty is the form of the object in the sense of the object’s design, then the second order of beauty is the active mental subject capable of creating this sort of intelligent design.⁷ In other words, the second order of beauty is the *human mind itself* which, through its intelligent creativity, imposes ordered design on the matter. That is why Shaftesbury can describe these forming forms of the second order as “living” and having “intelligence, action, and operation”. It may be objected to this reading that the important passage cited above where Theocles says “The beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter but in the art and design, never in the body itself but in the form or forming power” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 322) suggests that Shaftesbury thinks beauty is *in* the mind (i.e., the forming power) not that it *is* the mind. But due to Shaftesbury’s Platonic metaphysics, he actually seems to think both that beauty is in the mind *and* that it is the mind. Remember that for a Platonist something becomes beautiful (i.e., it gets the property of beauty “in” it) by participating in the form

⁶ In the passage cited above, Shaftesbury does say that the dead forms are “despicable in respect of” the living forms. But I do not take him to mean that the dead forms are literally not beautiful at all. Rather he is saying that *compared with* the living forms it is *as if* the dead forms were not beautiful at all.

⁷ Gideon Yaffe gives a reading of *The Moralists* similar to mine here, though we differ at other points. See his “Earl of Shaftesbury” in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 431.

of beauty (i.e, by somehow becoming an instance of beauty itself).⁸ Admittedly, this is hard to understand. Shaftesbury seems to believe something like this: the mind is a forming power which gives form to the body while at the same time the mind has its own form which is given to it by its participation in the divine Mind. In this way Shaftesbury can say both that there is beauty in the mind and that the mind is beauty.

This brings us to the third order of beauty. When Theocles speaks of the third order of beauty as “that which fashions even minds themselves” and which “contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by those minds and is consequently the principle, source and fountain of all beauty”, Shaftesbury makes this supreme beauty sound like the Form of Beauty from Plato’s *Symposium* which Augustine had identified with God.⁹ Likewise, just prior to this passage, Shaftesbury introduces the third order of beauty by having Theocles claim that “living forms” (i.e., human artists) have “a superior art or something artist-like which guided their hand and made tools of them” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 323).

How we interpret the third order depends on how literally we take Theocles’s claim that the third order is “artist-like” and capable of guiding human artists. Theocles seems to soften this claim by starting with the weaker claim that artists are guided by “a superior art” and only then adding the qualified “or something artist-like”. But if this reference to a Supreme Artist is meant literally, Shaftesbury might simply mean God. This is how Stanley Grean reads this passage, interpreting Shaftesbury’s third order of

⁸ “Participation” is Plato’s terminology, not Shaftesbury’s.

⁹ See my discussion of Augustine in Chapter 2 above.

beauty as a “Supreme Mind”.¹⁰ Grean’s reading gains some support when Shaftesbury speaks of the “mind ... which formed [our minds] at the beginning and which, as we have already proved, is original to all mental as well as other beauty” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 325).

On the other hand, we may choose to take Theocles’s talk of a guiding artist-like mind more metaphorically.¹¹ On this reading, Shaftesbury would be saying that the highest order of beauty is something like a standard or set of rules for creating art. This reading seems to gain plausibility when Theocles says “architecture, music and all which is of human invention resolves itself into this last order” (*Moralists* III.ii, p. 324), suggesting that the highest order of beauty is the general science or theory of architecture or music that is used to create particular works of art. But when Theocles says architecture “resolves itself” into the Supreme Beauty, he does not mean that architecture is an instance of Supreme Beauty. Rather he means that Supreme Beauty is the source of architecture. Remember that Theocles had said

whatever beauty appears in our second order of forms or whatever is derived or produced from thence [i.e., whatever appears in our first order of forms], all this is eminently, principally and originally in this last [i.e., third] order of supreme and sovereign beauty. (ibid)

If, as on my interpretation, only minds are at the second order of beauty, then architecture and music, being “of human invention” would be “derived or produced from thence” and would therefore be “resolved” into the Supreme Beauty in virtue of being located at the *first* order of beauty – not, as the metaphorical reading would have it, by being located at the third order. Indeed Theocles goes on to ask Socratically, “are those fabrics of

¹⁰ Grean, p. 254.

¹¹ Both Yaffe and Den Uyl take this approach.

architecture, sculpture and the rest of that sort the greatest beauties *which man forms* or are there greater and better?” (ibid, my emphasis). If architecture is something “which man forms”, then it cannot be located at the third order since the mind of man is a second order form-which-forms, and the third order is that which *forms* the forms-which-forms, not that which *is formed by* those forms.

The supreme beauty, then, is nothing less than God. But it must be noted that “God” for Shaftesbury means a Stoic-style Providence. In the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury goes as far as to define theism simply as belief in Providence:

Whatsoever is superior in any degree over the world or rules in nature with discernment and a mind is what, by universal agreement, men call ‘god’. ... To believe therefore that everything is governed, ordered or regulated for the best by a designing principle of mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect theist. (*Inquiry* I.i.1, p. 165)

But Shaftesbury’s Deity is not precisely the God of Judeo-Christian-Islamic Monotheism. Rather, Shaftesbury often seems to use the word “God” as another name for “Nature” or, better, “the Laws of Nature” – the objective ordering of the universe.¹² In his notebooks (published by Benjamin Rand under the title *Philosophical Regimen*), Shaftesbury writes that “the universe is one” and “has one nature, so as to conspire together and to one end” (*Regimen*, p. 15). Then he argues that this natural order would be impossible without some designing intelligence “since nothing can be more certain than that what is intelligent cannot be produced out of what is not intelligent” (*Regimen* p. 15-16). He concludes, “Hence there is in this respect a supreme eternal mind or intelligent principle belonging to this whole; and this is Deity” (*Regimen*, p. 16).

¹² See Grean’s Chapter 4: “Nature and God”, p. 50ff.

The same argument can be found (albeit in more rhapsodic terms) in *The Moralists* where Theocles argues that God (“the universal and sovereign Genius”) is a “uniting principle” immanent in the world analogous to the soul of a human body, the thing which makes a system of parts into a living organism directed to a teleological end.

How can we be so unnatural as to disown divine nature, our common parent, and refuse to recognize the universal and sovereign Genius? ... Each understands and thinks the best he can for his own purpose: he for himself; I for another self. And who, I beseech you, for the whole? – No one? Nothing at all? – The world, perhaps, you suppose to be a mere body, a mass of modified matter. ... Is not this nature still a self? Or tell me, I beseech you: How are you one? By what token? Or by virtue of what? “By a principle which joins certain parts and which thinks and acts consonantly for the use and purpose of those parts.” Say, therefore: What is your whole system a part of? Or is it, indeed, no part, but a whole, by itself, absolute, independent and unrelated to anything besides? If it be indeed a part and really related, to what else, I beseech you, than to the whole of nature? Is there then such a uniting principle in nature? If so, how are you then a self and nature not so? (*Moralists* III.i, p. 302-3)

Nature is not simply a “mere body, a mass of modified matter”, but is a rationally structured “whole” which constitutes a “self” or mind. Thus we see that Shaftesbury’s deity is an “Over-Soul” (to borrow Ralph Waldo Emerson’s term) whose body is the world.¹³ Grean rightly points out that the metaphor the world as God’s “body” implies (for Shaftesbury at least) that God and the world are, strictly speaking, distinct: “Though God is found *in* Nature, He is always *more than* Nature. This is ‘panentheism’ rather than

¹³ For the term “The Over-Soul”, see Emerson’s essay by that title in *Essays: First Series* reprinted in *Essays and Lectures* (The Library of America, 1983). Note that Emerson opens his essay with a quote from Cambridge Platonist Henry More’s 1642 poem “A Platonick Song of the Soul”:

But souls that of his own good life partake,
He loves as his own self; dear as his eye
They are to Him: He'll never them forsake:
When they shall die, then God himself shall die:
They live, they live in blest eternity.

‘pantheism’. It may be formulated as ‘God is *in* all, and all is *in* God,’ rather than simply as ‘God is All’.¹⁴ This is why I say that when Shaftesbury identifies God with “Nature”, he means to identify God with the “the Laws of Nature” rather than the physical world itself.

For Shaftesbury, conceiving God as both Nature and the Supreme Beauty grounds the normativity of individual moral beauty. Following the classical Platonic and Stoic sources Shaftesbury holds that everything else is beautiful to the degree that it works in harmony with the supreme beauty of providential design.¹⁵ Theocles approvingly quotes 2nd Century Greek philosopher Maximus Tyrius:

“For divinity itself,” says he, “is surely beauteous, and of all beauties the brightest, though not a beauteous body but that from whence the beauty of bodies is derived, not a beauteous plain but that from whence the plain looks beautiful. The river’s beauty, the sea’s, the heaven’s and heavenly constellations’ all flow from hence as from a source eternal and incorruptible. As beings partake of this, they are fair and flourishing and happy; as they are lost to this, they are deformed, perished and lost.” (*The Moralists* II.iii, p. 277).

Thus there is a “nature upon which the world depends, and ... every genius else must be subordinate to that one good genius” (*Moralists* III.i, p. 300). The metaphorical reading of the third order of beauty was not, then, completely off-base. The supreme beauty can

¹⁴ Grean, p. 66. For a recent general history of panentheism, see John W. Cooper’s *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers – From Plato to the Present* (Baker, 2006). For a study of panentheism in the 17th and 18th Centuries in particular, see Philip Clayton’s *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Eerdmans, 2000), especially Chapter 7. Neither Cooper nor Clayton mentions Shaftesbury, but they both mention Cambridge Platonists Cudworth and More in passing. For various current formulations of panentheism see Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, eds, *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World* (Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁵ On Stoicism, see Chapter 2 above.

serve as a standard to ground the particular choices of particular minds, but not exactly in the way the metaphorical reading proposes. The supreme beauty is not a subjectively chosen standard. It is the objective ordering of the universe. And when “we are reconciled to the goodly order of the universe” by developing beautiful souls “we harmonize with nature and live in friendship with God and man” (*Moralists* III.iii, p. 334).

This use of an objective universal order should make it clear that when Shaftesbury refers beauty to “minds” rather than to “bodies”, he does not mean to make beauty “subjective” in 20th Century terms. Remember that it is in part Locke’s value subjectivism to which Shaftesbury is responding. There are two dominant metaphors that Shaftesbury uses to explain his concept of a beautiful soul: musical harmony and architectural symmetry. These metaphors have a long tradition, the musical metaphor stretching back through Plato’s *Republic* to Presocratic thinkers such as Philolaus, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus and others.¹⁶ For Shaftesbury (as for Plato) beauty in general is a proper ordering between the parts of something according to the universal natural rules of harmony and proportion. Therefore a viewer’s subjective failure to judge the proper objective value of this ordering does not diminish its value. Likewise, moral beauty is the objectively proper ordering between the parts of the soul. In his own voice Shaftesbury writes:

Should a writer upon music, addressing himself to the students and lovers of the art, declare to them that ‘the measure or rule of harmony was

¹⁶ See Kahn, Charles H. *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Hackett, 2001), p. 23-38. Cf. Barnes, Jonathan. *The Presocratic Philosophers*, revised ed. (Routledge, 1982), especially p. 308-11 and 386-9.

caprice or will, humour or fashion', it is not very likely he should be heard with great attention or treated with real gravity. For harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of music. So is symmetry and proportion founded still in nature, let men's fancy prove ever so barbarous or their fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, sculpture or whatever other designing art. It is the same case where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony and proportion will have place in morals and are discoverable in the characters and affections of mankind, in which are laid the just foundations of an art and science superior to every other of human practice and comprehension." (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p. 157-8)

To summarize the current line of argument, beauty, whether of a body or a soul is grounded in an objective "standard" of order – namely the mind of God. At the highest level this order is the "supreme beauty" of God which guides God's own creation of the natural order and which we in turn imitate when we bring order to bodies or souls.

With this account of beauty in place, we are ready to look at what in *The Moralists* Shaftesbury calls (reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium* as discussed in Chapter 2 above) our "ascent" from physical beauty to moral beauty. The character Philocles (who, at this point in the narrative timeline of the dialogue, has already been converted to Theocles's Shaftesburian way of thinking) says: "Not captivated by the lineaments of a fair face or the well-drawn proportions of a human body, you view the life itself and embrace rather the mind which adds the luster and renders chiefly amiable" (*Moralists* I.iii, p. 243). Here and elsewhere Shaftesbury argues that our attraction to physical beauty is due only to the fact that outer physical beauty is a reflection of inner moral beauty, as shown by the fact that moral or intellectual "foolishness" can turn us off to an otherwise physically attractive person:

The admirers of beauty in the fair sex ... must allow still, there is a beauty of the mind, and such as is essential in the case. Why else is the very air of

foolishness enough to cloy a lover at first sight? Why does an idiot-look and manner destroy the effect of all those outward charms and rob the fair one of her power, though regularly armed in all the exactness of feature and complexion? (*Sensus Communis* IV.ii, p. 63)

Again we see that, for Shaftesbury, beauty is ultimately (“essentially”) a property of souls or minds, not of bodies at all.

But our ascent doesn’t stop at the individual. From a single beautiful soul, we ascend to the proper “coalition” of such souls which, when combined in the right way, can form a “beautiful society” (*Moralists* I.iii, p. 243-4). Next we move from a single community to all “mankind”, attracted by the “charm of beauty” we find in the “perfection of human nature”. Then comes the beauty of the “the whole” or the “universal order” (i.e., the cosmos itself), which, Shaftesbury argues, could not exist if there were not a “universal mind” or “a supreme intelligence and providential care ... by which the interest of the whole is securely established, the beauty of things and the universal order happily sustained” (ibid, p. 244). From bodies, to souls, to an individual society, to humanity as a whole, to the universe as a whole, we finally arrive at “the supreme beauty” of the “Deity” (ibid.) Here Philocles is taking his interlocutor Palemon through the three orders of beauty Philocles learned from Theocles. We pass through the natural beauty of bodies to the moral beauty of souls, ultimately to the cosmic beauty of God.

The teleological element of this view is emphasized in another, similar passage where Shaftesbury describes his vision of an ever-widening system of interconnectedness. Shaftesbury starts with the concept of an ordered “system”. Theocles says, “Whatever things have order, the same have unity of design and concur in

one, are parts constituent of one whole or are, in themselves, entire systems” (*The Moralists* II.iv, p. 274). In other words, the concept of order is teleological: a system has order insofar as its parts are aimed at a single end. Organisms and artifacts are examples of this sort of system: “Such is a tree with all its branches, an animal with all its members, and edifice with all its exterior and interior ornaments” (ibid.) Just as the parts of a human artifact such as a piece of architecture are designed so as to form a unified whole, so the parts of a plant or animal are interconnected in such a way as to form a system. Thus something forms a system if its parts are not “independent but all apparently united ... according to one simple, consistent and uniform design” (ibid.) For example, this sort of “mutual dependency of things” can be seen “in any dissected animal, plant or flower where [even] he who is no anatomist nor versed in natural history sees that the many parts have a relation to the whole, for thus much even a slight view affords” (*The Moralists* II.iv, p. 275).

But individual organisms are only relatively self-sufficient. Their parts are internally united, but at the same time organisms are externally united to other organisms. As Shaftesbury puts it in the *Inquiry*:

If therefore, in the structure of this or any other animal, there be anything which points beyond himself and by which he is plainly discovered to have relation to some other being or nature besides his own, then will this animal undoubtedly be esteemed a part of some other system. (*Inquiry* I.ii.2, p. 168).

He gives the example of “the respective proportions of the male and female” which Shaftesbury thinks not only have an obvious (he says it is “doubtless”) relationship to one another but also “to have a joint relation to another existence and order of things beyond

themselves” insofar as their union results in procreation (ibid). The reproductive organs of human beings work together toward the end of making more human beings. Hence Shaftesbury concludes that males and females

are both of them to be considered as parts of another system, which is that of a particular race or species of living creatures, who have some one common nature or are provided for by some one order or constitution of things subsisting together and co-operating toward their conservation or support. (ibid)

Likewise the human species is dependent on other species of plants and animals for their survival just as, for example, “to the existence of the spider that of the fly is absolutely necessary”, showing that each individual species is “in general, a part only of some other system”, namely “the system of all animals” (ibid).

In *The Moralists* Theocles gives this argument in summary form:

Here then is our main subject insisted on, that neither man nor any other animal, though ever so complete a system of parts as to all within, can be allowed in the same manner complete as to all without, but must be considered as having a further relation abroad to the system of his kind. So even this system of his kind to the animal system, this to the world, our earth, and this again to the bigger world and to the universe. (*The Moralists* II.iv, p. 274)

Human organisms, for example, especially as infants, are “helpless, weak, and infirm” and are thus inherently (“purposely, and not by accident”) “rational and sociable” such that humanity “can no otherwise increase or subsist than in that social intercourse and community which is his natural state” (*The Moralists* II.iv, p. 283). Thus human organisms form a system called a community. Likewise, all human communities form the human species (“the system of his kind”), which fits into a certain ecosystem of the

planet Earth, which has its ordered place in the universe as a whole. Thus Theocles concludes, “all things in this world are united” (*The Moralists* II.iv, p. 274).

For Shaftesbury, this cosmic order has moral implications. If man is an ordered system of parts, then “there must be somewhere a last or ultimate end in man” (*Regimen*, p. 48).

What is it, then, that we call the end? To eat, drink, sleep, copulate, and the pleasures which belong either to eating, drinking, sleeping, or copulating, are all of them only means, and refer to something further. If we can find nothing beyond, then all that we can say is, that the end of man is only to be in such a certain sound and perfect state of body; and such as serves to generate similar bodies. But if besides what has been mentioned, there are any certain dispositions of mind such as plainly refer to a species and society, and to the enjoyment of converse, mutual alliance, and friendship, then is the end of man *society*. Therefore to be such as to serve to that end of society (which is to be good or virtuous) is that to which everything in man is lastly referred, and which is properly his end. And where his end or perfection is, there certainly must be his good. (*Regimen*, p. 48-9).¹⁷

The virtues (things such as “integrity, justice, faith” etc.) are those character traits which allow us to live in society with other humans thereby fulfilling our “end”. Therefore the virtues are “part of a man, as he is a man” (*Regimen*, p. 50) – they allow us to be fully human and to “live according to nature” (*Regimen* p. 52). It is this harmonious relationship to the natural order that Shaftesbury calls *moral beauty*.

Thus we have seen what Shaftesbury meant when he said that the “principle end” of the *Characteristics* was “to assert the reality of a beauty and charm in moral as well as natural subjects” (*Miscellany* V.iii, p. 466). Just as “natural subjects” are naturally beautiful when they are in harmony with the other natural subjects to which they are

¹⁷ Shaftesbury gives a similar argument at *Inquiry* II.i, p. 167.

teleologically related in a mutually dependent system, so human beings are morally beautiful when they are in harmony with the wider community of humanity. And just as the harmony of nature is objective and reasonable, so moral harmony is objective and reasonable. Therefore, Shaftesbury concludes, Locke was wrong to think that happiness is subjective and that inquiry into the *summum bonum* was unreasonable. And if there is an objective standard of nature, then it is up to us to conform our judgment to that standard.

Now whether the writer be poet, philosopher or of whatever kind, he is in truth no other than a copyist after nature. ... Whatever philosopher, critic or author is convinced of this prerogative of nature will easily be persuaded to apply himself to the great work of reforming his *taste*, which he will have reason to suspect if he be not such a one as has deliberately endeavored to frame it by the just standard of nature. (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p, 158, my emphasis)

Enter the concept of moral taste. If good aesthetic taste is the ability to detect beauty when it is present, then good *moral* taste is the ability to detect moral beauty. It is this “moral taste” that Shaftesbury elsewhere calls the “moral sense” drawing the attention of Francis Hutcheson.

II.

In his essay *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury argues for an understanding of “common sense” as *a sense of the common good*. (*Sensus Communis* III.1-2, 48-53). Shaftesbury finds a predecessor in the Roman tradition which followed Marcus Aurelius’s coining of the term *koinonoemosune* to describe the same sort of sense of the common good (*Sensus Communis* III.1, 48n19). This notion of the common good recalls

the distinction between one's "private good" and one's "real good" which Shaftesbury draws in his essay *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*. The *private good* or "self-interest" is the "end" or "interest" which is "right" for an individual of one's species and toward which the natural affections point when they are not "ill". And the *real good* or "virtue" is the end in which one's private good harmonizes with the common good of one's species as a whole (*Inquiry* I.II.1, p. 167). Note that pursuing one's private good is not necessarily selfish. In fact, for Shaftesbury, pursuing one's private good is necessary, natural, and therefore good (insofar as it does not conflict with the public good). "Selfishness" is not just any regard for one's private good, but an "immoderate" one which is "inconsistent with the interest of the species or public" (*Inquiry* I.II.2, p. 170).

Shaftesbury emphasizes the importance of one's relation to society when he says that a creature is "nowise" good (i.e., neither "privately" nor "really" good) if it is naturally part of a "system" but is either detached from the system or harms that system (*Inquiry* I.II.1, p. 168). Recall, as discussed above, that a human's most immediate "system" is society. In this way the *sensus communis* becomes a necessary component in Shaftesbury's ethics. On Shaftesbury's view, for any action to be considered good, the agent must be moved to action by an affection for the good of the system: one can only be "supposed good when the good or ill of the system to which he has relation is the immediate object of some passion or affection moving him" (*Inquiry* I.II.1, p. 169). According to Shaftesbury, then, we couldn't have an affection toward the common good if we didn't somehow represent the common good to ourselves. And it is the *sensus communis* which allows us to do that. Shaftesbury is clear that it is not enough that our

actions be *in fact* aimed at the common good though still inwardly motivated by self-interest: “as soon as he has come to have any affection towards what is morally good and can like or affect such good for its own sake, as good and amiable in itself, then is he in some degree good and virtuous, and not till then” (*Inquiry* I.iii.3, p. 188). To be virtuous, an action must be aimed at the common good *because* we recognize that it is the common good and have an affection toward it as such. Thus a truly virtuous and good creature is “one as by the natural temper or bent of his affections is carried primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to good and against ill” (*Inquiry* I.ii.2, 171). Shaftesbury thinks this affection toward the good of one’s species is natural and common to every member of the species. Thus a virtuous action “ought by right” to have as its “real motive” the natural affection for one’s species.

Being motivated by an affection toward the common good is, however, only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for being virtuous. While anything can be good under Shaftesbury’s definition, only a human being can be virtuous. This is because virtue requires a “reflected sense” (i.e., the ability to reflect on what is good and right) which requires a high degree of reason. Shaftesbury says:

But to proceed from what is esteemed mere goodness and lies within the reach and capacity of all sensible creatures, to that which is called virtue or merit and is allowed to man only: In a creature capable of forming general notions of things, not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense are the objects of affection, but the very actions themselves and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects. So that, by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt and have now become the subject of a new liking or dislike. (*Inquiry* I.ii.3, p. 172)

The view seems to be that the *sensus communis* shows us what is good for our species and we naturally “approve” of that good and have an “affection” towards it, thereby motivating us to act. Those actions are individually good which are motivated by an affection toward the good of the whole. Then our “reflected sense” gives us a “new affection” towards the motives which result in good actions. On the next page Shaftesbury refers to this “reflected sense” as a “sense of right and wrong” which he defines as “a sentiment or judgment of what is done through just, equal and good affection or the contrary” (*Inquiry* I.ii.3, p. 173). So the notion of the moral sentiments, as Shaftesbury employs it, presupposes the existence of the *sensus communis*. A properly functioning person is already motivated by the right affections as represented by the *sensus communis*, and then our moral sentiment (our “sense of right and wrong”) confirms that those are in fact the right motivations by giving us a higher-order “feeling”, “affection”, or “sentiment” of which actions are done by the right affections. In other words, moral sentiment is a second-order affection toward the “right” first-order affections. Note that, while Shaftesbury also talks as if not only first-order affections but also actions, tempers, etc. can be the objects of the moral affection, it must be remembered that for Shaftesbury no action or temper is truly good or virtuous unless it is motivated by affection for the common good. In sum, after the *sensus communis* determines the moral action and motivates us to pursue it *as good*, then moral sentiment approves of what the common sense tells us via a feeling of affection and thereby motivates us to pursue it *as virtuous*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Here Shaftesbury anticipates Hume’s account according to which, first, we are

Shaftesbury later makes another distinction that is parallel to the distinction between the *sensus communis* and moral sentiment.

When we say, therefore, of a creature that ‘he has wholly lost the sense of right and wrong’, we supposed that, being able to discern the good and ill of his species, he has at the same time no concern for either nor any sense of excellency of baseness in any moral action relating to one or the other. . . . So that, if there be any further meaning in this sense of right and wrong, if in reality there be any sense of this kind which an absolute wicked creature has not, it must consist in a real antipathy or aversion to injustice or wrong and in a real affection or love towards equity and right for its own sake and on the account of its own natural beauty and worth (*Inquiry* I.iii.1, 178).

Here he seems to distinguish the *cognitive ability* to “discern the good and ill or his species” (thereby having a “notion” of the good) and the *conative affection* for the good which gives one the “concern for” the good of one’s species, a concern he goes on to describe as a “liking or dislike of manners” or “admiration or love” of the moral good (*Inquiry* I.iii.1, p. 178). The former cognitive ability, which Shaftesbury says is so natural as to be inalienable from a human being, refers to the *sensus communis* (in its cognitive function, abstracted from its typical connection to the natural affection for the common good) while the latter conative affection, which Shaftesbury allows can be lost due to vice, seems to refer to moral sentiment. It is important to notice here that Shaftesbury is *not* drawing a sharp distinction between the cognitive and conative aspects of moral judgment. Both of the steps he describes (i.e., first discerning the common good and second loving the common good) are based on a combination of reason and

motivated by a general benevolence called the “sentiment of humanity”, and then this natural sentiment comes to be regarded as a virtuous motive when our moral sentiment approves of it, thereby “gilding or staining” this motive with the “color” of virtue (EPM Appx 1.20-21). See Chapters 8-9 below.

sentiment. For Shaftesbury the *sensus communis* gives rise to both a representation of and an affection for the common good. And the sense of right and wrong is both a reflection on and an approval of an agent's motivation.

Related to Shaftesbury's understanding of the role of affections in moral judgment is his notion of moral pleasure. For Shaftesbury, there is a hierarchy of pleasures (see *Inquiry* II.ii.1, p. 202-3). The bottom rung is physical pleasure. Then there is a "contemplative delight", i.e., a "pleasure and delight superior to that of sense" which one gets from the proper exercise of the mind and discovering "speculative truths". And the highest pleasure comes from virtue. This moral pleasure comes from a combination of the "natural affections" (i.e., the affections for the common good, which "carry a real enjoyment above that of the sensual kind" within themselves) and the "pleasing assent and approbation of the mind" which we feel when we contemplate actions motivated by the natural affections: "For where is there on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a beautiful, proportioned and becoming action?" Moral pleasure seems also to be related to "conscience", which I take to be Shaftesbury's term for the moral sentiment when it is directed at actual past actions rather than possible future actions. Shaftesbury says that every being with reason and understanding is "forced to receive reflections back into his mind" of previous thoughts and actions. These reflections then cause a kind of moral pleasure or pain which Shaftesbury identifies as the workings of the conscience. Anyone who has "thrown off natural affection" will find that "nothing can be more grievous than" this automatic review of past behavior, and anyone who has "preserved [natural affection] with

sincerity” will find nothing “more delightful” (*Inquiry* II.ii.1, 208-9). Here again we see that the mechanism of moral judgment involves both cognitive representations of actions and motives and conative pleasures or pains in response to those representations.

It is important to notice here that, while Shaftesbury refers to our moral sentiments as our “conscience” and even as our “sense of right and wrong”, he is not trying to establish a “moral sense” as a distinct mental “faculty” for receiving moral ideas. As D.D. Raphael notes, “the casual application of the word ‘sense’ to the moral faculty is hardly more significant in Shaftesbury than it is in Samuel Clarke, who was a severe rationalist”.¹⁹ We talk of a “sense of purpose”, a “sense of urgency”, a “sense of adventure”, a “sense of humor”, etc. Sometimes we even speak of morally relevant “senses” such as a “sense of decency”, a “sense of shame”, a “sense of duty”, etc. But we don’t mean to suggest that any of these “senses” ought to be thought of as analogous to the physical senses or that they are special mental faculties metaphysically distinct from our ordinary mental faculties. Likewise, Shaftesbury’s use of the phrase “sense of right and wrong” is simply a figure of speech. He thought we used our ordinary faculties of thinking, feeling, and desiring to make moral judgments.

That we use a combination of our ordinary faculties explains why our moral judgments can be described as judgments of *moral taste*. Just like aesthetic judgment, the process of moral judgment has both cognitive and conative features. A.O. Aldridge saw this as a confusion on Shaftesbury’s part:

The addition of the moral sense to the faculties of man represents both Shaftesbury’s most highly-publicized contribution to thought and the

¹⁹ *The Moral Sense*, p. 16.

weakest part of his system. ... The weakness of the concept, however, is that it is nowhere clearly defined or explained. In some sections of the *Characteristics* it is not to be distinguished from reason, and in others it is almost equivalent to innate ideas. It represents variously knowledge and a motivation to action.²⁰

Aldridge reads Shaftesbury the same way I have done here: “The natural sense of right and wrong itself, by which is meant not only a discernment of the good or ill of one’s species – but a desire to obtain one and avoid the other – is the basis of Shaftesbury’s ethics”.²¹ In other words, he reads Shaftesbury as holding what I have called a moral taste theory. But because Aldridge himself doesn’t distinguish between moral sense theory and moral taste theory, he sees Shaftesbury as simply an inconsistent moral sense theorist: “Shaftesbury does not keep the two concepts [i.e., knowledge of and motivation to morality] separate, but allows them to merge indiscriminately” (p. 332-3). In contrast, if, following Rafael, we don’t impose on Shaftesbury the view that there is a distinct moral faculty, then we can see our ordinary rational, affective, and motivational faculties as elements in a single process of moral judgment analogous to judgments of aesthetic taste.

III.

One objection to my view that Shaftesbury ought to be classified as a moral taste theorist rather than a moral sense theorist is that Shaftesbury sometimes seems to suggest that moral judgment is instinctive. Yet, in Chapter 1, I stipulated that being acquired

²⁰ *Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto*, p. 302.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 309.

rather than instinctive was one of the essential features of the moral taste view. For example, in the dialogue titled *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody*, Shaftesbury seems to advance the claim that our sense of beauty is innate: “Nothing surely is more strongly imprinted on our minds or more closely interwoven with our souls than the idea or sense of order and proportion” (*The Moralists* II.4, p. 273-4). In this context, Shaftesbury is specifically talking about natural beauty, but, as we have seen above, moral beauty is a function of one’s relationship to the natural order. Shaftesbury notes that we can easily tell the difference between a structure created by an architect and a mere “heap of sand and stones” and claims that “this difference is immediately perceived by a plain internal sensation”. I take the source of this sensation to be the common sense. In the *Sensus Communis* essay, Shaftesbury argues that true beauty in art requires the artist to submit the “particulars” of the artwork “to the general design” and make “all things subservient to that which is principal” (*Sensus Communis* IV.3, p. 66), adding that “common sense (according to just philosophy) judges of those works which want the justness of a whole and show their author, however curious and exact in particulars, to be in the main a very bungler” (67). Hence it is the common sense (or “sense of beauty” as he calls it in *The Moralists*) which discerns “order and proportion” so that taste can approve or disapprove of them.

Now, Shaftesbury seems to think this ability of common sense to detect beauty is innate:

No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged. No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than

straight an inward eye distinguishes and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious or the despicable. (*The Moralists* III.2, p. 326)

Similarly, he says in the *Inquiry* that the mind “cannot be without ... nor can it withhold” judgments of moral taste, and he compares the functioning of the moral faculty to the functioning of a bodily organ: “this affection of a creature towards the good of the species or common nature is as proper and natural to him as it is to any organ, part or member of an animal body, or mere vegetable, to work in its known course and regular way of growth” (*Inquiry* II.I.1, 192). If our awareness of moral beauty functions instinctively analogous to the operation of a bodily organ, then it would seem to be more like a moral sense than a moral taste. But these statements are misleading in isolation. By this point in *The Moralists* Shaftesbury has already observed that taste requires cultivation: “How long before a true taste is gained! How many things shocking, how many offensive at first, which afterwards are known and acknowledge the highest beauties! For it is not instantly we acquire the sense by which these beauties are discoverable” (*The Moralists* III. 2, p. 320). Shaftesbury also says (following the Cambridge Platonists) that the affection for and knowledge of the good can be lost by vice: “contrary habit and custom (a second nature) is able to displace” even the most natural instincts (*Inquiry* I.III.1, 179). Likewise in the *Miscellaneous Reflections*, Shaftesbury writes that “a legitimate and just taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived or produced without the antecedent labour and pains of criticism” (*Miscellany* III.2, p. 408). If anything about the *sensus communis* or moral taste is innate, it is the potential to develop good taste. Everyone is born with these faculties. But everyone

must be educated in how to use them. Moral taste is a natural faculty but it is also a cultivated faculty.

There is another possibly misleading passage in the *Sensus Communis* essay where Shaftesbury disparages philosophical reflection on morality:

The truth is, as notions stand now in the world with respect to morals, honesty is like to gain little by philosophy or deep speculations of any kind. In the main, it is best to stick to common sense and go no further. Men's first thoughts in this matter are generally better than their second, their natural notions better than those refined by study or consultations with casuists. (*Sensus Communis* IV.1, p. 61)

Here Shaftesbury seems to suggest that moral principles are simply self-evident to "common sense" such that we should hold to our "first notions" in contrast to the "deep speculations" of philosophy's attempts at moral elucidation. But we must keep in mind that, in this section of his essay, Shaftesbury is explaining why a virtuous person will not need to deliberate about whether to take a bribe (or "plum" as he calls it):

A man of thorough good breeding, whatever else he be, is incapable of doing a rude or brutal action. He never deliberates in this case or considers of the matter by prudential rules of self-interest and advantage. He acts from his nature, in a manner necessarily and without reflection... (*Sensus Communis* IV.1, p. 60)

It is significant here that Shaftesbury is speaking of the person of "good breeding". This quality of being above temptation is not something with which a person is born.

Elsewhere Shaftesbury argues that though "good rustics who have been bred remote from the formed societies of men" might have been "so happily formed by nature herself that, with the greatest simplicity or rudeness of education, they have still something of a natural grace and comeliness in their action", it is nevertheless "undeniable, however, that the perfection of grace and comeliness of action and behavior can be found only among

the people of a liberal education” since such perfection requires knowledge of “those particular rules of art which philosophy alone exhibits” (*Soliloquy* I.3 p. 85-7).

So virtue must be cultivated like good taste in art or wine. Only *then* can one act “from his nature, in a manner necessarily and without reflection.” The *Sensus Communis* passage continues by claiming that, for the well-bred, “to deliberate about dishonesty” goes “against their stomach” (*Sensus Communis* IV.1, p. 60). For the virtuous person, morality becomes a matter of taste in the best possible way. The point is that, having acquired good taste, the virtuous person no longer needs a rational justification for being moral.²² The truly honest person “gives no other answer to the thought of villainy than that he cannot possibly find it in his heart to set about it or conquer the natural aversion he has to it” (*Sensus Communis* IV.1, p. 61).²³ Therefore I conclude that the capacity to make correct moral judgments and to have correct moral motivations is something Shaftesbury thinks must be cultivated just as good aesthetic taste must be cultivated.

²² I don’t mean to suggest that the virtuous person’s judgment *itself* will not have a rational justification, nor even that the virtuous person will not be able to give a rational justification for his judgment. I only mean that, from the virtuous person’s point of view, the *practice* of morality will not need a justification. The questions “why be moral?” and “why care about morality?” will not arise.

²³ Indeed, Shaftesbury argues that in trying to justify morality by appeals to self-interest Enlightenment moralists have actually undermined morality, teaching their readers to be the selfish knaves the moralists assumed them to be (p. 61-2).

CHAPTER 6: HUTCHESON AS MORAL SENSE THEORIST

I.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Shaftesbury held to a conception of moral beauty in the classical Greek and Roman tradition. Moreover we saw that Shaftesbury's account of moral judgment is a version of *moral taste theory* according to which moral judgments are analogous to aesthetic judgments in that someone with good taste has the acquired skill of using his or her ordinary perceptual faculties to cognitively discern and conatively appreciate certain qualities. In this chapter we turn to Francis Hutcheson. Most historians of philosophy have taken Hutcheson at his own word when he says he is following in Shaftesbury's footsteps, but I will argue that Hutcheson's account of moral judgment is importantly different from Shaftesbury's account. Hutcheson holds to a version of *moral sense theory* according to which moral judgments are analogous to innate physical sense perception in that certain information (viz., cognitive knowledge of the presence of moral properties) automatically enters the mind via a special perceptual faculty when attention is directed at the relevant objects.

In the Preface to *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (first published in 1729, eighteen years after Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*), Hutcheson summarizes his book saying that we have a "Moral Sense" which he defines as our "Determination to be pleased with the Contemplation of those Affections, Actions, or Characters of rational Agents which we call virtuous" (IBV Preface, p. 8-9). He says the "principal Design" of the *Inquiry* is to show that "The Author of Nature ... has made

Virtue a lovely Form, to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong Affections to be the Springs of each virtuous Action” (IBV Preface, p. 9).

This description sounds remarkably similar to the description of Shaftesbury’s project: to show the existence of moral beauty and moral taste. Hutcheson even cites Shaftesbury as a recent defender of “this moral Sense of Beauty in Actions and Affections”, insisting that if there exists “Tastes and Relishes for Beauty, Harmony, Imitation in Painting and Poetry” then surely there also exists “a Relish for a Beauty in Characters, in Manners” (IBV Preface, p. 9). Consider also the subtitle Hutcheson gave to the first edition of his *Inquiry*: “*In which the principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain’d and Defended, against the author of the Fable of the Bees: and the Ideas of Moral Good and Evil are establish’d, according to the Sentiments of the Antient Moralists*”.¹ So we seemingly have Hutcheson assuming the classical analogy between beauty and goodness and defending Shaftesbury’s account of moral taste against those empirically-minded British moralists who were “offended” at its rejection of psychological egoism (ibid). Hutcheson’s primary opponent here is Bernard Mandeville who, in *The Fable of the Bees* (first published in 1714), had attributed to Shaftesbury the view “that Men without any Trouble or Violence upon themselves may be naturally Virtuous” before going on to ridicule this view, saying, “His Notions I confess are generous and refined: ... What Pity it is that they are not true”.² Hutcheson also wants to

¹ Note that this subtitle was included only in the first edition of the *Inquiry* and was dropped in all subsequent editions, perhaps suggesting that Hutcheson began to see the ways in which his own views diverged significantly from Shaftesbury’s views.

² Mandeville, Bernard. *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F.B. Kaye. (Oxford, 1924), p. 323-4.

defend Shaftesbury against anticipated criticism of Christians such as George Berkeley who would, three years later, in his dialogue *Alciphron* (1732), take Shaftesbury to task for his rejection of orthodox Christianity in favor of Deism.³ Hutcheson writes that “to recommend the Lord Shaftesbury’s Writings to the World, is a very needless Attempt. They will be esteemed while any Reflection remains among Men” despite Shaftesbury’s unfortunate Deism. Hutcheson continues, “It is indeed to be wished, that he had abstained from mixing with such Noble Performances, some Prejudices he had receive’d against Christianity” because his anti-Christian attitudes cause those of “low Minds” to be “incapable of relishing those noble Sentiments of Virtue and Honor, which he has placed in so lovely a Light!” (IBV Preface, p. 12).

Further giving the impression that he is defending a moral taste theory in the tradition of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson also claims that the main thesis of the second treatise of his *Inquiry* is “That some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness; or, that by a superior Sense, which I call a Moral one, we perceive Pleasure in the Contemplation of such Actions in others” (IBV II.Intro, p. 88). Here Hutcheson claims that moral judgments involve taking a kind of *pleasure* in the thought of some action. But contrary to the standard reading of this passage, the pleasure aspect of Hutcheson’s analysis does not necessarily commit him to noncognitivism. Noncognitivism is the view that statements of moral judgment express some mental state about the judge such as, for

³ Berkeley, for example, says that while deists such as Shaftesbury call themselves “free-thinkers”, they are more properly called “minute philosophers” since they are “a sort of sect which diminish all the most valuable things, the thoughts, views, and hopes of men; all the knowledge, notions, and theories of the mind they reduce to sense; human nature they contract and degrade to the narrow low standard of animal life, and assign us only a small pittance of time instead of immortality”. See *Alciphron*, op cit, p. 37.

example, an emotion or a desire. On this view the judgments of the moral sense do not give us any cognitive information about reality apart from the judge's subjective response, and therefore moral judgments are not truth-evaluable. If Hutcheson's point about pleasure is supposed to be a *metaphysical* claim – i.e., if he is saying that the pleasure our moral sense perceives *constitutes* the property of moral goodness – then his view would be a version of noncognitivism.⁴ If, on the other hand, Hutcheson is simply making an *epistemological* claim – i.e., that we *know* moral goodness is present when our moral sense perceives pleasure – then his view would be compatible with some version of cognitivism.

Likewise, the pleasure aspect of Hutcheson's analysis does not necessarily commit him to motivational internalism. As defined in Chapter 1 above internalism is the view that an agent's motivation to act is internal to (in the sense of being a necessary constituent of) the agent's judgment of an action's being morally obligatory. If Hutcheson thinks that the pleasure our moral sense perceives *just is* our motive to act, then he would be committed to the internalist view that having a motive to perform a certain action and judging that action to be morally good are one and the same feeling of pleasure. If, however, Hutcheson's view is simply that there is a *contingent correlation* between making a moral judgment and having a motive to act morally, then his view could be interpreted as a version of externalism.

⁴ We will see in Chapter 8 below that Hume holds this sort of view. For Hume, both the motive to act morally and our feeling of moral approval are functions of benevolence. Hutcheson, however, as we will see shortly, keeps benevolence and moral approval strictly distinct.

If Hutcheson's view was in fact either noncognitivist or internalist, then his moral sense theory might indeed be seen as a kind of moral taste theory in the tradition of Shaftesbury. If the moral sense is noncognitive, then morality is like taste in that both can be conceived subjectively: moral judgments would be, like aesthetic judgments, a matter of personal preference. And if moral sense is a motivationally internalist moral faculty, then it has the kind of conative element distinctive of the moral taste theory. In short, if Hutcheson is either a noncognitivist or an internalist, the distinction between moral sense theories and moral taste theories will be hard to maintain.

We will consider Hutcheson's alleged noncognitivism and internalism each in turn, but first it may be helpful to set out the basic framework of Hutcheson's system. Hutcheson's most important work *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* is, the title page tells us, an "Inquiry" presented "In Two Treatises", the first "Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design" and the second "Concerning Moral Good and Evil" (IBV p. 3). In the Preface Hutcheson says his "principal Design is to shew, 'That Human Nature was not left quite indifferent in the affair of Virtue, to form to it self Observations concerning the Advantage, or Disadvantage of Actions, and accordingly to regulate its Conduct'" (IBV Preface, p. 9). In other words, like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson takes as his main opponents psychological egoists such as Hobbes and Locke who had argued that all action was motivated by self-interest. Against the egoists Hutcheson argues that God "has made Virtue a lovely Form, to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong Affections to be the Springs of each virtuous Action" (ibid). Drawing on the language of the Shaftesburian moral taste theory, Hutcheson calls our "strong Affection"

for virtue a “moral Sense of Beauty in Actions and Affections” which gives us “a Relish for Beauty in Characters, in Manners” (ibid). Hence Hutcheson gives us a single *Inquiry* made of both a treatise on beauty and a treatise on virtue.

The purpose of the first treatise

is to shew, “That there is some Sense of Beauty natural to Men; that we find as great an Agreement of men in their Relishes of Forms, as in their external senses which all agree to be natural; and that Pleasure or Pain, Delight or Aversion, are naturally join’d to their Perceptions”. (IBV, Preface, p. 10)

After arguing that our sense of beauty is distinct from our five ordinary perceptual senses, Hutcheson goes on to compare beauty to Lockean secondary qualities⁵ which are, strictly speaking, “the Perception of some Mind; so Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter, denote the Sensations in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us” (IBV I.i.17, p. 27). Like secondary qualities, the experience of beauty is due to a “universal” capacity innate in human nature (IBV I.vi.4, p. 63). Just as we do not have to learn to feel coldness or taste sweetness, so we do not have to learn to experience beauty. There are differences in judgments about beauty, but these can be explained by differences in perspective: “The simple Ideas rais’d in different Persons by the same Object, are probably some way different, when they disagree in their Approbation or Dislike; and in the same Person, when his Fancy at one time differs from what it was at another” (IBV I.i.7, p. 21). In other words, Hutcheson argues that if two perceivers disagree about whether an object is beautiful, then they must not be perceiving the same (mental) object. Often the source of our disagreement is the presence of the

⁵ Hutcheson usually refers to secondary qualities as “sensible Ideas”, but he does use the term “secondary Quality” at least once (see IBV I.i.7, p. 21).

different “associations” which our minds link with the object (IBV I.vi.9, p. 67), associations which are more often than not “Prejudices” instilled in us through peculiar “customs”, false “education”, and misleading “examples” (IBV I.vii, p. 70-5). Hence beauty on Hutcheson’s view seems to be relative not to an individual’s disposition but to the disposition of the normal viewer. So there is a sense in which beauty really is in the object: it is the object’s disposition to cause a certain response in the normal viewer. In this, too, beauty is like a secondary quality.

Hutcheson then turns to the question of “what Quality in Objects excites these Ideas, or is the occasion of them” (IBV I.ii.1, p. 28). In other words he is asking, If beauty is like a secondary quality, then what is like the primary quality which has the power to cause a viewer to experience beauty? He immediately concludes that “the Figures which excite in us the Ideas of Beauty, seem to be those in which there is Uniformity amidst Variety” (IBV I.ii.3, p. 28). Hutcheson claims that empirical evidence shows that these qualities are universally pleasant. But he is careful to note that we need not understand why beauty pleases us in order to be pleased by beauty:

But in all these Instances of Beauty let it be observ’d, That the Pleasure is communicated to those who never reflected on this general Foundation; and that all here alledg’d is this, ‘That the pleasant Sensation arises only from Objects, in which there is Uniformity amidst Variety:’ We may have the Sensation without knowing what is the Occasion of it; as a Man’s Taste may suggest ideas of Sweets, Acids, Bitters, tho he be ignorant of the Forms of the small Bodies, or their Motions, which excite these Perceptions in him. (IBV I.ii.14, p. 35).

Just as we can experience secondary qualities without understanding the microscopic structures which cause these experiences in us, so we can experience beauty without understanding that it is caused by uniformity amidst variety (cf. IBV I.i.13, p. 25).

Hutcheson concludes the first treatise with an argument that our possession of a sense of beauty suggests the existence of a benevolent divine designer. He observes that because they bring a variety of parts into a unified whole, beautiful forms “are more distinctly and easily comprehended and retain’d, than irregular Objects” (IBV I.viii.2, p. 79).

Therefore it is good that we have a natural instinct to prefer beautiful objects, because this instinct motivates us to look for, to formulate, and to remember “Universal Theorems” and “general Laws” which allow us to prudentially plan our future actions rather than engaging in the “perpetual Toil” of deciding anew how to act in every particular circumstance (IBV I.viii.2-3, p. 80-2).

Hutcheson opens his second treatise with a definition of virtue or moral goodness: “The Word Moral Goodness, in this Treatise, denotes our Idea of some Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation, and Love toward the Actor, from those who receive no Advantage by the Action” (IBV II.Intro, p. 85). At first Hutcheson appears to have given up his analogy with secondary qualities. He seems to be saying that virtue is a *primary* quality (“some Quality apprehended *in Actions*”) the perception (“Idea”) of which causes (“procures”) approval (“Approbation and Love”).⁶ But the analogy with secondary qualities returns when Hutcheson goes on to say that his second treatise attempts to “prove”:

I. “That some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness; or that by a superior Sense, which I call a Moral one, we perceive Pleasure in the Contemplation of such Actions in others, and are determin’d to love the

⁶ Cf. Darwall: “Hutcheson says not that moral goodness *is* the property of causing approbation and love but, rather, that it is whatever quality of actions, if any, that *causes* approbation (when it is contemplated).” See *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’*, p. 214 (my emphasis).

Agent, (and much more do we perceive Pleasure in being conscious of having done such Actions our selves) without any View of further natural Advantage from them.”

II. It may perhaps also appear, “That what excites us to these Actions which we call Virtuous, is not an Intention to obtain even this sensible Pleasure; much less the future rewards from Sanctions of Laws, or any other natural Good, which may be the Consequence of the virtuous Action; but an entirely different Principle of Action from Interest or Self-Love.” (IBV II.Intro, p. 88)

In the first thesis we see that the moral sense perceives *pleasure* at the contemplation of moral actions – a feeling in the perceiver, not a quality “in Actions” themselves. And then, having perceived this pleasure, we are caused (“determin’d”) to approve (“love”) the agent. Combined with the earlier definition of virtue as a quality in the object, we can see that Hutcheson means to say that virtue is a power of an object to cause a certain pleasurable experience in a perceiver. Therefore virtue, like beauty, is conceived along the lines of a secondary quality.

The second of the two theses makes a claim about our motivation. Our moral sense is that which approves virtuous motives, but Hutcheson insists that we’re not motivated to act virtuously because we approve of virtuous actions. Rather we are motivated to act virtuously by a “Principle of Action” that Hutcheson later identifies as “benevolence” which he says is the single “foundation” or “ground” upon which “all the Actions which are counted amiable any where” are “approv’d” (IBV II.iii.1, p. 116). But because benevolence is a *disinterested* love (IBV II.ii.3, p. 103), it cannot, on Hutcheson’s view, be motivated by the agent’s own pleasure, even the pleasure of the

agent's moral sense.⁷ In other words, what motivates virtuous action is benevolence itself, not the moral sense.

Most of the treatise on virtue is devoted to refuting the Hobbesian doctrine that all action, including virtuous action, is motivated by self-interest. For Hutcheson the true object of moral judgment is "some Affection toward rational Agents" (IBV II.ii.1, p. 101). In other words, moral value depends entirely upon motivation. The "external Motions" of agents without reference to their motives are morally neutral (ibid). Like Hobbes Hutcheson claims that all affections are "but different Modifications" of love and hatred, but against Hobbes Hutcheson insists that love need not be self-interested (IBV II.ii.2, p. 102). In Hobbes's terms all actions are caused by either "desire" (which he says is synonymous with both "appetite" and "love") or "aversion" (synonymous with "hate") (*Leviathan* I.6, p. 38). And all other "passions" are forms of these two appetites "diversly called" (ibid, p. 41). Hutcheson seems to agree with this much of Hobbes's analysis. What he rejects is Hobbes's further claim that all desires are aimed at pleasure (*Leviathan* I.6, p. 40). For Hutcheson, we can have "disinterested" desires which are not aimed at pleasure. All and only these motives of disinterested love (or "benevolence") are approved by the moral sense (IBV II.iii.1, p. 116).

As I have said, most of the second treatise is devoted to demonstrating that the existence of benevolent motives better accounts for our empirical observations of human behavior than the view according to which all motives are self-interested. But along the way Hutcheson makes all the same points about virtue that he made about beauty in the

⁷ As we will see below, Hume specifically rejects this position, arguing instead that the moral sense *can* motivate us to act benevolently.

first treatise. The moral sense is a distinct sense (IBV II.i.1, p. 90); the moral sense is a “universal” “Instinct” to approve benevolence (IBV II.ii.9, p. 112); disagreements in judgment are not based on disagreement about the moral goodness of benevolence but are based on different theories (due to differences in philosophical, religious, and social education) of what leads to the happiness of those we disinterestedly love (IBV II.iv, p. 135-146); our moral approvals can be either “well or ill grounded” and when there are disagreements in moral judgment at least one party is “mistaken” (IBV II.iv.2, p. 136); the standard of correct moral judgment is objectively specifiable, namely that one’s motive is aimed at “the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers” (IBV II.iii.8, p. 125); and the fact that we have a moral sense is due to divine goodness and is evidence of nature’s providential design (IBV II.vii.12, p. 195-6).

Note that Hutcheson’s explanation of moral and aesthetic disagreement casts doubt on his commitment to the concepts of moral beauty and moral taste. While a moral taste theorist such as Shaftesbury would agree with Hutcheson that disagreements in moral judgment are due entirely to differences in education, the moral taste theorist would give a different explanation of this fact. The analogy with taste is supposed to show that moral judgment is a skill of expert judgment that can only be acquired through proper education.⁸ Hutcheson, however, says that moral judgment is instinctive such that we would all agree if not for our education. Far from being necessary, education generally hurts our ability to make correct moral judgments. So, while Hutcheson does use the metaphor of moral taste, he denies one of the essential features of the standard

⁸ See Chapters 1-2 above.

concept of taste, namely that taste is acquired. For example, in a passage written three years after his *Inquiry* Hutcheson's says:

'Tis in vain to allege, 'that there is no disputing about *Tastes*:' To every Nature there are certain *Tastes* assigned by the great AUTHOR of all. To the *human Race* there are assigned a *publick Taste*, a *moral one*, and a *Taste for Honour*. These Senses they cannot extirpate, more than their *external Senses*: They may pervert them, and weaken them by false *Opinions*, and foolish *Associations* of Ideas; but they cannot be happy but by keeping them in their natural State, and gratifying them. (*Essay* I.v.2, p. 90)

In our pre-educated "natural State" our moral sense is designed by God to lead us to happiness. As Hutcheson explained in the *Inquiry* with regard to our sense of beauty, our moral sense is "a natural Power of Perception ... antecedent to all Custom, Education, and Example" (IBV I.vii.1, p. 70).⁹ Here in the *Essay* the implication is that education can, at best, make sure that we remain in our natural state by protecting us from "false *Opinions* and foolish *Associations* of Ideas" which "pervert" and "weaken" our moral sense. But since our natural state is perfect, "the Prejudices of Education" itself (IBV I.vii.4, p. 73) are the source of these false and foolish ideas.¹⁰ Thus even here (in the passage from the *Essay*), where he is consciously comparing his moral sense to aesthetic taste, Hutcheson denies that taste is acquired.

We should not conclude, therefore, that Hutcheson accepts the classical conception of moral beauty simply because he gives us a single *Inquiry* with treatises on both beauty and virtue. We should examine more closely what Hutcheson takes to be the

⁹ Cf. the comments about "the Sentiments of Children" at IBV II.iv.7, p. 145-6 which are supposed to show "the Universality of this moral Sense, and that it is antecedent to Instruction".

¹⁰ For a convincing interpretation of Hutcheson along these lines, see Michael Gill's *The British Moralists on Human Nature* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 187-194.

connection between the two treatises. Recall that Hutcheson had said the purpose of the treatise on beauty was to show

“That there is some Sense of Beauty natural to Men; that we find as great an Agreement of men in their Relishes of Forms, as in their external senses which all agree to be natural; and that Pleasure or Pain, Delight or Aversion, are naturally join’d to their Perceptions.” (IBV Preface, p. 10)

The passage continues:

If the Reader be convinc’d of such Determinations of the Mind to be pleas’d with Forms, Proportions, Resemblances, Theorems, it will be no difficult matter to apprehend another superior Sense, natural also to Men, determining them to be pleas’d with Actions, Characters, Affections. This is the moral Sense, which makes the Subject of the second Treatise. (ibid)

The idea here seems to be that the existence of disinterested aesthetic judgment presents a counterexample to Hobbsean psychological egoism, thereby opening the door to the existence of disinterested moral judgment.¹¹ In other words, the two treatises are linked only for the purpose of an argument by analogy. Despite all his talk about “the beauty of virtue”, Hutcheson does not seem to see any deep connection between beauty and goodness. As Michael Gill puts it,

For Hutcheson the origin of our moral ideas is a sense that is distinct from the sense that is the origin of our ideas of beauty. These two senses turn out to be harmonious, but the perceptions they produce are distinct from each other. Put another way, Hutcheson’s accounts of the two senses are completely parallel but unconnected (or, rather, connected only in that both senses were designed by a benevolent God).¹²

This is a major difference between Hutcheson and those in the classical moral beauty tradition such as Shaftesbury.

¹¹ See Gill *op cit*, p. 145.

¹² Gill *op cit*, p. 292 n8.

Hutcheson rejects the classical view of the unity of the Good and the Beautiful. Recall that Shaftesbury, following the ancient Stoics, Platonists, and Pythagoreans, had argued that beauty and goodness both consist in “harmony”. For Shaftesbury, as for the ancient Stoics, this meant that an individual has beauty/goodness to the degree that it is in its proper teleological relation to the whole of nature. Thus, on this classical view, moral beauty turns out to be a kind of psychic health, a “harmony” both in the soul and between the individual’s soul and his or her whole society. Hence, for Shaftesbury, both natural beauty and moral beauty are discerned by the power of our mind to notice order and proportion: the morally charged *sensus communis* and the aesthetic sense of beauty are the same mental faculty. In contrast, Hutcheson is explicit that our “Perceptions of moral Good and Evil, are perfectly different from those of natural Good” and that we have a “Sense of Good distinct from ... the Perceptions of Beauty and Harmony” (IBV II.i.1, p. 89).

Hutcheson must distinguish natural goods such as beauty from virtue because he wants to preserve the non-teleological aspect of morality: we approve of actions “disinterestedly”, as they are in themselves without reference to any ends we as individuals have.¹³ Shaftesbury, on the other hand, is concerned to show that self-interest

¹³ Morality still has a teleological aspect, too, for Hutcheson. As we saw above, the objective standard of morality is whether our actions promote “the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers” (IBV II.iii.8, p. 125). This is the quality of the actions themselves which causes our moral sense to feel approbation. But we need not know that this is what causes us to approve of an action before we can sense it to be virtuous, any more than we need to know what primary qualities of an object cause us to experience it as colored before we can see that it is red. In other words, we can make correct moral judgments without understanding that the objective basis of our subjective approval is teleological. What Hutcheson insists on is that our subjective approval itself is not experienced as

and virtue coincide when seen from the perspective of the whole. On this view virtue turns out to be, not independent of all our ends, but in fact our true highest end, the *summum bonum*. Hutcheson agrees that virtue and happiness ultimately coincide (IBV II.vi., p. 162-175), but he thinks we need not recognize this fact to be fully virtuous. For Hutcheson we can (and indeed *ought to*) act benevolently with no thought of our benevolent action being in harmony with our own individual happiness, whereas Shaftesbury says the highest degree of virtue is to make benevolence my own end in the pursuit of happiness. Thus Shaftesbury's account of moral beauty is essentially teleological in a way that Hutcheson's is not.¹⁴

II.

Let us turn now to the question of whether Hutcheson's account of moral judgment is a version of noncognitivism. If we take noncognitivism to be the view that statements of moral judgment do not express the judge's beliefs but only express some noncognitive mental state about the judge such as, for example, an emotion or a desire, then Hutcheson's view should be seen as a version of cognitivism. Hutcheson does not think the statement "X is virtuous" means "I feel approval when I contemplate X". He does think the truth of the second statement follows from the truth of the first statement (i.e., if X is virtuous, then I will feel approval when I contemplate X), but virtue isn't

teleological. We approve of the greatest happiness *disinterestedly*, i.e., regardless of any end we may have and therefore without taking into account our own happiness.

¹⁴ In this respect Shaftesbury is looking back towards Aristotle, and Hutcheson is looking forward toward Kant.

identical to “whatever I approve”. If he did think virtue was simply whatever causes a feeling of approval, then he would be forced to affirm moral relativism, because different actions cause approval in different perceivers. But, as we have seen, Hutcheson thinks some moral judgments can be mistaken. This is because Hutcheson thinks virtue is identical to benevolence. So he thinks the statement “X is virtuous” means “X is motivated by benevolence”. And, since this statement expresses the judge’s belief about X (namely the belief that X is motivated by a disinterested desire to promote public good, conceived in terms of the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers), then moral judgments are capable of evaluation in terms of truth and falsity. In this sense Hutcheson’s account is a version of metaethical cognitivism.

Some commentators have argued that Hutcheson’s comparison of moral properties to secondary qualities commits him to noncognitivism, because secondary qualities do not cognitively “represent” the world and thus (allegedly) can give us no information about how the world is in itself apart from our subjective responses.¹⁵ The moral sense, on this view, does not even purport to give rise to ideas with cognitive

¹⁵ Commentators who read Hutcheson as a noncognitivist include: Frankena, William. “Hutcheson’s Moral Sense Theory” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16:3 (June 1955); Stafford, J. Martin. “Hutcheson, Hume, and the Ontology of Morals” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 19 (1985); Winkler, Kenneth B. “Hutcheson and Hume on the Color of Virtue”, *Hume Studies* 22:1 (April 1996); Kail, P.J.E. “Hutcheson’s Moral Sense: Skepticism, Realism, and Secondary Qualities” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 28:1 (January 2001). Commentators who read Hutcheson as a cognitivist (though not all for the same reasons) include: Mackie, J.L. *Hume’s Moral Theory* (Routledge, 1980); Norton, David Fate. *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982); Haakonssen, Knud. “Natural Law and Moral Realism: The Scottish Synthesis” in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford, 1990); Darwall, Stephen. *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’* (Cambridge, 1995); Gill, Michael B. *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006)

content, because the idea of moral goodness is a simply *approbation*, a purely affective feeling of pleasure. Now, it is correct that Hutcheson believes the subjective experience of making a moral judgment is a feeling of pleasure. But it is wrong to assume that feelings of pleasure cannot be cognitive in the sense of giving us information about the way the world is.

Initially it may be difficult to see how nonrepresentational mental states such as pleasure and pain can give us information about the external world. But here we should consider what Locke says about secondary qualities:

But though Whiteness and Coldness are no more in Snow, than Pain is; yet those *Ideas* of Whiteness, and Coldness, Pain, *etc.* being in us the Effects of Powers in Things without us, ordained by our Maker, to produce in us such Sensations; they are real *Ideas* in us, whereby we distinguish the Qualities, that are really in things themselves. For these several Appearances, being designed to be the Marks, whereby we are to know, and distinguish Things, which we have to do with; our *Ideas* do as well serve us to that purpose, and are as real distinguishing Characters, whether they be only constant Effects, or else exact Resemblances of something in the things themselves: the reality lying in that steady correspondence, they have with the distinct Constitutions of real Beings. But whether they answer to those Constitutions, as to Causes, or Patterns, it matters not; it suffices, that they are constantly produced by them. And thus our simple *Ideas* are all real and true, because they answer and agree to those Powers of Things, which produce them in our Minds, that being all that is requisite to make them real, and not fictions at Pleasure. (ECHU II.xxx.2, p. 372-3)

Secondary qualities are not “exact Resemblances of something in the things themselves”, but they do nevertheless allow us “to know, and distinguish Things” and even to “distinguish the Qualities, that are really in things themselves”. So even if virtue is a secondary quality, ideas of moral properties can still be “real and true” and thus

Hutcheson can be a moral realist and cognitivist.¹⁶ Hutcheson himself makes a similar point in his later work *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*:

This *Approbation* cannot be supposed an *Image of any thing external*, more than the *Pleasure of Harmony, of Taste, of Smell*. But let none imagine, that calling the *Ideas of Virute and Vice* Perceptions of a *Sense*, upon apprehending the *Actions and Affections* of another does diminish their *Reality*, more than the like *Assertions* concerning all *Pleasure and Pain, Happiness or Misery*. Our *Reason* does often correct the *Report of our Senses*, about the *natural Tendency* of the external *Action*, and corrects *rash Conclusions* about the *Affections* of the *Agent*. (*Essay* II.iv, p. 177-8)

So the fact that approbation is not an “Image” or representation of the world as it is in itself does not imply that the moral sense is not getting us in touch with “Reality”, because the approbation of the moral sense can be corrected by “Reason” according to the mind-independent standard of the “natural Tendency” of the action’s consequences.

We must not forget that for Hutcheson the analogy with secondary qualities has both subjective and objective components. While beauty is a pleasant “Idea rais’d in us” and the sense of beauty is “our Power of receiving this Idea”, Hutcheson also says that there is some “real Quality in the Objects” which “excites” and “is the immediate Occasion of these pleasant Ideas” (IBV I.i.9, p. 23). Recall that beauty on Hutcheson’s analysis is relative not to an individual’s disposition but to the disposition of the normal viewer such that beauty really is in the object in the sense that it is the disposition to

¹⁶ Kenneth Winkler points to this same passage in Locke but, because he defines his terms differently, comes to different conclusions about how to classify Hutcheson’s metaethics. See Winkler op cit., p. 6. I think my disagreement with Winkler is entirely verbal.

cause a certain response in the normal viewer. We must bear this in mind when

Hutcheson talks about whether beauty or virtue is “in the Object”:

Only let it be observ'd, that by Absolute or Original Beauty, is not understood any Quality suppos'd to be in the Object, which should of itself be beautiful without relation to any Mind which perceives it: For Beauty, like other Names of Sensible Ideas, properly denotes the Perception of some Mind; so Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter, denote the Sensations in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us, however we generally imagine that there is something in the Object just like our Perception. The Ideas of Beauty and Harmony being excited upon our Perception of some primary Quality, and having relation to Figure and Time, may indeed have a nearer resemblance to Objects, than these Sensations, which seem not so much any Pictures of Objects, as Modifications of the perceiving Mind; and yet were there no Mind with a Sense of Beauty to contemplate Objects, I see not how they could be call'd beautiful. (IBV I.i.17, p. 27).

We have to be careful with the first sentence here. Notice that Hutcheson does *not* say that beauty is not a quality in the object. Quite the contrary: he implies that beauty *is* a quality in the object, but that this quality has a necessary relation to the perceiver. Beauty involves a relation between the mind and object such that without minds there could be no beauty. In this beauty is like a secondary quality: without minds there would be no hot, sweet, or red, either. But certain primary qualities would still have the power to produce these ideas in the minds of perceivers under the correct circumstances. That there would be no perceivers of the correct sort does not mean that these powers would not exist. This is all he means to affirm when he says that there would be no beauty apart from a perceiver. While beauty, conceived as a qualitative experience, is mind-dependent, nevertheless beauty, conceived as that quality in objects which causes this distinctive experience, remains mind-independent. Hence, despite the final sentence of this passage, Hutcheson actually thinks that there is some sense in which it is true that an

object would be beautiful even if there were no one to perceive it. While we may speak of secondary qualities as mind-dependent insofar as our subjective experience of them is concerned, we may also speak of secondary qualities as mind-independent insofar as their objective power to cause our experience is concerned. Like Locke, Hutcheson seems to speak both ways in different contexts.

Recall also that Hutcheson uses his secondary quality analogy to argue that we can experience beauty without understanding its cause. In an interesting passage building on this point, Hutcheson argues that the existence of “the Beauty of Theorems” (i.e., the “delight” we take in a simple theorem that can explain complex phenomena, see IBV I.iii.2, p. 36) suggests that “as in our external Senses, so in our internal ones, the pleasant Sensations generally arise from those Objects which calm Reason would have recommended, had we understood their Use, and which might have engag’d our pursuits from Self-interest” IBV I.iii.6, p. 40). We first arrive at the truth of the theorem through ordinary mathematical or scientific reasoning and only afterward do we experience its beauty. By analogy, we could in theory come to know a moral or aesthetic truth through reason alone if we knew its cause (benevolence or uniformity amidst variety, respectively). The problem is that if God had only given us reason by which to know moral truths then, due to the “weakness of our Reason”, it is likely that “very few Men could ever have form’d those long Deductions of Reasons which shew some Actions to be in the whole advantageous to the Agent, and their Contrarys pernicious” and hence very few of us would ever have known moral truths necessary to our happiness (IBV

Preface, p. 9).¹⁷ What is interesting about these passages is their suggestion that insofar as it is accessible to reason, moral beauty exists independently of the judgments of the moral sense. On this point, Hutcheson is following the Cambridge Platonists.¹⁸

Therefore Hutcheson's considered view is that moral judgments do in fact represent the world as being a certain way. Specifically they represent either actions or characters as having certain moral properties, and these representations can be accurate or inaccurate. So, metaethically, moral statements are cognitive. According to Hutcheson, we know moral properties are in an object by a pleasant feeling of approval. We feel pleasure when we contemplate an action or character, and then on this basis we judge that the property of moral goodness is present. But a feeling of pleasure alone is not enough to justify a moral judgment. We must correct for biases in our perspective. Only the feeling of pleasure that a perceiver would feel under standard circumstances counts as valid. So, epistemologically, moral judgments are intersubjective. The truth of a moral judgment is collectively mind-dependent in that it is relative to the perspective of the "normal" human observer, i.e., the observer unbiased by false education. That moral judgments are intersubjective suggests that moral properties are real insofar as the particular moral properties an action or character has does not depend on any individual's response. Morality is not merely "in the mind", and it is not merely "a matter of taste". Moral properties (moral goodness, rightness, virtue, etc.) are qualities in objects

¹⁷ This is why Hutcheson thinks the existence of a moral sense constitutes an argument from design for the existence of a loving Creator (see IBV I.v, p. 46ff; cf. I.viii.2, proposition 5, p. 80).

¹⁸ See Chapter 4.

independently of our responses. They are to be identified with certain natural properties such as being motivated by benevolence or the tendency to promote the public good. So, ontologically, moral properties are real and natural. Hutcheson is an intersubjective cognitivist, and this is a version of moral realism.

J.B. Schneewind objects to any reading of Hutcheson as holding that morality is mind-independent.¹⁹ On Schneewind's reading, Hutcheson thinks the morality's

origin is in the empirically observable *relation* between the feeling of approval and the motive of benevolence. Seeing benevolence, which is objectively real and which is virtuous *because* we feel approval toward it, is not the same thing as seeing an objective quality of virtuousness that belongs to benevolence regardless of our response to it.²⁰

Here Schneewind says that for Hutcheson virtue is a response-dependent quality in the sense that there would be no such thing as virtue if we did not feel approval towards anything. I, on the other hand, claim that, while Hutcheson does think virtue is response-dependent in some sense, his view is consistent with holding that if we had no feeling of approval then there would still *be* virtue but we wouldn't *know* what virtue is. On my reading our feeling of approval is the origin of our *idea* of virtue, but not of virtue *itself*. Schneewind's argument seems to be that virtue is *contingently related* to our subjective responses because if God had given us different responses then we would have a different sense of morality, and therefore virtue must be *necessarily dependent* on our responses. But, while the premise is true, the conclusion doesn't follow without the additional

¹⁹ Schneewind has Knud Haakonssen specifically in mind, but his objection is equally *a propos* to my reading. See Haakonssen *op cit*.

²⁰ Schneewind, J.B. *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 339n18 (my emphasis).

question begging premise that, as Schneewind puts it, benevolence “is virtuous *because* we feel approval toward it”. As long as God’s creation of morality is distinct from God’s creation of our response to it (i.e., as long as virtue doesn’t *consist in* a feeling of approval), then our response can be contingently related to virtue while allowing morality to be mind-independent. For Hutcheson virtue causes a feeling of approval but does not consist in a feeling of approval. In other words, God might have created morality just as it is and then have created us with a false sense of morality. Hutcheson concedes the voluntarist position:

If it be here enquir’d, “Could not the Deity have given us a different or contrary determination of Mind, viz. to approve Actions upon another Foundation than Benevolence?” It is certain, there is nothing in this surpassing the natural Power of the Deity. (IBV II.vii.12, p. 196).

That God did not do this is, for Hutcheson, “one of the strongest Evidences” of God’s benevolence (IBV II.vii.13, p. 197), but it is not a sign that virtue would not exist without our responses.²¹

III.

We turn now to the question of motivational internalism. Consider the passage in which Hutcheson claims that beauty is “necessarily” pleasant: “the ideas of Beauty and Harmony, like other sensible Ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately

²¹ Cf. Darwall: According to Hutcheson, “benevolence would be morally good even if, contrary to fact, we did not approve it. And being approved by moral sense would turn out to be an inessential feature of being morally good” (*The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’*, p. 214).

so; neither can any Resolution of our own, nor any Prospect of Advantage or Disadvantage, vary the Beauty or Deformity of an Object” (IBV I.i.13, p. 25).

When Hutcheson says here that beauty is “necessarily” pleasant, he means only that the pleasure a perceiver receives from beauty is not dependent on the perceiver’s will. He does not mean that beauty just is a feeling of pleasure. His point is that when I see something beautiful I don’t have to (indeed, *can’t*) choose whether or not to feel pleasure.

Compare the more general claim about pleasure in the Preface:

In reflecting upon our external Senses, we plainly see, that our Perceptions of Pleasure,, or Pain, do not depend directly on our Will. Objects do not please us, according as we incline they should. The presence of some Objects necessarily please us, and the presence of others as necessarily displease us. (IBV Preface, p. 8)

It should be kept in mind that this point about the *causal* necessity of feeling pleasure in beauty or virtue does not imply a stronger claim about *logical* necessity. As we have already seen, it is Hutcheson’s view that the connection between value and pleasure is *logically contingent* such that God had to *choose* to associate the experience of pleasure with, for example, the perception of beauty: “There seems to be no necessary Connection of our pleasing Ideas of Beauty with the Uniformity or Regularity of the Objects, from the Nature of things, antecedent to some Constitution of the Author of our Nature, which has made such Forms pleasant to us” (see IBV I.v.1, p. 46). Moreover, while Hutcheson certainly thinks that the experience of value is always pleasant, he says in the first passage quoted above that this is no more true of beauty than “other sensible Ideas” (IBV I.i.13, p. 25). Indeed, he thinks “There is scarcely any Object which our minds are employ’d about, which is not thus constituted the necessary occasion of some Pleasure or

Pain” (IBV Preface, p. 8). Pleasure does not seem to be an essential part of the *distinctive* phenomenology of aesthetic experience. In other words, being pleasurable is not what differentiates aesthetic experience from other experiences. Pleasure is a necessary but not sufficient component of aesthetic experience. Therefore, as we have already seen, beauty is not identical to pleasure; rather, beauty causes pleasure.

Now some commentators have taken the claim that the perception of virtue always causes a pleasurable feeling of approval, combined with the common sense idea (not explicitly endorsed by Hutcheson, but intuitively plausible) that approval of a state of affairs always gives the agent a *prima facie* motivation to actualize that state of affairs, to be evidence that Hutcheson must be an internalist: he must believe that any agent who judges an action to be morally right necessarily has a motive to perform that action.²²

This is a mistake. As mentioned in Chapter 1 above, the term “internalism” is sometimes used broadly enough to include philosophers who hold that judging an action to be morally obligatory *causes* a motive to do it. But recall that we are following Darwall in reserving the term “internalism” for views according to which having a (certain kind of) motive to do something is what its rightness *consists in*. Is Hutcheson an internalist in the present sense? Apparently not. Recall Hutcheson’s introduction to the second treatise of his *Inquiry*. As discussed above, Hutcheson says the treatise on virtue attempts, in part, to prove:

That what excites us to these Actions which we call Virtuous, is not an Intention to obtain even this sensible Pleasure; much less the future rewards from Sanctions of Laws, or any other natural Good, which may be

²² For an example of an internalist reading of Hutcheson, see Kail *op cit* p. 59.

the Consequence of the virtuous Action; but an entirely different Principle of Action from Interest or Self-Love. (IBV II.Intro, p. 88)

Here Hutcheson says we are motivated to act virtuously by an instinct toward disinterested benevolence, “an entirely different Principle of Action from Interest or Self-Love”. This means that we’re not motivated to act virtuously because we approve of virtuous actions. Since benevolence “excludes Self-Interest” (IBV II.ii.3, p. 103), it cannot be motivated by the agent’s own pleasure, *even the pleasure of the agent’s moral sense*. In other words, what motivates virtuous action is benevolence itself, not the moral sense.²³

According to Hutcheson, the moral sense feels pleasure or pain at the contemplation of an action or character. This pleasure or pain constitutes our approval or disapproval of the object of our contemplation, and then this approval causes a desire to pursue or avoid the object: we have an independent motive toward benevolence, and, since the approval of the moral sense cognitively distinguishes benevolent actions, then our moral approval inevitably results in a desire to act morally. But that desire is distinct from the pleasurable sensation of approval or “approbation” itself. Moral sense is the source of a pleasure which *constitutes* approbation of benevolence but this pleasant sensation only *causes* (i.e, it does not constitute) motivation to act benevolently. Moreover every link in this causal chain is logically contingent and based on God’s will. God chose to make benevolence cause approbation, and God chose to give us an instinctive motivation toward benevolence (*Essay* I.vi.3, p. 118-20).

²³ Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought*, p. 223

For Hutcheson approbation and desire can't be the same thing because desire is entirely distinct from pleasure. This position is probably (but ambiguously) found in the first edition of the *Inquiry* but is made more explicit (and consistent) in the fourth revised edition of the *Inquiry* and in Hutcheson's later work *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*.²⁴ In the *Essay* Hutcheson explains that moral "Approbation or Dislike" just are "agreeable or disagreeable Perceptions" which we have when an action or character is "reflected upon in our selves" (*Essay* I.i.1, p. 16). But the pleasurable sensation which constitutes the approbation of the moral sense must be distinct from motivation, because "Desire of the grateful Perceptions, and Aversion to the uneasy, either for our selves or others ... are entirely distinct from all Sensation, and directly incline the Mind to Action or Volition of Motion" while "we call 'the direct immediate Perception of Pleasure or Pain from the present Object or Event, the Sensation'" (*Essay* I.ii.1, p. 30). Here, as Darwall explains, Hutcheson "makes a fundamental distinction between motives – 'desires' or 'affections' in his terms – and any sensation or perception, including the ideas of moral sense among the latter".²⁵ Hutcheson reasons that since we can have a desire to remove pain or to experience pleasure, then desire must be distinct from pleasure. Therefore, "since approbation and condemnation are pleasures or 'ideas' received by a sense, they differ from any motive (desire or affection)".²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

That affective approbation and conative love are distinct mental states explains why Hutcheson takes his *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* to be answering two distinct questions:

1st, “What quality determines our *Election* of [moral goodness] rather than the contrary?” Or, if the Mind determines itself, “What *Motives* or *Desires* excite to an Action, rather than the contrary, or rather than to the *Omission*?” 2ndly, “What *Quality* determines our *Approbation* of one Action, rather than of the contrary Action?” (*Essay II.Intro*, p. 133).

Hutcheson goes on to point out that desire and approval must be distinct because of the phenomenon of weakness of will. We often desire what we do not approve and approve what we do not desire:

The *Qualities* moving to *Election*, or *exciting to Action*, are different from those moving to *Approbation*: We often do Actions which we do not *approve*, and *approve* Actions which we *omit*: We often *desire* that an Agent had omitted an Action which we *approve*; and we *wish* he would do an Action which we *condemn*. *Approbation* is employed about the Actions of *others*, where there is no room for our Election. (*Essay II.Intro*, p. 134).²⁷

This admission of weakness of will does not mean, however, that Hutcheson thinks we might not have a motive to act on our judgments of morality. The point is the motive toward morality is not overriding. Hutcheson insists that “we must, by the Constitution of our Nature, desire any apprehended Good which occurs a-part from any Evil” (*Essay I.ii.2*, p. 33).²⁸ The essential point here is that, for Hutcheson, the fact that we are always motivated to act on our moral judgments is an entirely contingent state of affairs due to

²⁷ This point is found in the *Inquiry*, too, where Hutcheson says “our Desire of Virtue may be counterballanc’d by Interest, our Sentiment or Perception of its Beauty cannot” (*Inquiry II.i.5* p. 95).

²⁸ Cf. Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’*, p. 225

the voluntary choice of the divine will. In short, God set it up that our moral judgments *cause* us to desire to act morally. Hence, there is no internal connection between the moral sense's approval of an action and the agent's (inevitable) motive to perform that action.

To sum up this chapter on Hutcheson: Hutcheson's moral sense is purely cognitive and motivationally externalist. While he holds that judgment of the good and motivation to action always *in fact* go together, he thinks this is a contingent correlation. We don't necessarily want to do good *because* it is good as the Cambridge Platonists, and Shaftesbury would argue. For these classical theorists, there is a specifically moral motivation which is logically connected to the good. On the classical view, beauty and goodness are identical and hence not even God could separate them. Moral goodness is intrinsically attractive. That's why they refer to virtue as "moral beauty". Hutcheson, however, only thinks morality is contingently attractive. He rejects the identity of beauty and goodness. Hutcheson is, for this reason, a motivational externalist. And his view, therefore, diverges in significant ways from the classical moral taste tradition.

CHAPTER 7: SHAFTESBURY AND THE INTERSUBJECTIVITY OF TASTE

So far our discussion of Shaftesbury has focused on his metaphysical attempts to defend the *objectivity* of moral beauty. In Chapter 3 we saw that Shaftesbury's overall philosophical project was to defend what he called "the reality" of moral beauty against Hobbesian subjectivism. In Chapter 5 we saw that Shaftesbury responded by appealing to an objective teleological natural order as the ground of moral beauty. But moral beauty could be "real" without being objective. If we conceive moral beauty along the lines of a secondary quality as Hutcheson did, perhaps we can defend its reality as *intersubjective*. Now, as we have seen, Hutcheson interprets secondary qualities the same way Locke did such that our subjective experience is caused by an objective reality. Intersubjectivity enters in here by specifying the perspective of the "disinterested" or unbiased spectator as the standard for determining which subjective responses are authoritative (see IBV II.iv; cf. I.vii.4 and II.ii.9). Shaftesbury and Hume make use of intersubjectivity in a more interesting way. As we will see below, these thinkers argue that our moral taste is formed through the process of social interaction. In this way, these thinkers anticipate a position recently advocated by Donald Davidson.

Davidson argues that the source of our idea of an objective world is our intersubjective interaction with others in the shared world presupposed by a shared language:

The ultimate source (not ground) of objectivity is, in my opinion, intersubjectivity. If we were not in communication with others, there would be nothing on which to base the *idea* of being wrong, or, therefore, of being right, either in what we say or in what we think. The possibility

of thought as well as of communication depends, in my view, on the fact that two or more creatures are responding, more or less simultaneously, to input from a shared world, and from each other. ... [I]t is this triangular nexus of causal relations involving the reactions of two (or more) creatures to each other and to shared stimuli in the world that supplies the conditions necessary for the concept of truth to have application. Without a second person there is, as Wittgenstein, powerfully suggests, no basis for a judgment that a reaction is wrong or, therefore, right.¹

Note that Davidson is not giving the skeptical argument that there is no such thing as an objective world. Davidson explains that, while the sort of view he espouses about the relationship between intersubjective language and the objective world “has typically led those philosophers who held it to conclude that reality and truth are constructs of thought”, reflection on this point “does not lead me to this conclusion”.² Rather he is rebutting skepticism by arguing that the process of intersubjective communication presupposes an objective world: “Intersubjectivity is the root of objectivity, not because what people agree on is necessarily true, but because intersubjectivity depends on interaction with the world”.³ Elsewhere he clarifies his argument:

Communication depends on each communicator having, and correctly thinking the other has, the concept of a shared world, an intersubjective world. But the concept of an intersubjective world is the concept of an objective world, a world about which each communicator can have beliefs.⁴

¹ Davidson, Donald. “Indeterminism and Antirealism” reprinted in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford University Press: 2001), p. 83

² Davidson, Donald. “Afterthoughts to ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’” (in Davidson, 2001), p. 155.

³ “Irreducibility of the Concept of the Self” (reprinted in Davidson 2001), p. 91

⁴ “Rational Animals” (reprinted in Davidson 2001), p. 105

A strikingly similar view can be found expressed in the terms of the continental philosophical tradition by Jürgen Habermas. Describing his own view, Habermas writes:

The phenomenologist does not rely upon the guiding thread of goal-directed or problem-solving action. He does not, that is, simply begin with the ontological presupposition of an objective world; he makes this a problem by inquiring into the conditions under which the unity of an objective world is constituted for the members of a community. The world gains objectivity only through *counting* as one and the same world *for* a community of speaking and acting subjects. The abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach understanding among themselves about what takes place in the world or is to be effected in it. Through this *communicative practice* they assure themselves at the same time of their common life-relations, of an intersubjectively shared *lifeworld*. This lifeworld is bounded by the totality of interpretations presupposed by the members as background knowledge.⁵

Both Davidson and Habermas argue that the conditions of communication presuppose an objective world and that our understanding of the objective world is shaped (guided and limited) by our social interactions.

In what follows, I argue that on Shaftesbury's view objective ethical facts are known through a process of intersubjective communication somewhat similar to the process Davidson and Habermas describe. In Chapter 9 I also argue that Hume's account of moral judgment follows Shaftesbury in emphasizing intersubjectivity. Hume's view is importantly different from Shaftesbury's, however, in that Hume is not interested in metaphysics: he consistently refuses to give any account of what the "world" is "really" like apart from our experience. So where Davidson, Habermas, and Shaftesbury want to show that our concept of objective reality *arises from* intersubjective communication,

⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Beacon Press, 1984). Vol 1, p. 12-13

Hume wants to *replace* talk of objective reality with intersubjectivity. This doesn't mean that we can *reduce* objectivity to intersubjectivity. It just means that, in light of Hume's skeptical arguments, objectivity remains forever beyond the pale of human understanding.

On this point, Hume is much closer to a postmodern neopragmatist like Richard Rorty than to more classical pragmatists such as Habermas or Davidson⁶ – though Rorty would resist the Humean label “skeptical”. On Rorty's view, skepticism requires the belief in an objective (but unknowable) reality apart from our experience. Rorty rejects this sort of objectivity as unintelligible, and therefore he rejects skepticism as incoherent.⁷

⁶ On the difference between classical pragmatism and neopragmatism, consider Rorty's critique of Habermas. Rorty says that, contrary to Habermas, he believes “there is no point in trying to find a general synoptic way of ‘analyzing’ the ‘functions knowledge has in universal contexts of practical life,’ and that cultural anthropology (in a large sense which includes intellectual history) is all we need.” See Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), p. 381. Rorty continues: “the only truth in Habermas's claim that scientific inquiry is made possible, and limited, by ‘inevitable subjective conditions, is that such inquiry is made possible by the adoption of practices of justification, and that such practices have possible alternatives. But these ‘subjective conditions’ are in no sense ‘inevitable’ ones discoverable by ‘reflection upon the logic of inquiry.’ They are just the facts about what a given society, or profession, or other group, takes to be good ground for assertions of a certain sort. Such disciplinary matrices are studied by the usual empirical-cum-hermeneutic methods of ‘cultural anthropology.’ From the point of view of the group in question these subjective conditions are a combination or commonsensical practical imperatives (e.g., tribal taboos, Mill's Methods) with the standard current theory about the subject. From the point of view of the historian of ideas or the anthropologist they are the empirical facts about the beliefs, desires, and practices of a certain group of human beings. These are incompatible points of view, in the sense that we cannot be at both viewpoints simultaneously. But there is no reason and no need to subsume the two together in a higher synthesis” (p. 385-396). In the first passage (from p. 381), Rorty is quoting Habermas's “A Postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*”, trans. Christian Lenhardt in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973).

⁷ Ibid, p. 333-342.

Despite classifying himself as a kind of skeptic, however, Hume is groping toward the same sort of rejection of objectivity. Hence I agree with Rorty's reading of Hume:

Hume did not think of himself as finding new arguments to support [the ancient skeptic] Sextus; rather he was anxious to show that the skeptical outcome of Locke's project showed not (as Kant and Russell were to believe) the need for a new and better sort of epistemology but the need to appreciate the unimportance of epistemology and the importance of sentiment.⁸

Characterizing the difference between his own views and Hume/Rorty's, Davidson says:

As Rorty has put it, "nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence." About this I am, as you see, in agreement with Rorty. Where we differ, if we do, is on whether there remains a question how, given that we cannot "get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence", we nevertheless can have knowledge of, and talk about, an objective public world which is not of our own making. I think this question does remain, while I suspect that Rorty doesn't think so.⁹

⁸ Ibid, p. 140n14.

⁹ See Davidson, Donald. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (reprinted in Davidson, 2001), p. 141. Here Davidson is quoting from Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 178. Habermas gives a similarly sympathetic critique of Rorty: "Richard Rorty's impressive critique of philosophy assembles compelling metaphilosophical arguments in support of the view that the roles Kant the master thinker had envisaged for philosophy, namely those of usher and judge, are too big for it. While I find myself in agreement with much of what Rorty says, I have trouble accepting his conclusion, which is that if philosophy forswears these two roles, it must also surrender the function of being the 'guardian of rationality.' If I understand Rorty, he is saying that the new modesty of philosophy involves the abandonment of any claim to reason – the very claim that has marked philosophical thought since its inception. Rorty not only argues for the demise of philosophy; he also unflinchingly accepts the end of the belief that ideas like truth or the unconditional with their transcending power are a necessary condition of humane forms of collective life." See Habermas, Jürgen. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (MIT, 1990), p. 3.

Like Davidson and Habermas, but unlike Hume and Rorty, Shaftesbury believes we “can have knowledge of, and talk about, an objective public world which is not of our own making”.

Before turning to Hume in the next chapter, however, we should take one more look at Shaftesbury whose concept of the “*sensus communis*” provided Hume with a model. Shaftesbury’s concept of the *sensus communis* is a naturalized version of the rationalist appeals to the intellect’s ability to discern right reason in morality.

II.

In his essay *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury sets out to analyze the concept of common sense. People often appeal to “common sense” to settle disputes in moral philosophy, but, says Shaftesbury, no one really knows what common sense is supposed to be. Shaftesbury notes that common sense is usually taken to mean “the opinions and judgments held by most people”, but he points out that it is unclear what counts as “most” people. There are always groups who disagree on any issue, and if “common sense” just means “majority opinion”, then it would be constantly changing, thus subjecting moral truth to “no law or measure than mere fashion and vogue”, making it a matter of taste in the sense defended by Hobbes and Locke (*Sensus Communis*, I.6, p. 37-8). He also points out that if we were to determine the truth “by counting noses”, then we would be compelled to admit the truth of superstitions such as those of “country people” who believe in “gossiping stories of imps, goblins and demoniacal pranks” (*Sensus Communis*, IV.3, p. 68). But at the end of the essay, Shaftesbury himself seems to return

to a use of the term “common sense” in the way he criticizes at the opening of the essay. He says that some moral truths are self-evident and gives as examples the moral truths called “natural knowledge, fundamental reason, and common sense” (ibid.). He goes on to say that these moral truths are confirmed by “historical truth” (i.e., tradition) and that to deny them is to “imagine half mankind to have run mad and joined precisely in one and the same species of folly.” Isn’t this simply an appeal to majority opinion?

To see that Shaftesbury is not contradicting himself we must recall the important passage that falls between these two discussions where Shaftesbury argues for a very different understanding of common sense as *a sense of the common good* (*Sensus Communis* III.1-2, p. 48-53). We saw in Chapter 5 above that this *sensus communis* is not innate but is acquired by good “breeding”. It is this element of “breeding” that I refer to as intersubjectivity. In a passage mostly unnoticed by scholars,¹⁰ Shaftesbury points out that “everyone thinks himself well-bred” but argues that true breeding or “politeness” comes from being part of the liberal democratic process of public reasoning:

All politeness is owing to liberty. We polish one another and rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision. To restrain this is inevitably to bring a rust upon men’s understandings. It is a destroying of civility, good breeding and even charity itself, under pretence of maintaining it. (*Sensus Communis* I.2, p. 31)

The truth is that which “may bear *all* lights” and withstand all challenges in the sphere of free criticism (Ibid., p. 30). Shaftesbury claims (somewhat hyperbolically) that this mechanism of public debate has, over the centuries, resulted in “a body of moral and

¹⁰ An exception is Klein, Lawrence E. *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

political traditions” in Britain such that “the maxims we draw from hence are as evident as those in mathematics” and such that “our increasing knowledge show us every day, more and more, what common sense is” (*Sensus Communis* III.i, p. 50). Here we can see why Shaftesbury’s appeal to tradition does not conflict with his rejection of interpreting common sense as majority opinion. Common sense is not what the majority of people *taken as individuals* think. It is what the majority has discerned *together* through public reasoning.

Shaftesbury is drawing here on the classical tradition of dialectic from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and others. In Book VII of his *Confessions* Augustine describes a mystical ascent from bodies to souls to God. This is the point in Augustine’s narrative at which he discovers “some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin” (*Confessions* VII.ix.13, p. 121). Augustine confesses to God that “by the Platonic books, I was admonished to return into myself. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel” (*Confessions* VII.x.16, p. 123). There, in his innermost self, Augustine experienced “the immutable light higher than my mind”. He says this inner light “was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. Eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity: you are my God” (ibid). Through contemplation of his inner self, Augustine had attained knowledge of ultimate reality: “What I saw is Being” (ibid). As we noted in Chapter 2 above, Augustine describes his vision of the Divine in terms that recall the vision of the Beautiful and the Good in Plato’s *Symposium* and *Republic*. Augustine tells God “I was caught up to you by your

beauty” (*Confessions* VII.xvii.23, p. 127), saying the process of contemplation involved an “inquiry” into “value judgments” about the beauty and goodness of bodies: “And so step by step I ascended from bodies to the soul” until “in the flash of a trembling glance [my soul] attained to that which is” (ibid).

What is relevant to our current discussion is the role Augustine allows for intersubjective dialogue. In Book IX, Augustine gives a second version of the ascent to God. This time his mystical vision takes place during a conversation he is having with his elderly mother Monica just before her death. Here Augustine confesses to God:

Alone with each other, we talked very intimately. ‘Forgetting the past and reaching forward to what lies ahead’ (Phil. 3:13), we were searching together in the presence of the truth which is you yourself. ... The conversation led us towards the conclusion that the pleasure of the bodily senses, however delightful in the radiant light of this physical world, is seen by comparison with the life of eternity to be not even worth considering. Our minds were lifted up by an ardent affection towards eternal being itself. Step by step we climbed beyond all corporeal objects and the heaven itself, where sun, moon, and stars shed light on the earth. We ascended even further by internal reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered our own minds. We moved up beyond them so as to attain to the region of inexhaustible abundance where you feed Israel eternally with truth for food. ... And while we talked and panted after it, we touched it in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart. ... That is how it was when at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things. (*Confessions* IX.x.23-25, p. 170-2).

Here we see the process of intersubjective dialogue by which subjective “internal reflection” led Augustine and Monica via their “own minds” to the same objective reality of “eternal being itself”.

There is no indication in Augustine of how or why dialogue is supposed to lead to truth, but perhaps we can find some clues in Plato and Aristotle. Plato called the proper

method of philosophy “dialectic”. As Plato explains it in the *Republic*, the method of dialectic requires its participants to “give an account of something either to himself or to another” (*Republic* 533a). Plato continues:

Unless someone can give an account of the form of the good, distinguishing it from everything else, and can survive all examination as if in a battle, striving to examine things not in accordance with belief, but in accordance with being; and can journey through all that with his account still intact, you will say that he does not know the good itself or any other good whatsoever. (*Republic* 533b-c)

Compare Plato’s argument against writing at the end of the *Phaedrus* (274b-278e). The written word can only “remind those who already know what the writing is about”

(*Phaedrus* 275d).¹¹ A written discourse seems to have

some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. ... And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father’s support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (*Phaedrus* 275d-e)

Dialectic, however, cannot be written on paper. Instead, dialectic “is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself” (*Phaedrus* 276a). It is “the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows” (ibid). Only “if you can defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth” will you deserve the name “philosopher” (278c-d).

Note that on Plato’s conception, one need not necessarily engage in *actual* discussion and debate. Julia Annas expresses a standard interpretation when she claims

¹¹ Citations of Plato’s *Phaedrus* are to the Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff translation included in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett, 1997).

that, for Plato, dialectic is “a method of attaining truth through co-operative inquiry and search” which “demands verbal articulateness and interpersonal exchange” whereby “one tests out one’s ideas against others’ responses, seeking in every way to find and exclude errors”.¹² This reading does seem to capture the apparent *intention* of Plato’s form of dialectic, but this reading conflicts with what Plato (through the character of Socrates) actually *says* about dialectic. Annas’s statement of Plato’s view is correct except for its requirement of “interpersonal exchange” and testing “against others’ responses”.

Annas’s reading certainly fits with the way Plato *portrays* dialectic. It explains Socrates’s practice of questioning the views he finds, and it explains Plato’s practice of writing in dialogue form. But the view of dialectic as necessarily interpersonal doesn’t fit with the explicit statements of dialectic’s nature that we find, for example, in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. One could satisfy Plato’s requirement of being able to give a rationally defensible account which “can survive all examination as if in a battle” even if the “examination” takes place entirely within a single person’s mind. Plato explicitly says the dialectician need only be able to “give an account of something ... to himself” (*Republic* 533a).

Aristotle, on the other hand, explains why actual interpersonal dialogue is necessary. Like Shaftesbury, Aristotle believes human beings are naturally social creatures (“political animals”) who cannot fulfill their distinctive mode of flourishing except in a community (NE I.vii.6, 1097b). Plato might be able to agree with this much. But for Aristotle the fact that we are essentially social implies something more. It implies

¹² Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p. 283

that we can never abstract ourselves completely from our particular social point of view. We cannot, as Descartes wished to do, throw out all our former beliefs and start philosophizing from scratch.¹³ Rather we must start from where we are, situated in our particular culture in its particular place in history. We must start from our own subjectively situated beliefs and then reason dialectically toward the objectively true reality. Aristotle writes:

For we should certainly begin from things known, but things are known in two ways, for some are known to us, some known without qualification. Presumably, then, *we* ought to begin from things known to *us*. That is why we need to have been brought up in fine [Gk. *kalon*] habits if we are to be adequate students of fine and just things, and of political questions generally. For we begin from the [belief] *that* [something is true]; if this is apparent enough to us, we can begin without also [knowing] *why* [it is true]. (NE I.4, 1085b3)

We begin with various subjectively accepted common sense intuitions about what the good is (things “known to us”) and to try to reason from them to an objectively true reality (things “known without qualification”).

Note that Aristotle is giving a coherence theory of justification according to which, if we don’t have the correct starting point, we won’t be able to reach the truth. So Aristotle *seems* to suggest here that if we receive a bad education and have not “been brought up in fine habits” we will be totally off from the truth. But he does not, in fact, draw this extreme conclusion. Rather he thinks every society’s starting points are at least partially correct: “Some of these views are traditional, held by many, while others are

¹³ In this first of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* Descartes writes: “I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations”. See *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, 1984), vol. II, p. 17.

held by a few men who are widely esteemed. It is reasonable for each group not to be completely wrong, but to be correct on one point at least, or even on most points” (NE I.8, 1098b27). The “things known to us” mentioned in this passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are what Aristotle calls “common beliefs” (Gk. *endoxa*) in the *Topics*: “The common beliefs are the things believed by everyone or by most people or by the wise (and among the wise by all or by most or by those most known and commonly recognized)” (*Topics* 100b22).¹⁴ For Aristotle, then, dialectic is the method or “line of inquiry that will allow us to reason deductively from common beliefs on any problem proposed to us, and to give an account ourselves without saying anything contradictory” (*Topics* 100a18). Here, as in Plato’s *Republic*, we are only required to give an account to “ourselves”, but this account must start from traditional beliefs and show how all the alternative theories are accounts which attempt to understand the same world. Thus Aristotle is building in a Davidsonian requirement of a “principle of charity” based on an assumption that most of our beliefs are true.¹⁵ And thus Aristotle is also giving a strong affirmation of what Shaftesbury calls “common sense”.

This affirmation of common sense explains why we should engage in discussion with other people. If their starting points are different than ours, then they might have access to an aspect of the truth that we lack. For this reason, as Martha Nussbaum explains, Aristotle thought we should actively look for alternative moral viewpoints:

¹⁴ Citations from Aristotle’s *Topics* are from *Aristotle: Selections*, trans. and ed. by Terrence Irwin and Gail Fine (Hackett, 1995)

¹⁵ Davidson, Donald. “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” (reprinted in Davidson 2001), p. 150-1.

Aristotle deliberately augmented the school's store of information about ethical and political alternatives through his cross-cultural research programs. Guided by the view that 'all people seek not the way of their ancestors, but the good' (*Pol.* 1269a3-4), he views the different traditions as contributions to a common project, whose aim is to define and defend a general account of human functioning and human flourishing that can guide ethical choice and political planning in any human community. ... [T]he purpose of pupil and teacher ethical inquiry is 'to set down the appearances, and then, first working through the puzzles, to go on to show, if possible, the truth of all the things we say concerning these matters; if not, the truth of the greatest number and the most basic' (*EN* 1145b2-7; cf. *EE* 1216b26ff.). Appearances are what people say, perceive, believe. So the aim overall is a thorough sifting and scrutiny of the experience and beliefs of the group, one that will effect a consistent ordering (an ordering free of 'puzzles') that preserves the greatest part of the original material.¹⁶

On this sort of view, interpersonal discussion is not optional. Not only do we need to be part of a community even to have our views in the first place, we must engage in dialogue both with alternative interpretations of our community's traditions and with those outside of our community in order to justify our views by giving an account of why our views are correct. In this way we can see why intersubjective dialogue is necessary: it broadens our horizons on the world, thereby correcting our blind spots.¹⁷ In this respect, Aristotle's social view of dialectic represents an advance over Plato's personal view.

Shaftesbury makes use of both Platonic and Aristotelian styles of dialectical reasoning. Shaftesbury thinks that all reasoning – even an individual person's private reasoning – involves a kind of intersubjective process. In his essay *Soliloquy* Shaftesbury

¹⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, 1994), p. 57

¹⁷ It would, perhaps, be interesting to compare here the dialectical process Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons", but that would take us too far afield from Shaftesbury and Hume. See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, 2nd Ed., trans Joel Weisheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (Continuum, 1989), p. 305.

describes moral reasoning through the mechanism of conscience as requiring the agent to partition herself into multiple voices (or “selves”) in order to engage in fruitful internal discussion on the model of a Socratic dialogue. Soliloquy, he says, is a kind of “self-dissection” in which an individual “becomes two distinct persons” in order to “be his own subject” of advice and edification (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 72). He calls “this method of soliloquy” an “art” or “regimen” which is “practiced” by “all great wits”, especially by “the poet and philosopher” but even “the orator”, too (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 73). Soliloquy, here, means something like the examination of conscience. Shaftesbury says this is the meaning of the ancient myth that each of us, like Socrates, has a “daemon” or “guardian-spirit”:

the very utmost the wise ancients ever meant by this daemon companion I conceive to have been no more than enigmatically to declare, that ‘we had each of us a patient in ourself’, that ‘we were properly our own subject of practice’ and that ‘we then became practitioners when, by virtue of an intimate recess, we could discover a certain duplicity of soul and divide ourselves into two parties’. . . . This, they thought, was the only way of composing matters in our breast and establishing that subordinacy which alone could make us agree with ourselves and be of a piece within.
(*Soliloquy* I.ii, p. 77)

So the point of dividing oneself into two dialogue partners is to achieve the kind of consensus that results from rational discussion. We reflect within ourselves and notice that we are of two minds about something (we “discover a certain duplicity of soul”). Then we discuss the issue with ourselves until we bring the two views into dialectical agreement. In this way we achieve integrity and self-unity within our mind (we “make us agree with ourselves and be of a piece within”). In aesthetic terms, we are trying to bring our soul into *harmony* with itself.

The emphasis on internal dialogue is Platonic. But, for Shaftesbury, the purpose of soliloquy is not only self-creation, but also preparation for public discourse. In this it is Aristotelian. It is significant that the full title of the essay is *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*, an “author” being one who “publishes” (makes public) his “meditations” (private thoughts). Shaftesbury says that publishing one’s private thoughts implies a claim of authority to give “advice” to the public: “For all authors at large are, in a manner, professed masters of understanding to the age” (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 70). So when he goes on to claim that his essay is published “not so much to give advice as to consider the way and manner of advising” (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 71), we should take this as ironic: Shaftesbury is giving advice on how to give advice. His recommendation is that we test our thoughts by the method of soliloquy before we presume to advertise them:

So that, unless the party has been used to play the critic thoroughly upon himself, he will hardly be found proof against the criticisms of others. His thoughts can never appear very correct unless they have been used to sound correction by themselves, and been well formed and disciplined before they are brought into the field. (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 76).

What is significant here is that public edification is the assumed goal of philosophical thinking.

But prior to public discourse, we must endeavor to construct a coherent self through the method of soliloquy. “Our thoughts”, says Shaftesbury, “have generally such an obscure implicit language that it is the hardest thing in the world to make them speak out distinctly. For this reason, the right method is to give them voice and accent” (*Soliloquy* I.ii, p. 78). By the method of giving voice to our thoughts here, Shaftesbury has in mind the “meditations, occasional reflections, solitary thoughts or other such

exercises as come under the notion of this self-discoursing practice” (*Soliloquy* I.i, p. 74) that make up his own private notebooks which he labeled *Askemata* (Greek: exercises), posthumously published as *The Philosophical Regimen of Antony, Earl of Shaftesbury*. In his *Regimen* Shaftesbury applies the practice of dialectical reasoning to his own inner life via the method of soliloquy. Shaftesbury is consciously following Marcus Aurelius’s example of “communing with himself”,¹⁸ but this is also a version of Platonic/Socratic dialectic in which one attempts to give an account of something to oneself. Moreover, it is an Aristotelian approach in that he draws eclectically from ancient sources, including Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian texts, to develop his own unique viewpoint.¹⁹ (His most obvious model here is Montaigne’s *Essays*.) Rather than commit himself solely to, for example, Platonism, Stoicism, or Christianity, Shaftesbury is attempting, like Aristotle, to establish a dialectical harmony between all such “common beliefs”.

Another Aristotelian element of Shaftesbury’s view is his insistence on the necessity of socialization for the development of virtue. According to Shaftesbury, the most morally beautiful people are those who have learned morality through “reflection” and “liberal education” as acquired by “the better models” of “good company” (*Soliloquy* I.iii, p. 85-6). If there is such a thing as “a right taste in life and manners”, then I will have to “*learn* to fancy, to admire, to please, as the subjects themselves are deserving and can bear me out” (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p. 151, emphasis in original). It is

¹⁸ The phrase comes from title of the Loeb Classical Library edition of *The Meditations*. See *The Communings with himself of Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome*, trans. C.R. Haines (Harvard, 1916).

¹⁹ For a brief summary of Shaftesbury’s sources see Klein’s introduction to the Cambridge edition of the *Characteristics*, p. xx.

possible to have some measure of moral taste from “nature only”, but in general moral development follows the pattern of aesthetic education in “the literate world” where “genius alone” is not sufficient to be a good poet without the “rules of art which philosophy alone can teach us” (*Soliloquy* I.iii, p. 87). Likewise good writing aims to conform to the “rules” of art, not merely to “the public relish and current humor of the times” (*Soliloquy* II.iii, p. 118). To aim at the latter would be to lack artistic integrity and to “prostitute” one’s art:

There is nothing more certain than that a real genius and thorough artist in whatever kind can never, without the greatest unwillingness and shame, be induced to act below his character and, for mere interest, be prevailed with to prostitute his art or science by performing contrary to its known rules. ... Be they ever so idle, dissolute or debauched, how regardless soever of other rules, they abhor any transgression in their art and would choose to lose customers and starve rather than, by a base compliance with the world, to act contrary to what they call the justness and truth of work. (*Soliloquy* II.iii, p. 117)

But the rejection of popularity does not imply a rejection of intersubjectivity. On the contrary, while he holds that beauty (both moral and artistic) requires philosophy, he also thinks philosophy requires intersubjective dialogue to establish the proper “rules” of beauty:

Such accuracy of workmanship requires a critic’s eye. It is lost upon a vulgar judgment. Nothing grieves a real artist more than that indifference of public which suffers work to pass uncriticized. Nothing, on the other side, rejoices him more than the nice view and inspection of the accurate examiner and judge of work. ... What is there mortifies the good painter more than when, amid his admiring spectators, there is not one present who has been used to compare the hands of different masters or has an eye to distinguish the advantages or defects of every style? (*Soliloquy* II.ii, p. 105-6)

What makes appeal to the to “the public relish and current humor of the times” prostitution is not that it is *public* taste, but that it is *bad* taste. Being merely the *current* majority opinion, it is relative to the whim of the lowest common denominator. Again we see why “common sense” must be conceived as a dialectical synthesis of traditional views rather than simply what most people happen to think at any one time.

III.

For Shaftesbury, the result of achieving harmony of soul is the construction of a unified “self”. “It is the known province of philosophy,” Shaftesbury writes, “to teach us ourselves, keep us the self-same person and to regulate our governing fancies, passions and humors as to make us comprehensible to ourselves” (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 127). With regard to the question of the self, Shaftesbury ridicules that “which stands for philosophy in some famous Schools”, saying it cannot generate “manners or understanding” because “It pretends indeed some relation to manners as being definitive of the natures, essences and properties of spirits” (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 128). In other words, scholastic philosophy confuses an accidental property (a “relationship”) of the self with an essential one. It does this by recommending “defining ‘material’ and ‘immaterial substances’ and distinguishing their properties and modes ... as the right manner of proceeding in the discovery of our own natures” (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 129-130). This focus on the metaphysics of “modes and substances” is, however, “beside the mark and reaches nothing we can truly call our interest or concern” (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 130). It does not tell us who we really are. Shaftesbury illustrates the scholastics’ mistake with a story:

If a passenger should turn by chance into a watchmaker's shop and, thinking to inform himself concerning watches, should inquire of what metal or what matter each part was composed, what gave the colors or what made the sounds, without examining what the real use was of such an instrument or by what movements its *end* was best attained and its perfection acquired, it is plain that such an examiner as this would come up short of any understanding in the real nature of the instrument. (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 131).

Likewise, the philosopher engaged in metaphysical speculation has “considered not the real operation or energy of his subject, nor contemplated the man *as real man and as a human agent*, but as a watch or common machine” (ibid).

Shaftesbury argues that true self-knowledge comes from the study of the passions.

This is because *I am* my passions: “These passions, according as they have the ascendancy in me and differ in proportion with one another, affect my character and make me different with respect to myself and others” (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 132). My *character* or *self* is a function of my passions, and that character is the *real me*, not the material (or immaterial) substance that my passions are made out of (or inhere in).

Should a like face and figure or a friend return to us with thought and humors of a strange and foreign turn, with passions, affections, and opinions wholly different from anything we had formerly known, we should say, in earnest and with the greatest amazement and concern, that this was another creature and not the friend whom we once knew familiarly. Nor should we in reality attempt any renewal of acquaintance or correspondence with such a person, though perhaps he might preserve in his memory the faint marks or tokens of former transactions which had passed between us. (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 127)²⁰

²⁰ The fact that continuity of memory is insufficient for identity of self is probably an objection to Locke's theory of personal identity. See Winkler, Kenneth P. ““All is Revolution in Us’: Personal Identity in Shaftesbury and Hume” *Hume Studies* 26:1 (April, 2000), p. 7

Were my character to change radically enough, then I would become a different self. If character were “wholly metamorphosed and converted”, I would be “thereby in reality transformed and lost” (ibid.) This is because my passions are aimed at what I take to be my happiness. And, as the teleological end of my life, my happiness is what makes me who I am.²¹

For as these passions veer, my interest veers, my steerage varies and I make alternately now this, now that, to be my course and harbor. The man in anger has a different happiness from the man in love. And the man lately become covetous has a different notion of satisfaction from what he had before, when he was liberal. Even the man in humor has another thought of interest and advantage than the man out of humor or in the least disturbed. The examination, therefore, of my humors and the inquiry after my passions must necessarily draw along with it the search and scrutiny of my opinions and the sincere consideration of my *scope* and *end*. And thus the study of human affection cannot fail of leading me towards the knowledge of *human nature* and of *myself*. (*Soliloquy* III.i, p 132-3)

True philosophy, then, is the kind of self-reflection which makes known to an agent what her passions are aimed at so that she can bring them into harmony with one another and thereby construct a coherent self.

Let me observe, therefore, with diligence what passes here [within myself], what connection and consistency, what agreement or disagreement I find within, ‘whether, according to my present ideas, that which I approve this hour, I am like to approve as well the next and, in case it be otherwise with me, how or after what manner I shall relieve myself, how ascertain my ideas and keep my opinion, liking and esteem of things the same’. (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 134)

²¹ Shaftesbury goes on to give an aesthetic analogy for the importance of having a teleological goal in view for one’s action: “However difficult or desperate it may appear in any artist to endeavor to bring perfection into his work, if he has not at least the idea of perfection to give him aim, he will be found very defective and mean in his performance” (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p. 148).

Until I can do this, “I am still the same mystery to myself as ever” (ibid), regardless of the truth of my metaphysical arguments.

The problem of an incoherent self arises primarily, in Shaftesbury’s view, when we define our lives in pursuit of pleasure. Pleasure is not stable, since pleasure comes from a variety of sources and the pursuit of pleasure demands a constant search for new sources, for “when we follow pleasure merely, we are disgusted and change from one sort to another, condemning that at one time which at another we earnestly approve, and never judging equally of happiness while we follow passion and mere humor” (*Soliloquy* III.ii, p. 138). What we need is a “rule of good” which can “control my fancy and fix it, if possible, on something which my hold good” (ibid). This is what Shaftesbury finds in the “honest pleasure” of moral beauty, the *honestum* which is both attractive and right. Only the “pleasure of society” is “constant” enough to ground a coherent self, enabling me to “bring my other pleasures to correspond and be friends with it” (*Soliloquy* III.ii, p. 139). Thus, “when I employ my affection in friendly and social actions, I find I can sincerely enjoy myself” without risking the kind of self-dissolution which comes from pursuit of self-interested pleasures (*Soliloquy* III.ii, p. 138). In the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury explains social affection in such a way as to highlight its intersubjectivity:

the effects of love or kind affection, in a way of mental pleasure, are *an enjoyment of good by communication, a receiving it, as it were, by reflection or by way of participation in the good of others, and a pleasing consciousness of the actual love, merited esteem or approbation of others.* (*Inquiry* II.ii.1, p. 204)

The pleasure I receive from moral affection is derived via sympathy from your enjoyment of my actions. As we saw in Chapter 5, it is Shaftesbury’s view that human beings have

natural affections for the good of society, and so we cannot flourish as human beings unless we live in society and develop the virtues which allow us to live according to our nature. Thus we are not fully human if we are cut off from a sympathetic relationship with a community. What Shaftesbury adds in *Soliloquy* is to draw out the implication that we can only construct a self-identity on the basis of sympathetic pleasure. In this way we construct our identities out of our social interactions with others. We are essentially intersubjective beings.

Note that, even apart its appeal to the social affections, Shaftesbury's account of self-construction is essentially intersubjective and dialectical. It involves at least soliloquy if not actual interpersonal dialogue. Remember that what spurs us to philosophical reflection is that we "discover a certain duplicity of soul" (*Soliloquy* I.ii, p. 77). When we notice that we are of two minds about something – i.e., when our passions or opinions conflict with each other – or when we notice that our mind has changed radically from what we once felt or believed, "it is to philosophy we then appeal" (*Soliloquy* III.i, p. 127). But, since it is often difficult to know what our true passions and opinions are, we need talk therapy (a "vocal looking-glass") in the form of dialogue or soliloquy: "Our thoughts have generally such an obscure implicit language that it is the hardest thing in the world to make them speak out distinctly. For this reason, the right method is to give them voice and accent" (*Soliloquy* I.ii, p. 78).

Shaftesbury's own dialogue *The Moralists* seems to be an example of this process since both characters in the dialogue present Shaftesburian viewpoints and help each

other come to the truth.²² Indeed the assembled text of the *Characteristics* itself expresses this view through its literary structure. David Marshall argues that Shaftesbury's use of the epistolary form in such works as *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* and *Sensus Communis* (whose full title is *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor in a Letter to a Friend*) is meant to transform these philosophical treatises into dialogues.²³ Perhaps the best example of this literary technique is Shaftesbury's unfinished treatise *Platstics: An Epistolary Excursion in the Original Progress and Power of Designatory Art*. In Shaftesbury's notes on this treatise (reprinted as *Idea of the Work* by Benjamin Rand in his reconstructed edition of Shaftesbury's unfinished *Second Characters*), we can see that Shaftesbury was self-consciously modeling his "epistolary excursion" on the form of a private letter in order to generate the same sort of effect as a philosophical dialogue. Shaftesbury writes:

And since dialogue-manner (whether diverse or recitative) too ponderous and vast; endeavor though in the letter-style and particular private address, (as O Theophilus! My Lord or Reader!), to introduce scenes and machines of this sort in many a chapter and everywhere in general, as much as possible in way of apostrophe and prosopope.²⁴

Marshall explains how this would work:

As a letter, the text would constitute a dialogue between its first person and its specific (fictional) *destinataire*: in principle, excluding the reader,

²² For a reading of the interlocutors in *The Moralists* as "two opposing tendencies" in Shaftesbury's thought, see Michael Prince's *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 47-73, especially p. 69.

²³ Marshall, David. *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (Columbia University Press, 1986)

²⁴ *Idea of the Work* reprinted in Shaftesbury's *Second Characters*, ed. Rand, Benjamin (Cambridge, 1914), p. 7

turning him into a witness to a scene which occurs accidentally, as it were, before his eyes. The author would have the status of an actor in the dialogue; the reader would be displaced by the character of the reader personated in the text.²⁵

In other words, reading a letter addressed to someone else is like overhearing a conversation.

The argument can be extended to all Shaftesbury's works. *The Moralists* is explicitly a dialogue. The treatise *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*, as its title implies, is an internal dialogue in which Shaftesbury is addressing himself. The *Miscellaneous Reflections on the Preceding Treatises and Other Critical Subjects*, Shaftesbury's self-commentary, written in the third-person, are in effect an extended soliloquy that can be read as a dialogue between Shaftesbury the literary critic and Shaftesbury the philosopher.²⁶ As Marshall explains, Shaftesbury's method of writing about himself in the third-person,

allows him to stand outside his books, beside himself, as it were; to become his own first reader, examiner, or witness. Through a delayed *dédoublement* which repeats the structure of the dialogue, Shaftesbury is able to examine and criticize himself as if he were someone else, and to create a dialogue between the different parts of the book.²⁷

²⁵ Marshall, p. 31

²⁶ Shaftesbury, in the voice of the apparent author of the *Miscellaneous Reflections*, says "my chief intention in the following sheets is to descant cursorily upon some late pieces of a British author", referring to himself, i.e., to Shaftesbury the author of the *Characteristics* (*Miscellany* I.1, p. 342). The author of the *Miscellaneous Reflections* goes on to say he will "serve as critic or interpreter to this new writer", attempting to explain his "regular and formal" ideas in a more "fashionable air and manner" (ibid). We might also offer a reading of *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* along these lines: Shaftesbury the author of *Soliloquy* is giving advice to Shaftesbury the author of *Characteristics*.

²⁷ Marshall, p. 47

Shaftesbury himself suggests this sort of dialogical reading of the *Miscellaneous Reflections*: in the sentence before the passage quoted above in which Shaftesbury links the “letter-style” and the “dialogue-manner”, Shaftesbury says his epistolary treatise should be a “continuance of manner and style of Miscellanys”.²⁸ Thus, the *Miscellaneous Reflections*, too, should be read as another of Shaftesbury’s dialogues. In this light we can see that even the (seemingly) ordinary philosophical treatise *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* takes on a dialogical character. Not only does the author of the *Inquiry* show up as a character in *The Moralists*,²⁹ the *Inquiry* itself, when read in the overall context of the other more obviously dialogical works of the *Characteristics* and thus located amidst a series of overheard conversations, begins to read like an overheard scholastic-style philosophy lecture.

So none of the individual treatises of the *Characteristics* is written unambiguously in Shaftesbury’s own voice. As Marshall puts it when commenting on the fictional voice of the critic in the *Miscellaneous Reflections*, “the recognition of the fiction of that impersonation must retroactively and retrospectively change the way one reads the *Characteristics*”.³⁰ Shaftesbury thus “turns the author of all and each of the essays into a role”.³¹ The character of “Shaftesbury”, the author of *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, emerges only as the harmonious unity of the other

²⁸ *Idea of the Work in Second Characters*, p. 7

²⁹ See *The Moralists* II.3, p. 265

³⁰ Marshall, p. 49

³¹ Marshall, p. 49-50

voices.³² In this way, the structure of Shaftesbury's work as a whole is an embodiment of intersubjective reasoning. The truth of Shaftesbury's philosophy is the product of a (metaphorical) community of persons reasoning together through (simulated) interpersonal dialogue. He is trying to achieve what he says Plato achieved in his Socratic dialogues: "they exhibited [real characters and manners] alive and set the countenances and complexions of men plainly in view. And by this means they not only taught us to know others, but, what was principal and of highest virtue in them, they taught us to know ourselves" (*Soliloquy* I.iii, p. 87).

Shaftesbury's theory of common sense as what a community has discerned together through public reasoning seems remarkably modern. Arguably, he is anticipating the dialectical philosophy of Hegel, the American pragmatists, the continental phenomenologists, etc. But Shaftesbury still has a rather premodern understanding of objective reality. He thinks that what we are discerning together is the teleological structure of nature. Something is beautiful (or good) on Shaftesbury's view, to the degree that it fits into "the system of the universe" as it was ordered by divine providence (*Inquiry* I.ii.1, p. 169). Hence in order to understand beauty, we must grasp the eternal rational principles in the mind of God. In this he is Augustinian: when we engage in dialogue about what we have found in our own minds, intersubjectivity leads us to a gods-eye-perspective. Hence Shaftesbury's account of morality requires a commitment to the possibility of metaphysics. But, interestingly, he ends his *Inquiry* with a concession to skepticism:

³² Consider also the way in which Augustine constructs his own self-identity through a kind of interior dialogue narrating an interpretation of his memories in *The Confessions*.

Let us carry skepticism ever so far, let us doubt, if we can, of everything about us, we cannot doubt of what passes within ourselves. Our passions and affections are known to us. They are certain, whatever the objects may be on which they are employed. Nor is it of any concern to our argument how these exterior objects stand – whether they are realities or mere illusions, whether we wake or dream. For ill dreams will be equally disturbing, and a good dream, if life be nothing else, will be easily and happily passed. In this dream of life, therefore, our demonstrations have the same force, our balance and economy hold good and our obligation to virtue is in every respect the same. (*Inquiry* Conclusion, 229-30)

Even if there is no external world and all his metaphysical hypotheses were wrong, the moral taste account would still be defensible. It is this suggestion that Hume picks up: we can defend moral taste without affirming natural teleology. It is to Hume that we turn in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8: HUME AS MORAL TASTE THEORIST

I.

Hume inherited from Hutcheson and “the elegant Lord Shaftesbury” (as he calls him at EPM 1.4) the analogy between beauty and virtue. Hume explicitly and repeatedly refers to “moral beauty” both in the *Treatise*¹ and in the second *Enquiry*.² But while Hutcheson saw the analogy between beauty and virtue as entirely metaphorical, Hume follows Shaftesbury in holding that virtue is *literally* beautiful. As we saw in Chapter 6, Hutcheson appealed to aesthetic considerations only as an analogy when defending his account of the moral sense. Hutcheson did not think there is any deep connection between beauty and virtue. Shaftesbury and Hume, however, both think (albeit for different reasons) that moral beauty and aesthetic beauty are two species of a common genus.

When Hume talks about “the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste*”, he says “The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue” (EPM Appx 1.21). This seems to imply that there is *one* faculty of taste that is the source of sentiments of *both* beauty and virtue. And if the faculty of moral and aesthetic sentiments is the same, then we would expect those sentiments to have something in common. Hume himself draws

¹ See T 2.1.8.3, 3.1.121, 3.2.1.8, 3.2.2.1, and 3.2.6.4. He also speaks of “beauty and deformity in action” (T 2.1.1.3) and says “there is no spectacle so fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action” (T 3.1.2.2).

² See EPM 1.9. He also speaks of “the beauty of virtue” (EPM 1.2, 1.5, Appx 1.21; cf. 5.1), and “inward beauty and moral grace” (EPM 9.10).

this conclusion: “It will naturally be expected, that the beauty of the body, as is supposed by all ancient moralists, will be similar, in some respects, to that of the mind” (EPM 6.23). Hume suggests that natural/external beauty (“beauty of the body”) is “similar” to moral/inner beauty (“that of the mind”). Hume continues: “and that *every kind of esteem*, which is paid to a man, will have something similar in its origin, whether it arise from his mental endowments, or from the situation of his exterior circumstances” (ibid, my emphasis). Here the implication is that not only are the ideas of moral and natural beauty similar, these ideas are both species of the same genus. They are both “kinds of esteem”.

For Hume judgments of moral and aesthetic beauty are both feelings of approval, and moral and aesthetic beauties themselves are the objects of that approval. Hume writes:

To have a sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us. (T 3.1.2.2)

Like Hutcheson, Hume argues that the feeling we get from contemplating a virtuous character constitutes our judgment of that character as virtuous. And this is true of any approval. The pleasure we feel upon contemplation of beauty, whether moral or natural, is our approval of it as beautiful. The pleasure and the approval are one and the same idea. Where Hume departs from Hutcheson is in his (Hume’s) willingness to accept the implication that all objects of approval are literally kinds of beauty.

For Hume, beauty in general is essentially the “power of producing pleasure” in the observer (T 2.1.8.3):

[B]eauty is such an order and construction of parts, as either by the *primary constitution* of our nature, by *custom*, or by *caprice*, is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. This is the distinguishing character of beauty, and forms all the difference betwixt it and deformity, whose natural tendency is to produce uneasiness. Pleasure and pain, therefore, are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence. (T 2.1.8.2)

We will examine below the way in which Hume thinks the “common” or “general” point of view of a “judicious spectator” or “true judge” can provide a “standard” against which we can “correct” our subjective feelings of moral and aesthetic pleasure.³ For now let us consider the *causes* of pleasant moral and aesthetic sentiments. Hume argues that the pleasure of beauty is often caused by a judgment of “utility” or “convenience” (T 2.1.8.2) by which he means the objects’ “fitness for that purpose to which they are destined” (T. 2.2.5.17).⁴ Hume calls this a “beauty of interest, not of form” (T 2.2.5.16). In other words, the beauty of things like “tables, chairs, scritoires, chimneys, coaches, saddles, ploughs” consists in their *form’s usefulness for some purpose* (or “interest”) rather than in

³ For the term “judicious spectator” see T 3.3.1.14; for “general point of view” see T 3.3.1.15; for “common point of view” and “standard of virtue” see T 3.3.1.30; for “standard of taste” see *Essays* p. 229; for “true judge” see *Essays* p. 241; for mention of the need to “correct” our moral and aesthetic sentiments, see T 3.3.1.15-16 and EPM 5.41 cf. EPM 5.42n25).

⁴ Likewise, in the immediate context of the sentence quoted above about “kinds of esteem” (i.e., EPM 6.23), Hume argues that what moral and natural beauty have in common is utility: “Ideas of utility and its contrary, though they do not entirely determine what is handsom or deformed, are evidently the source of a considerable part of approbation or dislike” (EPM 6.25). For an excellent study of the role of utility in Hume’s ethics (a study which draws from Hume’s aesthetics), see Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey. “Hume and the Bauhaus Theory of Ethics” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20 (1996)

their *form alone* which would (if beautiful) produce pleasure for its own sake even in a disinterested spectator.⁵ But Hume does agree that some objects do have a beauty of form from which we receive an “immediate pleasure” from the perception of a beautiful object “tho’ it be neither useful to ourselves nor others” (T. 3.3.5.4). Thus, while he never uses this formula for beauty, we see that Hume’s account of beauty is – as we would expect – precisely parallel to his more famous account of virtue according to which virtue is “the possession of mental qualities *useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*” (EPM 9.1.1).⁶ The only difference between moral beauty and natural beauty is that virtue refers specifically to “mental qualities” of which we approve.

The upshot of Hume’s account of beauty is that virtue is *literally* a species of beauty. The idea or judgment of beauty (whether moral or natural) is a pleasant feeling of approval. This is what Hume means when he says that “there is nothing in common to natural and moral beauty ... but this power of producing pleasure” (T 2.1.8.3). Hume claims that beauty “cannot be defin’d, but is discern’d only by a taste or sensation” (T 2.1.8.2). But since every beautiful object “agrees in producing a separate pleasure, and agrees in nothing else” (T 2.1.8.5), it follows that “the power of producing pain and

⁵ Note that by “form” here and elsewhere, Hume means only an object’s literal *shape* and *physical structure*. He does not have in mind any sort metaphysical entity along the lines of a Platonic form.

⁶ Compare this passage where Hume explains that virtue can arise from either rational judgments of usefulness or immediate perceptions of agreeableness and then explicitly says beauty is parallel: “Moral good and evil are certainly distinguish’d by our sentiments, not by reason: But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflections on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. My opinion is, that both these causes are intermix’d in our judgments of morals; after the same manner as they are in our decisions concerning most kinds of external beauty” (T 3.3.1.27).

pleasure makes in this manner the essence of beauty and deformity” (ibid.) Moreover the feeling of pleasure from “all kinds” of beauty is “peculiar”: “*beauty* of all kinds gives us a peculiar delight and satisfaction; as *deformity* produces pain, upon whatever subject it may be plac'd, and whether survey'd in an animate or inanimate object” (T 2.1.8.1). In other words, the pleasure which constitutes the idea of beauty is phenomenologically different from other kinds of pleasure.⁷ Now, as we have seen, the cause of this unique feeling is usefulness and/or agreeableness. If the cause is a character trait, then the beauty is denominated *moral* beauty; if the cause is an object's form (whether for its own sake or for its instrumental value), then the beauty is denominated *natural* beauty.

II.

Beauty, whether natural or moral, operates according to what Hume calls *the principle of sympathy* (T 3.3.1.7-10). Hume says that “the same principle [i.e., sympathy] produces, in many instances, our sentiments of morals, as well as those of beauty” (T 3.3.1.9). For Hume sympathy is, officially, a psychological mechanism of emotional contagion. Hume observes that “The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce corresponding movements in all human breasts” (T 3.3.3.5). Thus, at its first mention in the *Treatise*, Hume defines sympathy as that psychological mechanism which allows us “to receive by communication [other people's] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (T 2.1.11.2).

⁷ Cf. Hume's claim that self-interested approval and approval of moral beauty “have a very different feeling and influence on the mind” (EPM 5.9).

Sympathy is so central in Hume's account of morality that he goes as far as to claim that the virtues "derive their merit from our sympathy" with the virtuous person (T 3.3.6.1). Indeed, Hume says "sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions" in that sympathy gives us "sentiments of approbation" (ibid). Of course, Hume also says in the heading of *Treatise* 3.1.2 that "Moral distinctions [are] deriv'd from a moral sense". So in the *Treatise* Hume seems to claim that two different mental faculties (namely, the *moral sense* and *sympathy*) are the source of moral distinctions. Furthermore, in the second *Enquiry* Hume claims that two different sentiments (namely, *benevolence* and *the sentiment of humanity*) are the source of moral distinctions. At EPM 9.4 Hume says moral distinctions "immediately arise" from feelings of benevolence, and at 9.8 he says the sentiment of humanity is "the origin of morals". In this chapter, we examine Hume's understanding of the relationship between these four "principles" of human nature, each of which has a claim to be considered the "source" of morality. I will argue that these four principles are the components of the "moral sense". Thus we will see that, for Hume, the moral sense is not a special *sui generis* mental faculty as it is for Hutcheson but is a function of our ordinary (non-moral) mental faculties.

Let us begin with *sympathy*. Sympathy is the key feature of Hume's moral system as it is found in the *Treatise*. One of the fullest examples Hume gives of the mechanism of sympathy comes in the section "Of our esteem for the rich and powerful":

Upon the whole, there remains nothing, which can give us an esteem for power and riches, and a contempt for meanness and poverty, except the principle of *sympathy*, by which we enter into the sentiments of the rich and poor, and partake of their pleasure and uneasiness. Riches give satisfaction to their possessor; and this satisfaction is convey'd to the

beholder by the imagination, which produces an idea resembling the original impression in force and vivacity. (T 2.2.5.14)

We contemplate the pleasure a rich person takes in possessing riches, and the rich person's pleasure is communicated to us by the mechanism of sympathy. The same sort of process gives rise to our aesthetic and moral sentiments.⁸ We contemplate a person's character traits and consider the ways in which those character traits give pleasure (either instrumentally or immediately) to that person and those around him, and then the mechanism of sympathy causes us to feel pleasure as well (even if we do not expect to personally benefit from the person's possession of those character traits). This pleasure constitutes our approval of that person as virtuous.

But not just any approval counts as *moral* approbation, because for Hume the concept of morality requires approval of others *qua* human beings. This brings us to the second principle of morals: the sentiment of *humanity*. In the Conclusion of the second *Enquiry* Hume explains that "The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it" (EMP 9.5). Hume calls this intersubjective agreement "establishing" a "rule of right" (ibid). And not only

⁸ In fact, it seems that the only reason the pleasure we receive by contemplating the utility of someone's riches is not a judgment of beauty is that the riches are neither a character trait (and hence not the proper object of moral beauty) nor an attractive physical "form" or shape (and hence not the proper object of aesthetic beauty). For our approbation of money to be judgment of aesthetic beauty (as opposed to mere "esteem"), we would need to feel pleasure in the relationship between money's form and its function. In reality, however, the physical form of money has no relevance to its economic value (i.e., its value *qua* money). While it is true that we may, for example, admire the beautiful form of a gold coin, it remains the case that the coin's physical form is not essential to its being an instance of money, since we might exchange the beautiful coin for an aesthetically uninteresting paper bank note without diminishing its economic value.

must the moral sentiment be *universal* so as to establish a single rule of right by “recommending the same object to general approbation”, the moral sentiment must also be *impartial* so as to “extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure” (ibid).

Yet there is a complexity here which the simplified *Enquiry* account does not address in detail. In the *Treatise* Hume observes that we tend to sympathize with people to the degree that they resemble us (T 2.1.11.5; cf. T 2.2.4.6-7). This is why we tend to sympathize more strongly with family members than with strangers and more strongly with people from our own country than with foreigners (T 2.2.4.2). We are naturally biased and partial in our sentiments and sympathies toward others. But this fact about our psychology makes it difficult to take up the universal and impartial moral standpoint. We tend to “sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us” such that “sympathy is very variable” according to one’s particular point of view, but “notwithstanding this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in *China* as in *England*. They appear equally virtuous, and recommend themselves equally to the esteem of a judicious spectator” (T 3.3.1.14). In other words, sympathy is naturally partial, but the moral sentiment is supposed to be impartial. We need a way to overcome our tendency to judge people differently.

So how can we avoid the “continual fluctuation” of “our situation, with regard to both persons and things” which gives to “continual *contradictions*” within our judgments (T 3.3.1.15)? Faced with “so many contradictions to our sentiments in society and conversation” which result in “an uncertainty from the incessant changes of our

situation”, we are led to “seek some other standard of merit and demerit, which may not admit of so great variation” (T 3.3.1.18). We can find such a standard and thereby “arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things” if we “fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation” (T 3.3.1.15). Taking up a general point of view provides us a way to stabilize our sympathetic feelings. This “method of correcting our sentiments” is the same sort of method we employ “with regard to all the senses” (T 3.3.1.16). Rather than thinking, for example, that objects “diminish by their distance”, i.e., actually get smaller when they move farther away from us relative to our position in space, we instead specify a standard way of measuring their size so as to “arrive at a more constant and establish’d judgment concerning them” (T 3.3.3.2).

In the case of moral judgment this “correcting” of our sentiments requires us to be “impartial” (T 3.3.1.18) and to “over-look our own interest” (T 3.3.1.17). Moreover, without this sort of correction we would not be able to achieve the universality implicit in the moral standpoint. If everyone judged virtue from their own particular point of view, then we would not be able to agree:

every particular person’s pleasure and interest being different, ’tis impossible men cou’d ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all. (T 3.3.1.30)

In the conclusion to the second *Enquiry* Hume gives the same argument, but in different language. There he refers to the moral sentiment as “the sentiment of humanity”. Hume

says “These two requisite circumstances [i.e., being universal and impartial] belong alone to the sentiment of humanity here insisted on” (EPM 9.5). Thus Hume concludes:

the sentiments, which arise from humanity, are not only the same in all human creatures, and produce the same approbation or censure [i.e., they are impartial]; but they also comprehend all human creatures; nor is there any one whose conduct or character is not, by their means, an object, to every one, of censure or approbation [i.e., they are universal]. (EPM 9.7).

The sentiment of humanity is therefore is “the origin of morals” (EPM 9.8). Thus, if we were to abstract from our particular relations with others and consider only our general relation to them as human beings (i.e., if we were to consider them *impartially*), we would sympathize with all human beings equally (i.e., *universally*). In other words, we would feel a *moral* sentiment. Hume says “Whatever conduct gains my approbation, by touching my humanity, procures also the applause of all mankind, by affecting the same principle in them” (EPM 9.8). This is why the moral judge must “depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others: He must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string, to which all mankind have an accord and symphony” (EPM 9.6).

In the *Treatise* Hume uses the same metaphor of a “string” to explain the mechanism of sympathy: “As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (T 3.3.1.7). Now, as we have seen, in the *Treatise* sympathy is presented as a problem since the effects of sympathy seem relative to the resemblance we see between ourselves and others. In other words, the ordinary operation of sympathy is what *prevents* us from making

impartial moral judgments. But in the second *Enquiry* sympathy is presented as a solution to this same problem since the mechanism of sympathy is what *allows* us to take up a “common point of view” wherein the moral judge can touch “the principle of humanity, in which every man, in some degree, concurs” (EPM 9.6). How can sympathy both prevent and allow the moral point of view? It is possible that Hume has simply changed his mind between the writing of the *Treatise* and the writing of the second *Enquiry*, but this seems unlikely since so much of the two accounts is the same. We have seen that the *Enquiry* account, like the *Treatise* account, still requires us to correct for our biases and to enter into an impartial moral point of view. I propose, then, that the difference in the use of the term “sympathy” between the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* can be explained away if we take the *Enquiry* references to “sympathy” to mean, not sympathy *per se* as defined in the *Treatise*, but sympathy *as corrected or made impartial by the general point of view*.

In the *Enquiry* Hume says, “Benevolence naturally divides into two kinds, the *general* and the *particular*. The first is, where we have no friendship or connexion or esteem for the person, but feel only a general sympathy with him” (EPM Appx 2.5n60). After discussing particular benevolence, Hume goes on to refer back to “the former sentiment, to wit, that of general benevolence, or humanity, or sympathy”. Here Hume seems to be *equating* the terms “general benevolence” with the sentiment of “humanity” and with “general sympathy”.⁹ By “general sympathy” here Hume probably has in mind

⁹ Hume also seems to equate the sentiment of humanity with benevolence as both being the source of moral sentiments at EPM 5.46, where he slides from appeal to “such principle in our nature as humanity or a concern for others” to “the benevolent principle”

a function of what in the *Treatise* he called “extensive sympathy” (T 2.2.9.14), which is our imagination’s ability to “extend” itself beyond the limited circumstances of “the present moment” (T 2.2.9.13). This is an ability we must utilize in order to take up an impartial or disinterested viewpoint. We feel sympathy strongly for those “very near to us” and then “extend” this sympathy “to other cases that are resembling”, even if these extended cases are “very remote from ourselves” (T 3.3.3.2). This extended sympathy is the general or impartial point of view which constitutes the moral standpoint. Thus, after explaining that moral judgment requires us to take up “*general* points of view” (T 3.3.1.15), Hume can conclude that “our sentiments of virtue depend” on extensive sympathy because it is through this mechanism that our “imagination adheres to the *general* views of things, and distinguishes betwixt the feelings they produce, and those which arise from our particular and momentary situation” (T 3.3.1.23).

Thus a coherent picture has emerged. Sympathy in itself is the communication of sentiments due to the recognition of similarity. We sympathize more strongly with those we see as more similar to us. But the moral point of view requires a directed form of sympathy. The only similarity that is morally relevant is our shared humanity. From my personal point of view, I may sympathize with someone for any number of reasons, e.g., because he is a male, a member of the white race, an American, a blood relative, a philosophy professor, etc. There are many different kinds of similarities I might notice between myself and others, but the only similarity that is relevant to moral judgment is

and to a “general principle of moral blame and approbation”. Sympathy appears here, too, as the mechanism which “communicates pleasure” in “every thing, which promotes the interest of society”.

our similarity *qua* human being. From the point of view which considers only our shared humanity, we notice that some character traits give pleasure or pain to the agent who has those traits and to those affected by those traits.¹⁰ These feelings of pleasure and pain are transferred from the agent and those directly affected to moral judges¹¹ through the mechanism of sympathy. In the language of the second *Enquiry* a feeling of pleasure or pain transmitted by sympathy is called a “sentiment of sympathy” or simply “a sympathy”, and a sentiment of sympathy which arises from the moral point of view is called a *moral sentiment* or “general sympathy” or “humanity” or “fellow-feeling”. Pleasant moral sentiments constitute a judgment of virtue and painful moral sentiments constitute a judgment of vice.

Where, then, does Hume’s fourth moral principle (*viz. benevolence*) enter the account? The feeling of pleasure the moral judge gets from the idea of an agent’s character traits is associated in the judge’s mind with the idea of the agent herself so that the judge begins to feel pleasure at the idea of the agent. In the *Treatise* the feeling of pleasure one gets at the thought of someone else is called “love” (T 2.2.1.6). The feeling of love causes (or at least is constantly conjoined with and “always follow’d by”) the “desire of the happiness of the person belov’d, and an aversion to his misery” (T 2.2.6.3). This desire is called “benevolence”. The moral sentiment of *general sympathy*, then, is a feeling of pleasure at the thought of someone *qua* human being and thus constitutes a

¹⁰ Hume refers to “those, who have any immediate connexion or intercourse with the person” as the person’s “narrow circle” or “sphere” (T 3.3.3.2).

¹¹ Hume refers to the one who has taken up the moral point of view as “a judicious spectator” (T 3.3.1.14).

general love or a *love of humanity*. This sentiment of humanity then causes a sentiment of *general benevolence* or a desire to benefit the person *qua* human being. Thus our natural motive toward general benevolence (i.e., our natural “concern for” “the interest of society”) proceeds from the same source as our approval of benevolent virtues (i.e., those virtues which have a “tendency to the good of society”): both arise from the operation of general sympathy (T 3.3.1.11).

Hume claims that sympathy “produces our sentiments of morals in all the artificial virtues. From thence we may presume, that it also gives rise to many of the other virtues; and that qualities acquire our approbation, because of their tendency to the good of mankind.” (T 3.3.1.10). Likewise with the natural virtues: “most of those qualities, which we *naturally* approve of, have actually that tendency [to the good of mankind], and render a man a proper member of society” (ibid). Here Hume slides between sympathy as the source of *approbation* of virtue (it “produces our sentiments of morals”) and sympathy as the source of the *virtue itself* (it “gives rise to” virtues). This is because sympathy both judges and motivates. Because sympathy motivates us to care about the good of society, sympathy leads us both to *acquire* virtues which benefit society and to *approve* of those virtues in ourselves and others. Hume claims “that moral distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities and characters to the interest of society, and that ‘tis our concern for that interest, which makes us approve or disapprove of them” (T 3.3.1.11). We approve of virtue because we are motivated toward benevolence. This motive has its source in sympathy:

Now we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy;
and consequently ‘tis that principle, which takes us so far out of ourselves,

as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in characters which are useful or pernicious to society, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss. (ibid)

The pleasure from sympathy generates both motivation toward benevolence and approval of such motivations just as if it were they were our own self-interest.

In the “Conclusion” to *Treatise* Book 3 Hume says sympathy is a “principle in human nature” which influences us “when we judge morals” and gives us “sentiments of approbation” (T 3.3.6.1). But, as we have seen, sympathy does not simply judge, it also motivates. Hume continues: “Justice is certainly approved’d of for no other reason, than it has a tendency to the public good: And the public good is indifferent to us, except so far as sympathy *interests us in it*” (ibid, emphasis added). Likewise in the second *Enquiry* Hume makes similar comments about our “interest” in (and the impossibility of being “indifferent” to) the “public good” (EPM 5.17). Hume says our “interest” in the public good is a kind of “public interest” which should be contrasted with our “private interests” and which results in a motive or a “public affection”.¹² Hence Hume’s view is

¹² Here is the complete passage: “We have found instances, in which private interest was separate from public; in which it was even contrary; And yet we observed the moral sentiment to continue, notwithstanding this disjunction of interests. And wherever these distinct interests sensibly concurred, we always found a sensible encrease of the sentiment, and a more warm affection to virtue, and detestation of vice, or what we properly call, gratitude and revenge. Compelled by these instances, we must renounce the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self-love. We must adopt a more public affection, and allow, that the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us” (EPM 5.17). In light of this passage I find unconvincing an alternative reading of T 3.3.6.1 suggested to me by Andrews Reath. In Reath’s reading, Hume has in mind that sympathy “interests” us as *judges* rather than as *agents*. In other words, sympathy makes us care about finding out what the public good is (through contemplation), but it does not make us care about bringing about the public good (through action). The problem with this reading is that, by “interest”, Hume almost always means the objective quality of “being good for” someone as used in reference to

clearly a Shaftesburian moral taste theory as opposed to a Hutchesonian moral sense theory: for Hume, as for Shaftesbury, there is a single faculty that, through an feeling of approbationary pleasure, both tells us what morality requires and motivates (or “interests”) us to do it.

Hume’s disagreement with Hutcheson comes out most explicitly two paragraphs later. Hume writes:

Those who resolve the sense of morals into original instincts of the human mind, may defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority; but want the advantage, which those possess, who account for that sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to their system, not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv'd. So that nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good. (T 3.3.6.3)

While Hume agrees that those such as Hutcheson “who resolve the sense of morals into original instincts” are correct in thinking our moral approbation always results in a motive to act morally, Hume argues that appeal to moral instinct alone can give us no motive to care about making correct moral judgments. Hume argues that the moral sense theory alone (as defended by Hutcheson) gives virtue “sufficient authority” but gives us no way to claim that the moral sense *itself* is morally good. Hutcheson explicitly admits this: “Yet we should no more call the moral Sense *morally good* or *evil*, than we call the *Sense of Tasting savoury* or *unsavoury*, *sweet* or *bitter*” (*Essay* II.i, p. 150). This would mean that we have no reason to improve our moral taste. If I take up the moral point of view, I will feel pleasure at the contemplation of virtuous character traits, but if I get more pleasure from satisfying my own vicious desires, then I have no reason to take up

one’s “self-interest”. Hume almost never uses “interest” to mean the subjective quality of “curiosity” as in something one considers “interesting”.

the moral point of view. I can simply ignore my moral sense. But on Hume's moral taste theory, the faculty of moral judgment approves of itself.¹³ Taking up the moral point of view is itself a source of pleasure. Hume attempts to "account for that sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind" such that "not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from which it is deriv'd" (ibid). On Hume's view, then, the motives which result from moral judgment are not simply directed at virtuous character traits but are also directed at the operation of the moral faculty itself. We are not simply motivated to act virtuously; we are also motivated to make moral judgments. And since properly moral judgments can only be made from the unbiased general point of view, then we are motivated to become as unbiased as possible. In short, we are motivated to acquire good moral taste.

To sum up this section, let us consider a passage in the second *Enquiry* which brings together all four of Hume's fundamental "principles of morals". Hume wonders rhetorically,

Have we any difficulty to comprehend the force of humanity and benevolence? Or to conceive, that the very aspect of happiness, joy, prosperity, gives pleasure; that of pain, suffering, sorrow, communicates uneasiness? ... Reduce a person to solitude, and he loses all enjoyment, except either of the sensual or speculative kind; and that because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow-creatures. (EPM 5.18)

Sympathy is our tendency to feel pleasure at the contemplation ("the very aspect") of happiness in another person (or pain at the contemplation of another's unhappiness). And

¹³ My language here follows Korsgaard: "the moral sense approves of its own origins and workings and so it approves of *itself*." See Korsgaard, Christine. *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 63. Compare EPM 7.28 where Hume says good aesthetic taste is itself a beautiful character trait.

humanity is sympathy corrected by the general point of view, i.e, our tendency to feel pleasure (or pain) at the thought of another person, impartial of that person's particular relationship to us. The *moral sense*, then, is the faculty which receives these pleasant feelings of approval (or painful feelings of disapproval). "Moral sentiment" is Hume's term for the actual pleasant (or painful) experience of these sentiments of sympathy, a pleasant experience which constitutes our approval of them as virtuous (or a painful experience which constitutes our disapproval of them as vicious). *Benevolence* is our desire for the other person's happiness. This desire makes us prefer or approve virtue over vice insofar as virtue benefits society (EPM 9.4). All four principles of human nature are components of a single process of moral judgment; they are principles of a single moral faculty, a faculty which, elsewhere, Hume calls "moral taste". "The approbation of moral qualities" Hume says, "proceeds entirely from a moral taste" (T 3.3.1.15).

Hume uses the term "taste", because, unlike the term "sense", "taste" emphasizes the fact that, for Hume, moral judgments are both representations of moral reality and motives to action. The dual cognitive and conative elements of taste are clearly evident in the first Appendix to the second *Enquiry* where "some internal taste", Hume says, both cognitively "distinguishes moral good and evil" and conatively "embraces the one and rejects the other" (EPM Appx 1.20). That Hume's faculty of taste is cognitive, however, is obscured as Hume continues in the next paragraph:

Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition and

diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery: Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition. From circumstances and relations, known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and unknown: after all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation. (EMP Appx 1.20-21).

The conative element is still clear in that taste “becomes a motive to action”. But the cognitive is questionable since Hume says taste does not give “knowledge of truth falsehood” or of “objects as they really stand in nature”. Instead taste is a “productive faculty” which involves “gilding or staining” the world. That taste projects moral ideas onto the world, however, does not imply (in Hume’s view at least) that judgments of taste are noncognitive. Just one sentence before this passage Hume has said clearly that taste “distinguishes moral good and evil”. It is by feeling the approbatory pleasure of taste that we *know* a person to be morally beautiful. So when Hume implies here that “knowledge of truth and falsehood” lies beyond the “boundry” of taste, he means only that taste doesn’t reveal facts about “objects as they really stand in nature”. Taste *does*, however, give us knowledge about objects as they stand *in relation to our sentiments*. As Hume puts it in the *Treatise*, morality does consist in “a matter of fact”, but this fact is “the object of feeling not of reason” (T 3.1.1.26)

III.

In the previous section I argued that (1) sympathy is, when corrected by the general point of view, the central component of Hume's account of moral judgment and that (2) sympathy has both cognitive and conative functions. If I am right about these two points, then Hume would be a moral taste theorist in the tradition of Shaftesbury, not a moral sense theorist along the lines of Hutcheson. But there is an important objection to my argument. It might seem that Hume's faculty of moral judgment cannot be conative, because Hume seems to say explicitly that the moral sense does not motivate.

Hume writes: "*no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality*" (T 3.2.1.7). On Hume's view virtues are motives and traits picked out and approved by the moral sense. Thus a motive in the agent is *assumed* by moral judgment, and so Hume seems to be saying that a motive is not *supplied* by moral judgment.¹⁴ But Hume is not saying here that moral judgment cannot motivate. He is saying that, since moral judgment is directed at motives, moral judgment *would not* motivate if we did not have some other motive for it to approve of. This is not an argument about the motivational force of moral judgment. It is an argument about the location of moral value. The moral value of actions, Hume is arguing, is due entirely to "the motives that produc'd them", not to the "external performance" of those actions themselves (T 3.2.1.2). But if this is true, then "the first virtuous motive, which bestows merit on any action, can never be a regard to the virtue of that action, but must be some other natural motive or principle" (T 3.2.1.4).¹⁵

¹⁴ I owe this objection to Andrews Reath.

By “first motive” here, Hume means *historically* first, as in a natural history of morals. As was standard in the 18th Century, Hume is appealing here to “state of nature” considerations (cf. T 3.2.2.14-15). He means that, historically, an action (or more precisely: a kind of action) could not have *become* understood as virtuous if we did not already have some natural motive to perform it. He does not mean that in our present circumstances, *after* we have established that kind of action as virtuous, we cannot *now* be motivated to perform it by its virtue alone. He says, “a virtuous motive is requisite to render an action virtuous. An action must be virtuous, before we can have a regard to its

¹⁵ On Hume’s (alleged) claim that morality cannot motivate itself on pain of circularity, see also his letter to Hutcheson which appeals to Cicero who, Hume says, argued that it is “on the Goodness or Badness of the Motives that the Virtue of the Action depends. This proves, that to every virtuous Action there must be a Motive or impelling Passion distinct from Virtue, & that Virtue can never be the sole Motive to any Action”. See Hume’s letter of 17 Sept. 1739 in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), Vol 1, p. 35. James Moore glosses this passage thus: “Hume reminded Hutcheson that Cicero had argued against the Stoics that virtue can never be its own motive; that the Stoic insistence that virtue must be pursued for its own sake left virtue and moral life without a motive”. See Moore’s “Utility and Humanity: The Quest for the *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson, and Hume” *Utilitas* 14:3 (November 2002), p. 377. I don’t see that Hume is arguing against morality being pursued for its own sake. (I don’t even see that Cicero is arguing that. Cicero’s point is that the twin Stoic claims that both virtue is acting according to nature and virtue is the sole component of our final end are incompatible since if acting according to nature was not part of our final end then it could not be virtuous. See *De Finibus* IV.46-8, p. 105.) Moore is better when he says “Hume was attempting to persuade Hutcheson that benevolence cannot be both the only virtue and the only motive to be virtuous” (p. 377.) Hume’s argument against Hutcheson is not that moral value cannot be its own motive, but that moral value cannot be identified with the motive of benevolence. Moral value, Hume claims, comes from sympathetic approval (a sentiment which is most often directed toward benevolence). What is important here is that sympathy has both cognitive and conative functions. As Moore explains, “The merit of sympathy as a moral principle was that it allows us to enter into the feelings of usefulness and agreeableness of qualities of character and forms of conduct [thereby cognitively discerning moral value]. And it was a further merit of the principle of sympathy that it provided an understanding of moral motivation [as consisting in the sympathetic pleasure which generates benevolence] without requiring recourse to an idea of the end or design of the universe” (ibid.).

virtue”. But he does not say that after a kind of action has been rendered virtuous, and after we have come to regard its virtue, we could not be motivated by its virtue.

Consider his example of the negligent father:

We blame a father for neglecting his child. Why? because it shows a want of natural affection, which is the duty of every parent. Were not natural affection a duty, the care of children could not be a duty; and ‘twere impossible we cou’d have the duty in our eye in the attention we give to offspring. (T 3.2.1.5)¹⁶

Hume does not say here that we cannot be motivated by duty. He says the action of caring for children couldn’t be considered a duty if there weren’t some virtuous motive associated with that action. I may not myself have the virtue of natural affection. But I can still be motivated to care for my children if my moral sense tells me that natural affection is virtuous. Hume writes:

When any virtuous motive or principle is common in human nature, a person, who feels his heart devoid of that principle, may hate himself upon that account, and may perform the action without the motive, from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire by practice, that virtuous principle. (T 3.2.1.8).

I take it that the fundamental motive here is my sense of duty, not my self-hate and my desire to become virtuous. If my moral sense did not antecedently approve of natural affection as virtuous, then I could not hate myself for lacking the virtue of natural affection. In other words, being motivated by self-hate presupposes a prior motivation toward duty (a motivation which I have failed to act upon, but which I nevertheless regard as obligatory thereby generating self-condemnation). This is what Hume means when he goes on to say that “A man that really feels no gratitude in his temper, is still

¹⁶ Hume comes back to this example in 3.2.5.6 where he discusses the fact that our only motive to obey promises is our sense of duty.

pleas'd to perform grateful actions" (ibid). Even if I am only caring for my children out of a sense of duty, I still feel pleasure in the contemplation of my actions. That pleasure is due to my moral sense. And the prospect of that pleasure is my motivation to act morally (see T. 3.3.1.2). Hume only insists on a motive antecedent to the moral sense, because if the action of caring for children was not standardly caused by a virtuous motive, then I could not consider my action (nonstandard because not motivated by natural affection) virtuous.

Therefore Hume does not conclude, as Darwall says he does, that "no action can be equitable or meritorious, where it cannot arise from some separate motive" – specifically, some motive other than the sense of merit, duty, or moral obligation".¹⁷ Darwall is quoting T 3.2.1.17. This passage is Hume's paraphrase of an earlier passage which is clearer: "*no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality*" (T 3.2.1.7). Hume's point in both of these passages is that the origin of an action's value must be some motive *in human nature* other than the sense of duty. He does not say that each particular instance of a virtuous action must arise from some motive other than the sense of duty. He only says that our valuing of that kind of action as virtuous must have originally arisen from some other motive. But now that we do value that kind of action as virtuous, we can be motivated to perform a particular instance of it from the sense of duty alone. That is why, even in the passage Darwall quotes, Hume says no action can be virtuous "where it *cannot* arise from some separate motive". If Hume meant what

¹⁷ *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, p 303.

Darwall thinks he meant, Hume should have said that no action can be virtuous where it *does not* arise from some separate motive. My view, then, dissolves the puzzle Darwall finds in Hume's claims both that (1) only motives are morally meritorious and that (2) the sense of duty is our only motive to follow the rules of justice.¹⁸ These claims only "seem to be in irreconcilable conflict" (as Darwall puts it) if we think the sense of duty itself cannot be a morally meritorious motive.

In support of his reading, Darwall cites 3.2.2.24: "This latter Principle of Sympathy is too weak to controul our Passions; but has sufficient Force to influence our Taste, and give us the Sentiments of Approbation or Blame".¹⁹ Darwall takes Hume to mean that "moral approval of justice is an insufficient motive to just acts" (p. 305). But the preceding sentence says self-interest is the "*original* motive to the *establishment* of justice" (my emphasis). Speaking as a natural historian of morality, Hume is claiming that self-interest was the *origin* of the practice of following the rules of justice. That is why he classifies justice as an "artificial virtue" (T 3.2.1.1). Hume does imply that sympathy could not have been the origin of justice. But he does not imply (as Darwall suggests) that *now*, after the practice of justice *has already been established*, that moral approbation is insufficient to motivate just acts. On the contrary, Hume goes on to speak of a "progress of sentiments" by which "the artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of" virtue (T 3.2.2.25). His point is that the rules of justice which were

¹⁸ Darwall, *op cit*, p. 302; cf, p. 288-290.

¹⁹ This sentence is a textual amendment found at p. 670 of the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition and inserted directly into the main text of the Norton and Norton edition; Darwall also points to 3.3.1.23 which makes a similar point about sentiments' influence on passions and taste.

originally established because of self-interest have, through the mechanism of sympathy, become virtuous. He wants to explain why, even though “sympathy is too weak to control our passions”, nevertheless moral approval of justice *can* be a motive to just acts. His explanation is that our sentiments have changed (have “progressed” or been “extended”).

CHAPTER 9: HUME ON THE INTERSUBJECTIVITY OF TASTE

I.

While Hume does accept the classical unity of beauty and virtue, he doesn't rely on the concept of moral beauty to establish the reality of good taste in the same way his predecessors had. Hume *does* believe in something he wants to call moral "reality", but he does not want to defend that reality with a metaphysics of moral beauty. Instead Hume wants to ground the reality of value in intersubjective conversation. Recall that Shaftesbury had said moral distinctions are "real" if they are "*in the nature of things, not arbitrary or factitious (if I may so speak), not constituted from without or dependent on custom, fancy or will*" (*The Moralists*, II.3, p. 267). In other words, moral properties are real if they are neither relative to human "custom" nor subjectively constituted by an individual's experience ("fancy") or desire ("will"). Hume implicitly affirms this definition when he distances himself from "those who have denied the reality of moral distinctions" (EPM 1.2). For Hume, denying the "reality" of moral distinctions means denying that there is any "difference which nature has placed between one man and another" (ibid). In other words, those who deny moral reality think morality is not founded on "nature"; instead they think morality is founded on "education" in social custom (ibid). In Hume's terms, those who deny the "reality" of moral distinctions, make all virtue *artificial* rather than *natural*, i.e., based on "an artifice or contrivance" of our social circumstances rather than on our natural constitution (T 3.2.1.1). For Hume, however, we should acknowledge "a real distinction between vice and virtue" and "a real

distinction between personal beauty and deformity” because “both these distinctions are founded in the natural sentiments of the human mind” (EHU 8.35). In short, Hume thinks to say that moral distinctions are “real” is to commit oneself to moral distinctions being “natural” in the sense of intrinsic to human nature.¹ So, in his own terms, Hume is a moral realist.

But Hume is not a moral realist in exactly the same way Shaftesbury had been. If moral distinctions are real and not founded on the artifice of social convention, then it makes sense to think that there is an objective standard against which to test particular moral judgments. Hence Shaftesbury had argued that beauty and goodness both consist in an objective relation of “harmony” (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p. 157) possessed by an individual in its proper teleological relation to the whole of nature (*Moralists* III.i, p. 300). Thus moral beauty turns out to be a kind of psychic health, a “harmony” both in the soul and between the individual’s soul and his or her whole society (*Moralists* III.iii, p. 334). Good moral taste, then, is the ability to detect this objective harmony when it is present (*Soliloquy* III.iii, p, 158).

¹ Hume explicitly links the natural and the real (as opposed to artificial and conventional) at T 2.1.7.5 where he says some people “maintain morality is something real, essential, and founded on nature”. See also Hume’s contention that the obligation of promises is “not natural” and “wou’d not be intelligible, before human conventions had establish’d it” (T 3.2.5.1). He later paraphrases his conclusion by saying that the obligation of promises is “merely a human invention for the convenience of society” but not “something *real and natural*” (T 3.2.5.13). Note that in saying that the obligation of promises is artificial Hume is not saying that we don’t really have an obligation to fulfill our promises or that contemplating such fulfillment doesn’t produce real pleasure. He is only saying that since this obligation is grounded in the artifice of social convention and not grounded in an intrinsic fact of human nature, then it is *in this specific sense* “not real”.

Like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson had also defended a standard of good taste by appealing to objective features of objects. For Hutcheson judgments of beauty and virtue are both feelings of pleasure caused by some “quality” in objects (IBV I.1.9, p. 23; II.Intro, p. 85). As we saw in Chapter 6, Hutcheson seems to think that the quality which causes our feelings of pleasure would be beautiful (or virtuous) even if, contrary to fact, the perception of this quality did not cause pleasure in us. Beauty *itself*, then, (as opposed to the *idea* or *judgment* of beauty) should be identified with the quality of “Uniformity amidst Variety” (IBV I.ii.3, p. 28), and virtue itself should be identified with the motive of benevolence (IBV II.iii.1, p. 116). One’s taste is good if one is able to experience pleasure from the correct qualities (viz. either uniformity amidst variety or benevolence), regardless of whether one knows what those qualities are (IBV I.i.12, p. 24). Indeed, because the tendency of certain qualities to cause pleasure in a normal perceiver is innate, education often serves to distort our taste and diminish our capability to experience beauty or virtue (*Essay* I.v.2, p. 90). Therefore, despite his appeal to subjective and intersubjective considerations in his discussion of beauty and virtue (i.e., his identification of moral judgment as an individual’s subjective feeling of pleasure corrected against the intersubjective standard of the normal human observer), Hutcheson’s account of value remains essentially objective, tied to a metaphysically realist understanding of moral and aesthetic qualities. Value judgments are intersubjective, but, if successful, such judgments connect us with an objective reality.

Hume combines elements from both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Like Hutcheson Hume sees judgments of beauty and virtue as consisting in feelings of pleasure (T

3.1.2.2). But, unlike Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Hume thinks *whatever* gives us that feeling of pleasure is beautiful or virtuous. We happen to be such as to feel pleasure in the contemplation of utility,² but if human nature had been different, then beauty and virtue would have been different (EPM Appx 1.21). This appeal to utility gives Hume's account of moral beauty a teleological element superficially similar to Shaftesbury's account. For Hume, as for Shaftesbury, a thing's utility is derived from its teleological "fitness" for a "purpose" (T 2.2.5.17). But, contra Shaftesbury, Hume thinks this teleological relation is doubly contingent. Not only is our approval of utility a contingent feature of human psychology, but also the purposes to which a useful object's qualities are fitted are relative to human "custom" (T 2.1.8.2). Useful qualities are defined pragmatically as "advantages" relative to "any action or exercise" we may happen to have (T 3.3.5.4).

So doesn't this leave us back with Hobbesian subjectivism about value? If value judgments are just feelings of pleasure caused either immediately by our contingent human nature or instrumentally by qualities fitted to contingently accepted purposes, then how could anyone ever be said to make a "wrong" judgment? At one point in the *Treatise* Hume promised to tell us: "In what sense we can talk either of a *right* or a *wrong* taste in morals, eloquence, or beauty, shall be consider'd afterwards" (T

² Of course, utility is not the only source of moral and aesthetic pleasure for Hume. Some aesthetic forms or moral character traits give pleasure immediately and noninstrumentally. The point here is simply to illustrate the difference between Hume's and Shaftesbury's appeals to teleological considerations.

3.2.8.8n80). It is usually claimed that Hume doesn't keep this promise.³ But he does provide the answer in his discussion of the "common point of view":

when we consider, that every particular person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. And tho' such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own, yet being more constant and universal, they counter-balance the latter even in practice, and are alone admitted in speculation as *the standard of virtue and morality*. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend. (T 3.3.1.30, my emphasis)

The common point of view provides the "standard of virtue" against which we can judge the rightness or wrongness of moral taste. Though people may be "remote from us" "we must neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning the characters of men" in order to "form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of charaters and manners" (T 3.3.3.2). Compare this passage from the first *Enquiry*:

Morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived. Or if we reason concerning it, and endeavor to fix its *standard*, we regard a new fact, to wit, *the general tastes of mankind*, or

³ In their editorial commentary to the recent Oxford edition of the *Treatise* Norton and Norton say "No further discussion of this topic is found in the *Treatise*" (p. 552). They cite the standard explanation that when Hume says in the "Advertisement" affixed to Books 1 and 2 that he planned to "complete this *Treatise*" with an "examination of *Morals, Politics, and Criticism*" he completed the first two topics in Book 3 but never wrote the section on criticism. I think that Hume in fact saw Book 3 as containing all three of these topics because he saw them as all inseparably founded on the same principles.

some such fact, which may be the object of reasoning and enquiry. (EHU 12.33, my emphasis)

The standard of moral beauty is “the general tastes of mankind” which is something we can *reason* about, thereby correcting our judgments. In other words, while morality is a matter of sentiment, our sentiments must be corrected against a standard that is obvious or instinctive but which must be found out by careful cognitive activity. We will examine below what form, exactly, this cognitive activity must take.

Now it might seem natural to read Hume’s reference to choosing a common point of view here as making moral beauty into something along the lines of a secondary quality such that it is relative to an intersubjectively specifiable standard viewpoint which puts us in touch with an objective reality. This is the way Hutcheson had blocked skepticism about value. And Hume himself explicitly compares beauty to a secondary quality at more than one point (T 3.1.1.26; cf. T 2.1.8.6 and “The Skeptic” at *Essays*, p. 162). But Hume’s appeal to intersubjectivity is more complex than Hutcheson’s secondary quality view.⁴

One place in which Hume’s theory *is* similar to a secondary quality view is his insistence that beauty is a “power” in the object which causes a subjective experience in the observer (T 2.1.8.3). This language suggests that a thing can *have* the power (i.e., it can be beautiful) even if the thing does not *in fact* produce pleasure in any particular observer. As long as an object has the power to produce pleasure, it is beautiful whether

⁴ For an excellent discussion of Hume’s comparison of moral qualities to secondary qualities, see Blackburn, Simon, “Hume on the Mezzanine Level,” *Hume Studies* 19:2, (November, 1993).

or not anyone actually receives pleasure from it.⁵ In this respect beauty is like a secondary quality: a thing could be, for example, objectively red in that it has the power to produce a subjective experience of redness even if no one ever perceived that object and its power was never actualized. Moreover something could be objectively red even if I have a subjective experience of it as purple because, for example, I am wearing blue-tinted glasses. What distinguishes Hume's view from a secondary quality view such as Hutcheson's, however, is that in taking up the general point of view we do not simply consider how we would react if we were in independently specifiable standard conditions, we must in effect *create* the standard conditions through the mechanism of sympathy. In what follows, we will see how this works.

Hume defines a social "convention" as "*a sense of common interest; which sense each man feels in his own breast, which he remarks in his fellows, and which carries him, in concurrence with others, into a general plan or system of actions*" (EPM Appx 3.7). Hume also refers to the source of such human conventions as a "common sense of interest" (T 3.2.2.10) and "a sense of interest, suppos'd to be common to all" (T 3.2.2.22). In the *Treatise* Hume treats the sense of common interest as a vague and implicit awareness, calling it "only a general sense" (T 3.2.2.10). But in the parallel passage of the second *Enquiry*, Hume makes clear that this sense is a feeling which "each man feels in his own breast" (EPM Appx 3.7). Thus this "sense of common interest" (in the later passage at least) seems to be our feeling of shared humanity (or "fellow-

⁵ My reading of Hume on this point was inspired by a remark by Jacqueline Taylor who suggests that "without sympathy we frequently would not recognize beauty or virtue, and would not appropriately admire or approve of them. See Taylor's "Hume on Beauty and Virtue" in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, (Blackwell, 2008), p. 281.

feeling”) due to the operation of general sympathy.⁶ Moreover, especially in light of Hume’s use of “common sense of interest” as an equivalent phrase in the *Treatise* passage, the sense of common interest sounds much like Shaftesbury’s “sensus communis” or sense of the common good, our awareness of being part of a whole greater than ourselves.⁷ On Hume’s view, the convention of justice was established when individuals recognized that we will each be individually better off if we all adhere to general rules of justice (i.e., the establishment of conventions of justice is in the self-interest of each individual) (T 3.2.6.6). But the establishment of these conventions require us to take into account a new thing: the public interest, which then becomes an object of our sympathy (T 3.2.2.24). Thus the sense of common interest establishes the public interest as an object of sympathy, and in this way sympathy has been extended to a general point of view which constitutes the moral standpoint.⁸

Furthermore, the parallel between (corrected) sympathy and the *sensus communis* is not simply their *outcome* in that they both generate a motivation toward the public good. The sentiments of sympathy and the *sensus communis* also have a similar *process* in that they both require an active engagement in a kind of public reasoning. We can only make stable moral judgments from within a society with a shared practice of moral judgment:

⁶ See Chapter 8 above.

⁷ See Chapter 7 above.

⁸ The argument of this paragraph follows Taylor, Jacqueline. “Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality in Hume’s *Treatise*” *Hume Studies* 24:1 (April 1998), p. 18-20.

we every day meet with persons, who are in a different situation from ourselves, and who could never converse with us on any reasonable terms, were we to remain constantly in that situation and point of view, which is peculiar to us. The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners. (T 3.3.3.2 and EPM 5.42)

The social interaction (“the intercoruse of sentiments”) establishes a “standard” against which we can correct our sentiments, because such a standard is required for communication (“conversation”). As Hume puts it when introducing the concept of the general point of view, “twere impossible we could ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation” (T 3.3.1.16). This is why Hume can say the “very nature of language guides us almost infallibly” in making moral judgments (EPM 1.10). While we might, for example, allow that it is possible to be honest or generous “to a fault”, it wouldn’t make sense to say that honesty or generosity as such is a vice. It is part of what Hume calls “the idiom” of moral terms like honesty and generosity that they are “estimable” and their opposites are “blameable” (ibid). When a speaker engages in moral approbation, he does not merely express his own personal feelings: “he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which, he expects, all his audience are to concur with him. He must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others” (EPM 9.6). In short, it is built into the “peculiar set of terms” used in moral judgment that the sentiments they express are publically accessible (EPM 9.8).

This process is similar to Davidson's intersubjective "triangulation".⁹ In order to communicate with others we must take up a position available to both ourselves and our interlocutors, creating a triangular relation between (1) our own subjective point of view, (2) our interlocutors' subjective point of view, and (3) objective reality. While Davidson emphasizes that communication requires us to assume that we are not trapped behind a veil of subjectivity, Hume focuses on the fact that taking communication requires us to make alterations to our subjective perspectives in order to construct a shared point of view. For Hume, we are not so much assuming the existence of a third point on the triangle (i.e., objective reality) as we are *creating* a third point (i.e., the general point of view) by engaging in conversation. In either case, whether we affirm the world's objectivity like Davidson or remain agnostic like Hume, the world (in particular the *social* world of value) is not something we can even conceive of prior to engaging in intersubjective conversation with other agents.

In the "Abstract" to the *Treatise* Hume argues that Adam (a person, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, created directly by God as an adult) would have no idea what effect striking one billiard ball with another ball would have, because causal inferences are based on experience and not reason (*Abstract* 11-12). Hume gives a similar argument regarding the passions:

For 'tis evident, that if a person full-grown, and of the same nature with ourselves, were on a sudden-transported into our world, he wou'd be very much embarrassed with every object, and wou'd. not readily find what degree of love or hatred, pride or humility, or any other passion he ought to attribute to it. The passions are often vary'd by very inconsiderable principles; and these do not always play with a perfect regularity,

⁹ See Chapter 7 above.

especially on the first trial. But as custom and practice have brought to light all these principles, and have settled the just value of every thing; this must certainly contribute to the easy production of the passions, and guide us, by means of general establish'd maxims, in the proportions we ought to observe in preferring one object to another. (T 2.1.6.9)

Just as we must learn the contingent correlation between causes and effects, we must learn through “custom and practice” how to feel about the world and what “the just value of every thing” is. The difference between causal inferences and passions is that the latter can only be acquired by *conversation* with other human beings. In Hume’s virtue ethics, sympathy is aimed at the effects an agent’s character has on those around her, and our ideas of a person’s character are constructed out of what Hume calls our “interpretation” of actions based on inferences about the agent’s “motives and inclinations” (EHU 8.9). We initially know another person’s sentiment or passion “only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it”, but then, “his idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself” (T 2.1.11.3). Thus conversation turns out to be essential to the operation of sympathy.

According to Hume, of all the social animals the human being “has the most ardent desire of society, and is fitted for it by the most advantages” (T 2.2.5.15). But both this “desire” and these “advantages” are themselves the result of sympathetic communication. Hume says we only acquire the “affection to company and conversation” through our “early education in society” (T 3.2.2.9). Echoing Shaftesbury’s claim that “good breeding” is essential to moral taste since “We polish one another and

rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision” (*Sensus Communis*

I.2, p. 31), Hume writes that

custom and habit operating on the tender minds of the children, makes them sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society, as well as fashions them by degrees for it, by rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections, which prevent their coalition. (T 3.2.2.4)

This sort of reasoning leads Hume to attribute to the mechanism of sympathy “the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation” (T 2.1.11.2). Jacqueline Taylor suggests that this shows that there will be cultural variation of moral sentiment.¹⁰ Taylor points out that Hume says our desires, sentiments, and passions all require sympathy and are therefore dependent on our conversation with others. Hume writes:

We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd a-part from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable. Whatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor wou'd they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others. (T 2.2.5.15)

Hence, in Taylor’s terms, our passions are “culturally informed responses to socially constructed goods or evils”, or, less contentiously, they are “fundamentally social in character”.¹¹ Taylor explains:

We learn, often insensibly, what things or persons to love, need, fear, pity, hope for, despise, take pleasure in, and so forth, by being inculcated into local practice and custom. Our passions may thus properly be understood

¹⁰ Taylor, “Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality in Hume’s *Treatise*” *op cit*, p. 9.

¹¹ Taylor, *op cit*, p. 10.

as forms of communication that enable our participation in a world of value that is historically and socially instantiated.¹²

In my terms, the passions, sentiments, and desires – including our virtues and moral judgments – are *intersubjective*.

Sympathy generates these intersubjective passions, but they are naturally partial since we feel a stronger connection to those closer to us. Hence, in order to constitute an impartial moral judgment, our sentiments have to be corrected by the general point of view (T 3.3.1.14). In the *Treatise* Hume insists that the approbation which constitutes a moral judgment “most certainly is not deriv’d from reason” (T 3.3.1.15). But all he means to rule out is the possibility of an *a priori* deduction of moral principles. Hume rejects the rationalist claim “that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them” (T 3.1.1.4). Hume’s contrary claim that “Moral distinctions [are] not deriv’d from reason” (the title of T 3.1.1) is not meant to exclude all cognitive activity from the process of moral evaluation, for in the second *Enquiry* Hume makes clear that what is going on in constructing the general point of view is reasoning:

But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance, command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment. But in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and

¹² Taylor, *op cit*, p. 11.

reflection. There are just grounds to conclude, that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind. (EPM 1.9)

Here we see that engaging in this process of rational reflection, we “correct” our “false relish” and are able to “feel the proper sentiment” toward “moral beauty”. Much of this rational reflection consists in ascertaining the empirical facts about “the tendency of qualities and actions” and “their beneficial consequences to society and to their possessor” (EPM Appx 1.2). But moral reasoning also involves adjusting for “any particular bias” in perspective (EPM 5.43). Hume gives this example:

A statesman or patriot, who serves our own country, in our own time, has always a more passionate regard paid to him, than one whose beneficial influence operated on distant ages or remote nations; where the good, resulting from his generous humanity, being less connected with us, seems more obscure, and affects us with a less lively sympathy. We may own the merit to be equally great, though our sentiments are not raised to any equal height, in both cases. The judgment here corrects the inequalities of our internal emotions and perceptions; in like manner, as it preserves us from error, in the several variations of images, presented to our external senses. (EPM 5.41)

The ability to make this sort of correction comes from socialization: “The more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain, the more shall we be familiarized to these general preferences and distinctions” (EPM 5.42). This is because, as we have already noted, public “conversation and discourse” presupposes shared meaning: “General language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community” (ibid). Learning to use general language in “our calm judgments and discourse concerning the

characters of men”, thus allows us to “render our sentiments more public and social” (ibid). In short as we practice taking up the common point of view by engaging in public reasoning we gradually develop good moral taste.

Hume’s writing on aesthetic taste expands upon his concept of the common point of view and clarifies how taking up this point of view cultivates our tastes.¹³ In his essay “Of the Standard of Taste”, Hume sets out to “seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another” (*Essays* p. 229). But, Hume continues, “There is a species of philosophy, which cuts off all hopes of success in such an attempt, and represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste.” This “species of philosophy”, it turns out, is an exaggerated form of Hume’s *own* philosophy – though he doesn’t explicitly admit this. He does, however, continue with what is a clear paraphrase of the Appendix to the second *Enquiry*:¹⁴

¹³ Here I follow more closely after Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (who holds that “the general point of view, as it describes a standard of taste in morals, parallels to an extraordinary degree the point of view of a qualified critic”) than Jacqueline Taylor (who claims that “Hume’s characterization of the standard of aesthetic taste differs substantially from his characterization of moral taste”). See Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey. “On Why Hume’s ‘General Point of View’ Isn’t Ideal – And Shouldn’t Be” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11:1 (Winter 1994), p. 220 and Taylor, Jacqueline. “Hume on the Standard of Virtue” *The Journal of Ethics* 6:1 (March 2002), p. 52. Taylor notes various differences in what Hume explicitly says in his various discussions of a normative “standard” in the *Treatise*, the second *Enquiry*, and the essay on taste. I, however, like Sayre-McCord, tend to see continuity among the three discussions. It seems to me that the later discussions only clarify the earlier discussions, and that, while Hume’s later explanations may mention features of his view that are not explicitly stated in earlier texts, these expansions are fully compatible with what Hume does explicitly say in the earlier texts. I take the later texts, then, to be clarifying what Hume meant all along rather than “substantially” changing his view.

The difference, it is said, is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them (*Essays* p. 229-30).

Here Hume almost quotes his earlier discussion: here “judgment” (= “reason” in EPM) and “sentiment” (= “taste”) are distinguished by the fact that claims of the former “have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact” (= “conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood” about “objects as they really stand in nature”) whereas “beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them” (= taste’s “productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation”). But then Hume goes further than he did in the *Enquiry*, seeming to draw the skeptical conclusion that, given beauty’s grounding in sentiment, there is no “standard” of the kind we find in the realm of reason to which judgments may or may not be “conformable”. In other words, he suggests that, if judgments of beauty are simply feelings of pleasure, then there is no right or wrong in aesthetics – or, by implication, in other areas of value such as ethics which are also based on sentiments. He writes:

¹⁴ See my discussion of EMP Appx 1.20-21 in Chapter 8 above.

each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek in the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter. According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes. It is very natural, and even quite necessary to extend this axiom to mental, as well as bodily taste; and thus common sense, which is so often at variance with philosophy, especially with the skeptical kind, is found, in one instance at least, to agree in pronouncing the same decision. (*Essays* p. 230)

Now, Hume is being somewhat disingenuous here for rhetorical effect. He is presenting exaggerated implications of his own view – implications which he does not himself accept. He does *not* believe that we cannot “dispute” or “regulate” the deliverances of taste. As we have already seen, he speaks of a “standard” of value in the *Treatise*. Therefore we should read him here as only suggesting these seemingly inevitable skeptical consequences of his view in order to respond to them. He wants to show (in the words of the *Treatise*) “in what sense we can talk either of a *right* or a *wrong* taste in morals, eloquence, or beauty”.

Hume’s response to skepticism about aesthetic taste is exactly the same as his response to skepticism about moral taste: he appeals to a common point of view. In the taste essay he calls this point of view the “joint verdict” of “true judges” (*Essays* p. 241). What is significant about the taste essay is that it reveals, in a way not fully evident in Hume’s earlier writings, *normativity* of taste. The standard of taste is not simply “the general tastes of mankind” (EHU 12.33). Here the standard is the tastes of “true judges”, those with expert moral perception and cultivated taste. These moral *connoisseurs*, if you will, know something those of us with bad taste do not know – something which, if we

wish to engage in the necessarily intersubjective language of public moral and aesthetic evaluation, we *ought* to know. In the second *Enquiry* Hume had said that we need “an experienced eye” to perceive beauty:

A machine, a piece of furniture, a vestment, a house well contrived for use and conveniency, is so far beautiful, and is contemplated with pleasure and approbation. An experienced eye is here sensible to many excellencies, which escape persons ignorant and uninstructed. (EPM 2.10)¹⁵

In the taste essay Hume adds that there are several kinds of expertise required for valid aesthetic judgment. The “generality of men” have “imperfections” in their taste, notes Hume,

and hence a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character; Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. (*Essays*, p. 241)

Here we have five criteria of the true judge: good reasoning ability (“Strong sense”, cf. p. 240), sensitivity to fine perceptual distinctions (“united to delicate sentiment”, cf. p. 234-236), experience with good examples (“improved by practice”, cf. p. 237), understanding of the difference between good and bad examples (“perfected by comparison”, cf. p. 238), and disinterestedness (“cleared of all prejudice”, cf. p. 239).

Only this last point is explicitly mentioned in the *Treatise* passages on the common point of view. Here in the taste essay Hume says the object under evaluation “must be surveyed in a certain point of view”, namely “I must depart from this situation; and

¹⁵ Cf EPM 5.1 where he says that “A ship appears more beautiful to an artist, or one moderately skilled in navigation.”

considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances” and take up a point of view accessible to any human being (*Essays*, p. 239). But this is not enough. The critic must be able to engage in good reasoning (as emphasized in the second *Enquiry*) and have “delicacy of taste” (something entirely new in the *Essays*¹⁶).

Hume thinks these five criteria are in principle empirically verifiable “questions of fact, not of sentiment” (*Essays*, p. 242). But he admits that they are still difficult to detect in practice: “where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? How distinguish them from pretenders?” (*Essays*, p. 241). Commentators often charge Hume with circularity, because he defines the true judge in terms of those who have experience with good art, but then he defines good art as that which the true judge approves.¹⁷ I suggest that Hume was aware of this circularity and that his recognition of this circularity is precisely the reason Hume admits the difficulty in finding the true judges. How can we, among the imperfect “generality of men” hope to recognize a “true judge” if the mark of a true judge is having such qualities as delicacy of taste and experience with great art – qualities which only the true judge is qualified to determine?

¹⁶ Cf. the essay “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion”.

¹⁷ See, for example: Weinand, Jeffery. “Hume’s Two Standards of Taste” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1983), p. 139; Noxon, James. “Hume’s Opinion of Critics” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20:2 (Winter, 1961). p. 160; Brown, S.G. “Observations on Hume’s Theory of Taste” *English Studies* 20:5 (1938), p. 196. Cf. Carroll, Noel. “Hume’s Standard of Taste” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43:2. (Winter, 1984), p. 189ff. For an important statement of the standard view and an attempt to mount a reply on Hume’s behalf, see Kivy, Peter. “Hume’s Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 7:1 (1967). For a different reply to the circularity objection see Townsend, Dabney. *Hume’s Aesthetic Theory* (Routledge, 2000), p. 202ff.

Hume, I believe, sees this problem, and he is not without a solution to offer. He points to the existence of classics: “Just expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain forever” (*Essays*, p. 242). He mentions especially Homer (*Essays*, p. 228). We might add Shakespeare, Bach, Tolstoy, Picasso, and Kurosawa. The idea is that people of all cultures and social perspectives recognize these works to be excellent, even if the works express religious, philosophical or moral attitudes alien to the viewer’s particular cultural perspective. For example, despite the fact that Homer’s heroes are, from the point of view of 18th Century polite society, “rough” and demonstrate a “want of humanity and decency” Hume thinks we can still approve the artistry of Homer’s works (*Essays*, p. 246). And the fact that a wide variety of people from a wide variety of cultures can agree on at least a minimal canon of classics, suggests to Hume a way for someone who has not yet acquired good taste to discern a genuinely good critic from whom to learn. The process can be seen earlier in the taste essay when Hume describes how to “silence the bad critic”. Once we have a generally “acknowledged” set of “excellent models” (i.e., a canon of classics), we may

show him [i.e., the bad critic] an avowed principle of art; when we illustrate this principle by examples, whose operation, from his own particular taste, he acknowledges to be conformable to the principle; when we prove, that the same principle may be applied to the present case, where he did not perceive or feel its influence: He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse. (*Essays*, p. 236)

The true critic is the one who can start from artworks that we, the unrefined masses, accept as good from our “own particular taste” and show us *why* they are good by presenting us with a “principle of art” such that we will be able to appreciate other works

as well. In this way it is possible for us to both identify true critics and to gradually refine our own aesthetic “palates”, learning to recognize new works as great and to appreciate classics in deeper ways.

Hence we have a process of cultivating good taste parallel to Shaftesbury’s *sensus communis* discussed above – a process which locates normativity in intersubjectivity. We are bound by what would be approved by the moral sense, *after the process of public reasoning*, i.e., after the establishment of a standard of moral taste in the joint verdict of true judges. This view is only spelled out in the taste essay, but is implicit in the *Treatise*. David Wiggins’s gloss on the *Treatise*’s concept of “the common point of view” brings out its *normative* force:

In the process of learning the sense of the public language in which there is talk of good and bad, fair and foul, beautiful and ugly, they have to learn to depart from their private and particular situation and see things not only from thence but also from the point of view that shall be common between one person and another. The only way in which one can come to speak the public language of praise and blame or attain to any agreement with others in judgments is to learn to see his judgments and responses as *answerable* to that common point of view.¹⁸

A commitment to the normative force of public reasoning is built into the semantics of value language. Likewise Annette Baier argues that in the *Treatise* normativity is “collective self-determination” in which we combine “experience, idealization, and convention”.¹⁹ On Baier’s reading, “Our norms, our linguistic self-imposed (but nature-

¹⁸ Wiggins, David. “Categorical Requirements: Kant and Hume on the Idea of Duty” *The Monist* 74, p. 301, my emphasis.

¹⁹ Baier, Annette C. *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 100.

suggested) necessities” are projected onto the external world when we judge objects as beautiful or virtuous.²⁰

Importantly, Hume’s standard of taste does not rely on the actual existence of good critics.²¹ In the taste essay Hume admits that “a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character” (*Essays*, p. 241). The figure of the true judge is an ideal to which we all approach in various degrees. I may appreciate some works, and you may appreciate other works, but through aesthetic conversation, we will both have our palates refined. Thus, as Shaftesbury put it, through the “amicable collision” of public debate “we polish one another and rub off our corners”. It is this intersubjectivity above all which allows Hume to naturalize the moral taste. Having conceived of moral beauty in empiricist terms as the power to produce pleasure (corrected by the general point of view, etc), Hume can explain the conative nature of moral judgment captured in the Platonist concept of *eros*. But at the same time, having shown how normativity can arise from public reasoning, Hume can avoid the tendency of empiricist moral philosophy to fall into egoistic subjectivism. In short Hume has shown us how to affirm the reality of good moral taste in a world skeptical of natural teleology.

II.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Costelloe, Timothy M. *Aesthetics and Morals in the Philosophy of David Hume* (Routledge, 2007), p. 18-19.

Any version of moral taste theory faces a dilemma. Either it provides no standard of good taste in which case it reduces to either subjectivism or relativism, or it does provide a standard of good taste in which case it is a form of elitism. As Carolyn Korsmeyer explains,

the goal of establishing a universal foundation for Taste has come in for considerable criticism. Today this Enlightenment project can be seen to manifest a set of social presumptions and exigencies peculiar to its time, and many contemporary critics have interpreted philosophies of Taste skeptically as components of the historical development of certain class interests. By this analysis, philosophies of Taste posit traits of universal human nature by generalizing about an ideal member of a privileged, educated class, who is held to represent the whole of human nature, or human nature at its “best”. Insofar as these theories are guilty of such a move, philosophies of Taste obscure the differences among people of different classes, locations, genders. Moreover, they not only ignore Tastes of different peoples, they occlude the very possibility of their recognition by asserting as the norm the aesthetic refinement of an elite group.²²

So far in this chapter we have seen that Hume followed Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in their attempt to provide a standard of good taste. Hume’s theory, then, must face the charge of elitism.²³ One of the most important and influential statements of the elitism objection against Hume comes from neopragmatist Richard Shusterman.²⁴

²² Korsmeyer, Carolyn. *Making Sense of Taste* (Cornell, 1999). p. 63

²³ Dabney Townsend charges Hume with elitism in *Hume’s Aesthetic Theory* (Routledge, 2000), p. 194, and Robert E. Norton charges Shaftesbury with elitism in *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Cornell, 1995), p. 37-8. For an extended study of elitism in 18th Century aesthetics, addressing Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and others see Terry Eagleton *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Blackwell, 1990).

²⁴ Shusterman, Richard. “Of the Scandal of Taste: Social Privilege as Nature in the Aesthetic Theories of Hume and Kant” *Philosophical Forum* 20:3 (Spring 1989). My citations are to the version of the essay reprinted as Chapter 5 in Shusterman’s *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Cornell University Press, 2002).

On Shusterman's reading Hume's theory is founded on "the social-class context of aesthetic judgment" though Hume himself was "not properly aware" of this fact and "tried to avoid or minimize, if not suppress" it.²⁵ Hume does not admit "the ways that aesthetic judgment and standards of taste seem grounded in social conditioning and class distinction", but appeals instead to a "notion of natural uniformity of feeling, essentially free from social determination and class distinction".²⁶ Shusterman's objection is most clearly stated when he says,

If taste is not socially and historically determined, then a culture's entrenched aesthetic judgments – the verdicts of taste that have so far dominated it – are accorded the status of natural and necessary facts rather than seen as the contingent and alterable product of social dynamics and history. Taste that departs from such a standard is thus not merely different but diseased or unnatural. Historically privileged subjective preferences (essentially those of historically socially privileged subjects) are reified into an ahistorical essentialist standard, a necessary standard for all subjects and at all times. This might cynically be described as 'the scandal of taste' perpetrated by the Enlightenment's founding fathers of modern aesthetics and smugly perpetuated by their followers.²⁷

Note that Shusterman is not arguing here in a Marxist vein that adherence to this account of taste necessarily serves to perpetuate the dominance of a particular class.²⁸ He is only arguing that there is no such thing as a "universal, naturally grounded, class-free aesthetics".²⁹ In other words, Shusterman objects that Hume asks the impossible: that we

²⁵ Shusterman, p. 91.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 92

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

transcend our historical and cultural situation and attain to some universal ideal human point of view. Shusterman argues that there is no such point of view and so Hume's appeal to this alleged point of view must be a disguised cultural imperialism.

But Hume freely admits that all value judgments are, as Shusterman puts it, "grounded in social conditioning". As we have seen, Hume's account of taste depends on a culturally determined process of intersubjective conversation. Moreover, Hume explicitly does not attempt to impose one culture's taste on other culture. Hume himself admits that there is an irreducible diversity of tastes. In closing "Of the Standard of Taste" Hume admits that

notwithstanding all our endeavors to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men, there still remain two sources of variation, which are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame. The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country. (*Essays* p. 243)

For example, some individuals prefer comedy and others prefer tragedy; some cultures prefer epic poetry and others prefer lyric poetry. These differences are "entirely blameless" and are not necessarily due to "some defect or perversion in the faculties ... proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy" (*Essays* p. 243-4). Hume says that in cases such as these "a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments" (*Essays* p. 244). Diversity of *personal preference* is ineliminable, but this diversity is not relevant to *criticism* as a public discourse:

It is plainly an error in a critic, to confine his approbation to one species or style of writing, and condemn all the rest. But it is almost impossible not

to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition. Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided. (Ibid)

Some commentators have taken this passage to say that Hume allows a limit to aesthetic objectivity since there can't be a standard for all cases.³⁰ I take him instead to be making a distinction between "approbation" (or normative judgment) and "predilection" (or personal preference).³¹ In other words, even after we take up the common point of view we will still have a diversity of personal preferences, but this does not prevent the common point of view from giving us a standard of normativity. There may be "no standard" of subjective personal preference, but there is a standard of intersubjective judgments of taste. As a private individual, I may have a particular "predilection", but once I take up the public role of critic, it would be an "error" to base my "approbation" on feelings inaccessible to others. For example, I may personally prefer comedy to tragedy, but, if I am a good critic, I can still recognize that a particular tragedy is good. That I don't *like* something doesn't entail that I can't *judge* it to be beautiful. This is what Hume is getting at when he says the common point of view is a "method of correcting our sentiments, or at least of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable" (T 3.3.1.16). I might, for example,

³⁰ See, for example, Shelley, James. "Empiricism: Hutcheson and Hume" in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2nd. ed. by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (Routledge, 2005), p. 51; and Kieran, Matthew. *Revealing Art* (Routledge, 2005), p. 226-9.

³¹ For an alternate reading which takes Hume to be mistakenly conflating the preference/judgment distinction, see Carroll, Noel. "Hume's Standard of Taste" *op cit*, p. 187-9. For a reading similar to mine, see Dickie, George. *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1996), p. 136-8.

continue to feel pain when another person's virtue conflicts with my private interest, but if I cannot justify my pain in publically accessible terms (i.e., from the common point of view), then I will still approve of the person's virtue despite its negative effects on me.

Cultural diversity in moral sentiments is also the main topic of the final appendix to the second *Enquiry* simply titled "A Dialogue". There, as in the conclusion of the taste essay, Hume seems to say that each culture has its own particular moral preferences. Comparing the differences in morality between ancient Greece and 18th Century England (things like attitudes toward homosexuality, incest, slavery, etc.), he says: "There are no manners so innocent or reasonable, but may be rendered odious or ridiculous, if measured by a standard, unknown to the persons" (EPM Dial. 19). Moreover, considering the differences in "national character", Hume asks rhetorically: "What wide difference, therefore, in the sentiments of morals, must be found between civilized nations and Barbarians, or between nations whose characters have little in common? How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature?" (EPM Dial. 25). The implication in these passages is that no culture's standard can be used to judge another culture's morals. But Hume argues that this irreducible diversity need not lead us to relativism. Since moral judgment is founded on natural principles of human psychology such as sympathy, then "the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same; though the conclusions which they draw are often very different" (EPM Dial. 36). Therefore the moralist need not conclude that "they all reason aright", but only that "the original principles of censure or blame are uniform, and that erroneous conclusions can be corrected by sounder reasoning and larger experience" (ibid). The appeal to "larger

experience” here is key. Though all humans share the same mental principles, different social contexts “naturally” give rise to different moral sentiments because of different experiential inputs (EPM Dial. 50-51). So the point seems to be the same as in the taste essay: there is a universal human nature, such that those with the same experience should develop the same standards.

Here Hume also compares morals again to aesthetics and argues that while there are “some minute differences” in ideas about beauty, ancient “models for male and female beauty” are still the same and in like manner the ancient models of heroism are still “our standard” (EPM Dial. 36). This is an appeal to classics that have been agreed upon in multiple cultures. This gives rise to his critique of the monkish virtues: When they cut themselves off from “common life” and “depart from the maxims of common reason” by living in the “austere” conditions of a monastery, religious communities create “artificial lives” in which the “natural principles of their mind” are not allowed to work properly and thereby generate an entirely idiosyncratic “standard of morals” (EPM Dial. 52-57).

The upshot of the dialogue seems to be that diversity of judgment arises from diversity of experience, and as we attempt to live together in community we must adopt a common point of view which naturally generates a single standard of taste. As the taste essay makes clear, this common point of view won’t eradicate all personal preference, but it will give us a standard of normativity. In its affirmation of diverse cultural conditions of sentiments this is a pragmatist or coherentist theory of evaluative truth according to which there is no neutral objective standpoint outside of all cultures from

which to judge competing standards. But this is not anything-goes relativism. The process of intersubjective communication dialectically harmonizes our diverse subjective starting points.

On this reading Hume's view is somewhat similar to Aristotle's view discussed in Chapter 7 above. Recall that for Aristotle the fact that we are essentially social implies that we can never abstract ourselves completely from our particular social point of view (NE I.7, 1097b). We must start from where we are, situated in our particular culture in its particular place in history and then reason dialectically toward the objectively true reality (NE I.4, 1085b3). But Aristotle also thinks every society's starting points are at least partially correct which explains why we should engage in discussion with other people (NE I.8, 1098b27). Different cultural starting points have access to different aspects of the truth, and so intersubjective dialogue is necessary to correct our blind spots by giving us what Hume calls a "larger experience". Where Hume differs from Aristotle is that Hume does not see intersubjective conversation as putting us in touch with a single objective reality, parts of which are known by each conversation partner. Rather Hume sees reality – the only reality we can know – as essentially social such that intersubjective conversation *creates* reality.

The common point of view is not a method for *discovering* aesthetic and moral reality because there is no independently true fact of the matter about aesthetics and morals prior to taking up the common point of view. The "fact" which constitutes the standard of value is "the general tastes of mankind" (EHU 12.33) – a fact which does not exist except from the general point of view. Moreover, as Geoffrey Sayre-McCord has

argued, Hume's general point of view "supposes neither an impossible omniscience nor an angelic equi-sympathetic engagement with all of humanity", rather it is grounded in our actual human emotional responses to concrete situations.³² In other words, the general point of view is bounded by what Sayre-McCord calls "the natural limits of our sympathy".³³ On this view, then, the standard of taste is deeply contingent: "Who counts as qualified, and under what conditions, depends of course on what is being judged. The emergence of some particular standard will reflect both the nature of what is judged and the needs and circumstances of those doing the judging".³⁴ Moreover, "who counts as a judge of whether one kind of trait or another is a virtue, will be a matter of public discussion and not the special province of an elite".³⁵ Hence Hume doesn't assume we can or should give up our particular culturally conditioned points of view. Rather he assumes that every judgment must be made from within a particular culturally conditioned point of view. What the general point of view does is allow us to bring stability to our judgments despite the irreducible plurality of such views. It does this by creating a kind of meta-culture, a "larger experience" from which a single conversation can generate a single standard.³⁶

³² Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey. "On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal – And Shouldn't Be" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11:1 (Winter 1994), p. 203.

³³ *Op cit*, p. 228.

³⁴ *Op cit*, p. 212.

³⁵ *Op cit*, p. 222.

³⁶ In this way Hume is like Gadamer or Habermas, giving us a way to reach consensus despite our various historical and cultural situations. See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth*

Thus we see why Hume does not fall into the inconsistency Shusterman accuses him of. Shusterman writes:

Hume here expresses the Enlightenment's case that if only we could see things naturally (free from disease and cultural prejudice), we would all see them aright; and true uniformity of sentiment on matters of taste would indeed obtain. However, in sharp contrast to this naturalism, when we look at whom Hume regards as the good critic or 'true judge,' it is obviously not a healthy innocent or *homme savage*, but someone who is thoroughly educated, socially trained, and culturally conditioned. What is the requisite practice, comparison, and good sense of Hume's good critic, if not the achievement and exercise of dispositions (socially acquired and refined) to react to the right objects in the culturally appropriate way or to think in ways that society regards as reasonable? ... Thus Hume's good critic, in effect, turns out to be someone not *without* prejudices but simply with the *right* prejudices, namely those unquestionably assumed as right (hence regarded as natural or necessary truth rather than prejudice) by the entrenched culture.³⁷

It is not inconsistent of Hume to appeal to social training as a way of freeing oneself from cultural prejudice. The reason why the *homme savage* cannot be a true judge is the same reason the monkish virtues are really vices: both the *homme savage* and the monk are too parochial in their experience. They need to join the broader cultural and multicultural conversation. They do not necessarily need to leave behind their own particular cultural experience, but they do need to learn to express that particular experience in general language that can be understood by everyone in the conversation. And that means they will need education. They will need to learn about the way their own cultural conditioning colors their experience and the way others' cultural condition colors their

and Method, 2nd Ed., trans Joel Weisheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (Continuum, 1989). I discuss Habermas briefly in Chapter 7 above. See also Habermas, Jürgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans Jeremy J. Shapiro (Heinemann, 1971).

³⁷ Ibid, p. 97.

experience. Only then can they engage in fruitful conversation with those from other cultures.

In other words, to be a true critic, we need to take up the kind of self-consciously multicultural position that Shusterman himself takes up. If we refuse to take up this kind of position, we have excluded ourselves from the only point of view which has access to the relevant facts. Only in *this* sense is it true that Hume believes that “to secure a consensus on the verdict of taste, not all are eligible to serve on the jury, only those whose social station and training already ensure that a reasonable degree of consensus will be achieved, indeed that it is already given”.³⁸ Hume does not exclude anyone from the conversation. In fact he assumes that everyone ought to join the conversation. But Hume does think that the act of joining the conversation presupposes taking up a shared point of view according to which consensus is possible. That conversation itself is the standard of taste.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 100.

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