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'MORAL SENSE' FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS
TO ADAM SMITH

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Declaration

Except where otherwise acknowledged,
this thesis is my own work.

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Dawn Elizabeth Partridge

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of the notion of 'moral sense' from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. Its roots are in the moral writings of some of the Cambridge Platonists, it flourished as a moral theory with Francis Hutcheson in the 1720s, and it had many supporters in the decades that followed. Only with the much more astute philosophies of David Hume and Adam Smith were the basic presumptions behind the notion of a natural moral sense examined with renewed care. David Hume, I argue, retains the veneer of a moral sense theory, while providing arguments able to challenge it severely. Only with Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* of 1759, is there a direct criticism and rejection of the moral sense theory in the form that it had held since the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. One of the important assessments of this period in the history of British moral philosophy, David Norton's *From Moral Sense to Common-Sense: An Essay on the Development of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy* of 1966 (revised as *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician*), made no room for Adam Smith's epistemological criticisms, nor his retention of some of the elements of the theory that he was so disparaging about.

After an introductory chapter, chapter two surveys some of the moral writings of the Cambridge Platonists, especially Benjamin Whichcote and Henry More. An unmovable belief in God's goodness and his beneficence towards mankind was evidence that the human natural faculties included a moral faculty as its crown. Its proper use meant that people spontaneously and correctly could apprehend moral qualities in peoples' actions and character traits. This 'boniform faculty' was happily confused, in their writings, with a bias towards benevolence and this confusion is still to be found in Hutcheson.

The notion of the moral sense was consolidated by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury. He is considered in chapter three. His *Characteristics of Men*,

Manners, Opinions, Times disseminated this optimistic assessment of human nature, underpinned by appeal to a natural moral faculty of moral discernment and motivation.

Only with Francis Hutcheson was the notion of a moral sense self-consciously expounded as a theory. In chapter four I deal with the epistemology of Hutcheson's account of the moral sense, looking at the details of how Hutcheson describes the activity of the moral sense, either as a faculty of sense, or as a sensibility. In chapter five I suggest that his moral-sense theory is supplemented by a virtue theory. The direct objects of the moral sense are the virtues and vices, but Hutcheson's interest in developing what he sees as an adequate epistemology never makes him lose sight of his goal to exhort people to live well and cultivate virtue.

Chapter six surveys some other moral-sense writers. Notable among them is Joseph Butler. His discussion of conscience in his *Fifteen Sermons from Rolls Chapel* is well within the moral sense tradition.

Chapter seven considers the moral sense aspects of David Hume's moral writings. His fundamental reassessment of human nature still leaves a place for some of the terminology of the moral sense, as well as a new emphasis on the non-moral assessment of others by 'sympathy'.

It is left to Smith, however, to challenge explicitly some of the arguments brought to defend the belief in a moral sense. This is the burden of chapter eight. Smith leaves no doubt as to the flimsiness of this philosophical construction. Yet, in tearing it down, he retains two very important notions. The first is a secure, if more cautious, role for the emotions in our moral assessment of others. The second is to secure the impartial spectator as the personification of ideal moral standards to be aspired to. A short conclusion follows.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: 'MORAL SENSE' FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS TO ADAM SMITH

1:1 Introduction

In closing his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith gives a résumé of the moral theories he rejected in favour of his own. Francis Hutcheson's moral sense theory was among those in disfavour. Smith writes:

It might be expected, perhaps, that if there was any such peculiar principle, such as this moral sense is supposed to be, we should feel it, in some particular cases, separated and detached from every other, as we often feel joy, sorrow, hope and fear, pure and unmixed with any other emotion. This however, I imagine, cannot even be pretended. I have never heard any instance alleged in which this principle could be said to exert itself alone and unmixed with sympathy or antipathy, with gratitude or resentment, with the perception of the agreement or disagreement of any action to an established rule, or last of all with that general taste for beauty and order which is excited by inanimated as well as by animated objects.¹

But despite his rejection of the moral sense theory, Smith acknowledges Hutcheson as a worthy predecessor. Hutcheson has secured, according to Smith, an indispensable role for the emotions and approbation and disapprobation in moral assessment. The problem is that Hutcheson attributes this role to a distinct sense, the moral sense. Smith, by contrast, considers that approving and disapproving are roles performed by the emotions more generally.

Recently the most comprehensive assessment of the moral sense theory of the eighteenth century has been made by David Norton. In both his doctoral dissertation and the book that it grew into, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician*, Norton examines the moral sense theory, from its origins in some of the moral writings of the Cambridge Platonists, through to its transmutation into the common-sense theory of David Hume and Thomas Reid. Norton makes no place for Adam Smith in this history. Correspondingly, nor does Norton deal with Smith's

¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. MacFie, (1976), Indianapolis: Liberty Classics (1982), pp. 326-327, (hereafter cited as *TMS*).

specific criticisms of the moral sense theory, even though these criticisms culminate in Smith's refutation of the moral sense theory in its naive form.

One intention of this thesis is to give an account of the moral sense theory with Smith, rather than Thomas Reid as its natural closing point. This is to offer an alternative view to Norton's contention that the common-sense theory was the only terminus of moral sense theory in its demise. Smith's theory of moral sentiments and the ideal spectator offers a rival end-point. But this intention is only a subsidiary theme. For by taking Smith's criticisms of the moral sense theory into consideration, this influences how the moral sense tradition, including Smith's assessment, can be understood.

The principal claim of the moral sense theory is that all people have a distinct sense performing a distinct but diverse range of moral functions, mainly moral assessment or judgement, and motivation. Smith's challenge to the theory is not that these functions are not performed, but that they are not performed by a singular and specialized sense. The major task of this thesis is to examine all the major claims of the moral sense writers, whether these are ontological, epistemological or psychological. I argue that the moral sense tradition, as it understood itself, had to account for variety in moral sense judgements between different people, without endorsing moral scepticism. But in conceding variety and error in moral sense judgements, the moral sense theory exposes its own weakness. Self-interest was taken to be the principal source of variety and error, and the role of the impartial spectator was devised to answer and correct such variations in judgements by the moral sense. While the notion of the impartial spectator has a certain plausibility, the moral sense writers appeal to it essentially in an *ad hoc* manner. They take it that, given the moral sense is wrong on this specific occasion, the erroneous judgement can be corrected by appeal to a normal or impartial spectator. The unsatisfactoriness of this *ad hoc* explanation, added to the challenges brought by Smith, erode the credibility of the moral sense theory. The thesis predominantly traces the epistemological pressures to do with claims of correctness of moral sense judgements. This leads naturally, I think, to Hume's and Smith's disquiet with the theory, and their reformation of the theory from within. Smith is the most explicit. He identifies two types

of moral sense theory, one dependent on a *sui generis* moral sense, the other rejecting a single faculty. Smith's criticism of the former helps to secure what is of enduring worth in the latter: his theory of the moral sentiments.

Two general difficulties are inherent in this thesis. One is that the theory of morals was not homogeneous in the hands of various writers. I have emphasized the similarities, rather than looked for the differences. For I think the theory was unchanging in its basic form from the Cambridge Platonists in the latter half of the seventeenth century, to Lord Kames as a contemporary of Hume's. Second, the theory was held with a degree of naivety by many of its proponents. The moral sense ethos had a diffuse and widespread following in the eighteenth century, and I only look at some of its more memorable adherents. Hutcheson gave the theory its most sustained epistemological underpinning, and it is for this reason that he occupies the major place in this thesis. I begin by making explicit my motivating questions in reading the eighteenth century literature.

1:2 *Motivating questions*

To my knowledge no modern discussion of eighteenth century moral sense theory accounts for the ways in which the theory is fundamentally contentious. Much literature is unhistorical to the extent that it looks for precursors to twentieth century emotivism in the eighteenth century. Debates range over whether Hutcheson, the strongest proponent of the theory, takes the moral sense to be objective or subjective, and moral attributes to be like primary qualities or secondary qualities. Other work is much more historically sensitive. Yet in being so it sees no need explicitly to reject the eighteenth century contention that different mental operations are performed by different and distinct senses.

Neither of these strands of present-day criticism acknowledges that the moral sense was a philosophical chimera. For different reasons, they consider it reasonable to consider the moral sense theory on its merits. The first group look at those aspects of the

moral sense theory which may attract contemporary attention. The second, historically minded critics report the theory in its own context, and give less of an analytic criticism. My own rationale combines both of these approaches, though the analytic approach predominates. Structurally, the thesis follows the historical line of transmission from the Cambridge Platonists to Adam Smith. However, the thesis is a close consideration of the basic building blocks of the moral sense theory. For, by making the underlying premises explicit, I think that we can see that they were related in the thought of the period in a distinct, but brittle, way.

Norton's work on the history of moral sense theories in the eighteenth century is of indispensable importance. It defends the thesis that the moral sense theory of the eighteenth century was devised to counter sceptical encroachments within the field of morals. Especially Thomas Hobbes, and later Bernard Mandeville were taken to be the major proponents of moral scepticism. Norton also identifies sceptical pressures within epistemological theories of the period. His claim is that the moral sense writers sometimes conceded intellectual doubt, but were unanimous in rejecting moral scepticism.² Their major bulwark against ineradicable moral doubt was the appeal to a natural moral sense shared by all people.

Norton examines the basic points about this sense, as argued for by the moral sense writers. The moral sense writers, as Norton characterizes them, agree that the moral sense is a natural faculty that all people have.³ With this faculty people discern moral qualities of right and wrong, virtue and vice.⁴ By 'natural' the early moral sense

² David Fate Norton, *From Moral Sense to Common Sense: An Essay on the Development of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, 1700-1765*, diss. (1966), Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International (1990), pp. 4, 67-69, 99-101, 129, 163-164, 189-191 (hereafter cited as *From Moral Sense*). Compare also David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press (1982), (cited below as *David Hume*).

³ Norton's further claim, which I do not deal with in any detail, is that the moral sense theory provided the methodology for Reid's common-sense theory. See *From Moral Sense*, pp. 57-59, especially p. 58.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 81, 120, 137, 167, 208.

writers mean that God has designed human nature with a set of principles and instincts⁵ among which virtue and benevolence predominate.⁶ The proper use of the sense allows people to fulfill their moral capacities to the full,⁷ and in this manner the sense shows God's providential design and teleological purposes.⁸ God's hand in designing the fabric of the universe is such that, with our moral sense, we apprehend the virtue and vice that we see in people's actions, characters and sentiments. These qualities are of an ontologically real kind,⁹ and our apprehension of such qualities is a cognitive, rather than a non-cognitive task.¹⁰ But the moral sense is involved in more than the discernment of moral qualities: it also has affective and motivating aspects.¹¹

Norton also includes the central epistemological claims of the moral sense theory, though I do not think he discusses them at the length they warrant. Among these is the idea that the apprehensions or judgements of the moral sense are most often correct. Those apprehensions which are in error, Norton reports, are able to be corrected by reason.¹² And, being most often correct, the claim is that our moral sense judgements

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 104. 'Natural' is one of the most unstable terms in the debate about human nature. The 'early' moral sense writers, from the Cambridge Platonists to Butler and Kames acknowledge God as the creator of man's nature. Hume and Smith, as is well recognized, implicitly minimize this claim, and attribute to mankind a nature formed over long periods of time by social pressures. They still attribute to man 'natural' capacities.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 103-104, 110-111, 136.

⁷ *ibid.*, 105-106.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 105. Hutcheson here considers the question that God could have created mankind with a different nature, but dismisses the question. God's 'love of regular forms and divine goodness' is ground for our certainty about man's moral goodness.

⁹ Norton, *From Moral Sense*, pp. 82, 119-121. See also *David Hume*, pp. 86-87; and Norton's 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 397-418.

¹⁰ Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 69-77. See also *From Moral Sense*, pp. 83, 112-122.

¹¹ On the affective aspect of the moral sense, see *From Moral Sense*, pp. 108, 112, 121 and 136. The motivational aspect of the moral sense is discussed by Norton as part of what Butler means by the 'authority' of our conscience: see *ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

¹² Norton, *From Moral Sense*, p. 117. Compare also *David Hume*, p. 75.

have an authority, a prior suitability to motivate us to action, or least a prior calling to be recognized as the morally best in that present situation.¹³

I have no disagreement with these claims of Norton's on behalf of the moral sense, and only minor disagreement with his interpretations of how the moral sense writers took the moral sense to operate. My disagreements with Norton's interpretation are at minor points, as will become apparent in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, my view differs from Norton's in that I have directly considered what it was that the moral sense writers claimed in defending the genuineness and the naturalness of the moral sense. In considering closely what it is for people to share moral sense judgements we can get an understanding of what it is to claim that the moral sense is correct and accurate, incorrect or inaccurate. It is upon the shared nature of moral assessments that the secure status of the sense depends. As we shall find, the moral sense writers acknowledged and tried to explain occasional or self-interested errors of the moral sense. In doing so, I postulate, they devised a role for adjudication by competent spectators. This notion of the impartial spectator develops from within the moral sense theory, though I suggest that in Hume's and Smith's work it is able to stand independently apart from the moral sense theory.¹⁴

1:3 *The aims of the work*

This thesis can be understood in two ways. Its structure is one of loose historical transmission and development of ideas from the Cambridge Platonists to Smith.

¹³ Norton, *From Moral Sense*, pp. 138-141.

¹⁴ My suggestion, though I do not follow it up, is that the moral sense theory tried to answer questions of residual doubt about the shared nature of moral judgements, rebutting the moral sceptics and egoists. But to do so they needed a test of what is surface variation in moral judgements, and what is open to genuine doubt. In doing so, they could either have gone the way of common-sense theories, with their repertoire of shared beliefs, or towards an independent form of impartial spectator theory. The impartial spectator gives a malleable test as to what is to count as able to belong to a shared body of beliefs. Thus common-sense and impartial spectator theories rebut moral scepticism in slightly different ways.

Nevertheless, its themes are primarily analytic. In the course of this thesis I make five claims. They are:

- (1) that the moral sense theory posits a non-existent entity, the moral sense
- (2) that modern interpretations of the moral sense theory as either objectivist or subjectivist are both incomplete
- (3) that Peter Jones's interpretation of Hume's aesthetics is of use in understanding the complexity of claims made of the moral sense
- (4) that the moral sense is closely related in the thought of the period to the sense of beauty
- (5) that the legacies of the moral sense tradition include devising of the impartial spectator and defence of the necessary role of emotions in our moral assessment and motivation.

The moral sense as a non-existent entity

It may seem unusual to begin a thesis with the express purpose of showing that its topic is built around a philosophical chimera. But in doing so, emphasis can be placed on considering the elements of the theory on their own merit. There are two reasons for wanting to be able to weigh the parts of the theory, as well as the moral sense theory as a whole. One is that the parts of the theory may have a plausibility which is not dependent on accepting the theory as a whole. The disentanglement of the idea that emotions have an indispensable role in moral assessment and moral motivation is of this sort. A second reason is to understand the assemblage of parts that related moral theories propose. Forms of moral sense theories, or at least response-dependent theories, are presently enjoying renewed interest. Writers such as John McDowell, Sabina Lovibond and Mark Johnston are proposing moral theories which share some elements with the moral sense

tradition of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ While they do not make the claim of a distinct, *sui generis* moral faculty, it is possible that they, judiciously or injudiciously, use elements of earlier moral sense theory. So, by carefully considering the theory in its eighteenth century form, we are able to bring a greater critical understanding to related moral theories.

Structurally, claims for the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of the moral sense theory are not raised until the later chapters of the thesis. The possibility is raised in discussing what Hutcheson has to say of virtue (chapter 5), but not followed up until considering the work of Hume and Smith (chapters 7 and 8). In this way, I hope to have considered as fairly as possible the claim that there is a distinctive unitary entity, the moral sense, over and above the various tasks attributed to it.

The moral sense theory as both objective and subjective

Especially within the field of Hutcheson scholarship debates have ranged over whether he endorses objectivism or subjectivism, and whether his theory likens moral attributes to primary or secondary qualities. These questions are often misleading. As an instance of this consider the term ‘objectivism’, and its contrasts. In its modern, emotivist guise, it is one term for the view, itself disputed, that the community has set moral standards and values.¹⁶ It can be likened to ‘intersubjectivism’ and contrasted with ‘subjectivism’. Subjectivism in the modern view claims that such standards and values are personal commitments, and need not necessarily be shared by others.

This categorization does not help us understand Hutcheson’s account, for the ‘objective’ claims that Hutcheson makes involve claims for ontological realism, and not

¹⁵ John McDowell, ‘Virtue and Reason’, *Monist*, 62 (1979), pp. 331-350; Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1983); Mark Johnston, ‘Dispositional Theories of Value’, *PASS*, 63 (1989), pp. 139-174.

¹⁶ It is perhaps more accurate to say that contemporary defenders of objectivism often defend no more than intersubjectivism.

the different realism of intersubjective values. Hutcheson's realism, I claim, is based on ontological beliefs about the design of nature. While such an ontology may be compatible with intersubjective values, his claims about intersubjective values are based on his belief in providential design. It is the ontological commitment to a providential teleology which is foundational. This can be contrasted to the modern view of intersubjectivism in the following way. A recent survey proposes two minimal conditions for moral realism to be met. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, in his essay, 'The Many Moral Realisms' writes:

Wherever it is found, I'll argue, realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literally true.¹⁷

This, I take it, is a modern, and more cautious view of minimal conditions that the eighteenth century writers would not have understood. Writers such as David Norton, James Moore and Knud Haakonssen independently argue for the ontological realism of the moral sense tradition, or at least its major figure, Hutcheson.¹⁸ While this is still under dispute,¹⁹ I think that this stronger view of realism is a necessary adjunct to understanding the manner in which Hutcheson's 'objective' arguments speak to ontological disputes, not epistemological ones.

Hence, I try to demonstrate throughout this thesis that the body of modern interpretations of the moral sense theory as either objective or subjective are partial. This type of interpretation stretches from William Frankena's influential article in 1955,²⁰ to

¹⁷ Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 'Introduction: the Many Moral Realisms', in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (1988), p. 5.

¹⁸ Norton, 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism'; James Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: On the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1990), pp. 37-59; Knud Haakonssen, 'Natural Law and Moral Realism: The Scottish Synthesis', *ibid.*, pp. 61-85.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kenneth Winkler, 'Hutcheson's Alleged Realism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 179-194.

²⁰ William Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16 (1955), pp. 356-375.

Elizabeth Radcliffe's work of 1986.²¹ Such interpretations pose a choice between understanding moral sense judgements or values as objective or subjective while neglecting even to consider the possibility of ontological reasons for values being what they are. This group from Frankena onwards see the debate about the moral sense tradition as one between objective or subjective value claims. The view I hold is that this is a false dichotomy; and that the moral sense tradition makes objective ontological claims about values, and claims about the necessarily subjective discernment of those values. For unless we are a human being with a moral sensitivity, how else can morally valuable things be understood by us, and acted upon or ignored in turn? My claim is that the subjective and personal experiencing of such values in no way means that those values are idiosyncratic. Similarly placed observers see moral situations in similarly pertinent ways. This is a strength, and not a weakness of the moral sense tradition.

Jones's triadic unity

In a recent book, *Hume's Sentiments*, Peter Jones puts forward an interpretation of Hume's claims about an aesthetic sense. Jones suggests that to understand the aesthetic sense that Hume describes, we need to be aware that he characterizes the sense in a triadic manner. Seemingly disparate claims are made about the way the sense operates, but this disparate nature resolves itself into three related clusters. According to Jones, Hume insists upon the ontological reality of aesthetic objects: there is a sense in which beautiful objects and beautiful qualities exist independently of being observed.²² Secondly, there are subjective observer responses; but 'subjective' only in the sense described above of personally experiencing beauty as it is apprehended. The subjective

²¹ Elizabeth Radcliffe, 'Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3 (1986), pp. 407-421. Radcliffe is critical of Norton's interpretation of Hutcheson. See pp. 416-419.

²² Peter Jones, *Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1982), pp. 108, 111, and p. 113, where Jones writes, 'For Hume, critical judgments are objective triadic relational judgments, 'triadic' because they depend on the work, the critic and the viewpoint.' (Hereafter I abbreviate this to *Hume's Sentiments*.)

response is a dependable and replicable response among like-constituted people.²³ Thirdly and finally, Hume gives an account of those broader conditions under which such observations take place.²⁴ For to change these viewing conditions is to change what any particular observer will notice.

My claim is that this triadic structure helps us to locate the disparate claims made by the earlier writers of the moral sense. As Hutcheson's theory is the most detailed, I discuss Jones's structure with regard to his work in chapter 4. Such a structure shows that the objective and subjective claims made of the moral sense are not irreconcilable, but are related in specific ways. Jones discusses only Hume on the aesthetic sense: I consider whether his views apply to Hume on the moral sense. I find that the two senses are very similar.

The moral sense and the sense of beauty

One feature of the moral sense tradition that I draw attention to is the similarity it sees between the moral sense and the sense of beauty. This theme is most predominant in Shaftesbury's work, though it is found in Hutcheson's writing as well. It is a feature of the tradition that is not discussed by Norton at any length.²⁵

The similarity postulated between these senses is significant because the moral sense tradition based upon it the notion that the moral *sensibility* could be improved. Thus there are two dominant strands within the moral sense tradition. The first is the idea that man possesses a basic innate moral capacity irrespective of any cultivation or training. They often compare this to possessing the basic capacity to see or taste. The

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

²⁵ Norton notes the similarity in Hutcheson's work between the moral sense and other internal senses, including the sense of beauty. But Norton minimizes the importance of this similarity. He writes, 'Hutcheson's interest in the sense of beauty is decidedly subsidiary, intended only, he says, to pave the way for the proof of the moral sense which follows', *David Hume*, p. 63.

second strand is that this basic capacity is open to cultivation, like the sense of beauty. Depending on this cultivation, some people may develop a moral sensibility more worthy than that of others. In this manner the moral sense writers hope to account for moral diversity. This defence against moral scepticism had two immediate advantages. The first is that in moral disputes, it is the people with a high moral sensibility who can be appealed to. The second is only mentioned in this thesis, and not taken further. It is the Platonic idea Shaftesbury puts forward that, by cultivating our sense of beauty, we inadvertently also cultivate our virtue, or our moral sensibility. Behind this is the idea that virtue is the most perfect form of beauty, and that by cultivating our aesthetic sense, we come to appreciate more the beauty of virtue.

This notion of moral sensibility is further confused by the moral sense writers. Not only do they use the analogy of moral sensibility for virtue, but also for benevolence. This thought can be identified in the bias which the moral sense writers claim to exist in human nature. Mankind is capable of moral good and evil, but good is thought to be more in our nature, or in our 'true' nature. Until Hume and Smith the whole moral sense tradition takes it that God has the formative hand in human nature, and as God's highest perfection is his benevolence, so is this man's highest goodness.

The impartial spectator and the role of the emotions

This thesis aims to bring a critical analysis to the epistemological claims made by the moral sense writers. In doing so, I think we are led to consider Smith as a natural closing point for the theory. For he abandons it in its naive form, and retains elements of the older theory as an integral part of his own theory of moral sentiments. Indeed, it is in noticing Smith's disquiet with the moral sense theory that I think we are led to notice its endemic problems.

Nevertheless, once we see the constituent elements of the moral sense theory, we can notice that some are of enduring worth. Smith and Hume demonstrate this in their own positive work. I suggest that both significantly alter the notion of the impartial

spectator, while giving it an important role in moral assessment. The change Hume makes is that he insists that the moral sense is not spontaneously engaged in its assessment of moral situations. Reason does most of the work, and when we see the situation as an impartial spectator would, then we can bring our emotions or moral sentiment to bear, thus completing a moral assessment based on reason. For Hume, however, reason is not just a corrective faculty brought in when the moral sense is incorrect. Thus he modifies one of the basic tenets of the moral sense theory, that sentiment is engaged first, and then corrected if necessary. This is discussed below in chapter 7.

Smith too broadens the notion of the impartial spectator, but in a different way. He uses it in his account of a developing moral sensitivity from early childhood to moral maturity. By bringing the notion of an impartial spectator to bear upon our own behaviour, we are motivated not just to the morally best in this present situation, but to gradually improve our moral outlook more generally. Smith specifically acknowledges Hutcheson as the person who had made clear the respective roles of the emotions and reason in moral judgement. But Smith does not acknowledge Hutcheson's hand in his own work on the impartial spectator. I thus suggest that Smith was correct to see Hutcheson's legacy in the thesis about the role of emotions in moral assessment, but that he should have also noted an indebtedness to Hutcheson, and the moral sense tradition more generally, on the matter of the impartial spectator.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS

2:1 Introduction

Francis Hutcheson, writing in the 1720s and 1730s, was responsible for the most methodical exposition of a moral sense theory in the eighteenth century. Yet he was preceded by the Cambridge Platonists in the mid-seventeenth century, and by the third Earl of Shaftesbury at the turn of the eighteenth century.¹ These earlier writers did not propound a fully-formed moral sense theory, but they did make use of the concept of the moral sense. This chapter considers the moral sense accounts of the Cambridge Platonists.

The Cambridge group rank as moral sense writers by including in their description of human nature a distinct and *sui generis* moral faculty, one that discerns the difference between moral good and evil, virtue and vice. It is the nature of this sense, or the claims made about it, which will exercise us most in this thesis.

The moral sense writers generally take it as an important part of their exposition that the moral sense is a *sui generis* sense. They mean to imply that they speak of a distinct psychological faculty. Without using this more recent terminology, they say that not only do we have the ability to discern or apprehend the difference between moral good and evil, but also that this ability or activity is a distinct and separate part of our psychological framework. This was not a claim made uniquely about the moral sense. They describe the external senses such as sight and taste in the same way. Nevertheless, this claim about distinctness has particular consequences with regard to the moral sense.

¹ On the Cambridge Platonists see G.R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought Within the Church of England 1660 to 1700*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1950), especially p. 60; and James Deotis Roberts, Sr., *From Puritanism to Platonism in Seventeenth Century England*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff (1968), especially pp. 242-244 for Whichcote's subsequent influence on Shaftesbury. (This is hereafter cited as *From Puritanism to Platonism*.) On Shaftesbury see R.S. Crane, 'Review of William Alderman's "Shaftesbury and the doctrine of moral sense in the eighteenth century."', *Philological Quarterly*, 11 (1932) pp. 205-206; and Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 33-43.

The moral sense writers, including the Cambridge Platonists, consider that, as vision is taken to be within the realm of the sense of sight, so moral apprehension is taken to be within the distinct realm of the moral sense.

From the Cambridge Platonists onwards many writers in this tradition did not dispute the reasonableness of claiming a distinct moral faculty. Only with the much later writers of David Hume and Adam Smith were there questions concerning the basic nature of this sense and its surprisingly diverse range of tasks raised. The earlier writers' concerns involved the naturalness of this sense, its perspicuity, its occasional errors, the notion of correcting these errors, and the status of the things it actually allows us to discern.

The chapter falls into five sections including this introductory note. The second describes the ways in which Calvinism and ethical rationalism provide rival accounts of human nature. It is against such views of human nature that the Cambridge Platonists insisted that human nature is capable of moral good. The third section looks at the providential teleology that is assumed by the Cambridge Platonists. This provides much of the rationale for their belief that mankind is capable of moral goodness. In the fourth section we look at their description of man's moral nature, especially noting that the Cambridge group attributes to mankind a *sui generis* moral sense by which people discern moral good and ill. In the fifth section some of the features attributed to the moral sense are discussed in more detail. These include the ontological realism assumed by the writers; the universality, non-willedness and correctness of the sense itself, and finally, the bias towards benevolence which the Cambridge group attributes to human nature.

2:2 Alternative accounts of human nature

To understand the Cambridge Platonists' attraction to a certain description of human nature, one including the moral sense as its highest faculty, we can consider the Cambridge group as providing a rival account of human nature to those made current by the Calvinists on the one hand, and the rationalists on the other. The debate polarized

around either an optimistic assessment of human nature, or a pessimistic leaning. In no manner was the debate settled by these late seventeenth century writers. In subsequent chapters we look briefly at the somewhat similar disagreements between Shaftesbury and John Locke (chapter 3), and Francis Hutcheson and Bernard Mandeville (chapter 4).

The Calvinists

The Cambridge Platonists attributed to the whole of mankind a well-functioning and distinctly moral faculty, endorsing an optimistic view of human nature. They wrote against different opponents, but especially the Calvinists and Puritans. Seventeenth century England was strongly Puritan. (Scotland was more Calvinist than Puritan, the difference being principally the degree of willingness to make use of Calvin's and Augustine's writings. The Calvinists were reluctant to do so, preferring to accept only the authority of the Bible.²) Both Calvinists and Puritans accepted an adherence to the Westminster Confession, with its doctrine of predestination.³ According to this article of faith, God has 'ordained from eternity whatever comes to pass'.⁴ Some men are predestined for everlasting life, and are known as the elect. God has fixed their number, and has 'foreordained' the means necessary for their salvation. Their faith sanctifies their superior status. The rest of mankind can only look forward to an everlasting death. God rejects them because of their participation in original sin. God's power and glory are served by their abandonment, and no rehabilitation is possible through faith or good works. This doctrine of predestination and its ramifications were 'to afford matter of

² Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 46, where he writes 'English Puritanism may be called Calvinistic chiefly as a matter of historical reference.'

³ *ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 45.

praise, reverence and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.’⁵

The elect are justified by faith, though it is God who has given them sufficient means for this faith. They identified themselves with an inner certainty, and were generally intolerant of those they saw as not belonging to their number.

The rest of humanity was characterized by the elect as sinful, vicious and narrowly self-interested or selfish. It is perhaps unsurprising that the strict exclusiveness claimed by the elect offended many thinkers. The view has been put forward that Cambridge Platonism was fostered from within the Puritan camp, its radically different thesis of human nature being a direct reaction against what it saw as a limiting and oppressive view of man’s moral and religious capabilities.⁶

The Rationalists

By contrast, the differences between the Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists on human nature were less marked. The rationalists wrote later than the Cambridge Platonists. I include them here because they share distinct similarities, as well as differences, with the Cambridge Platonists. We look specifically at Samuel Clarke, 1675-1729, whose Boyle lectures of 1704-1705 gave him a prominence that other members of the group did not reach. Other writers belonging to the group include Wollaston, Balguy and Price.⁷ Our starting point will be a general characterization of the similarities and differences between the Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 45-46, Roberts at this point is quoting from A.F. Mitchell's *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*.

⁶ Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, ch. 3, 'Controversy With a Puritan'.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 240-241, especially p. 241, fn. 6.

The Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists share a number of important aspects in the detail of their accounts of human nature. They agree that God created man with a set of faculties and ways of behaving that fit him for ongoing social dealings with others.⁸ Both the Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists allow that man has both reason and sense, and they sought to give an account of human nature in terms of faculties or discrete powers. Crucially though, they differ on the relative roles that they allow to both reason and sense in our moral life.

The rationalist's focus is almost exclusively on the positive role that reason has in our moral life. It alone, according to the rationalists, is that mental faculty which discerns moral good and evil. The rationalists also give the impression that man would be a much better moral agent if he were not encumbered with a body. According to them, passions sway us from doing what is morally correct. It is only the destructive, aggressive and sensual passions that the rationalists dwell upon. In comparison with the Cambridge Platonists, this leads to the distorted view that we are vicious because of our intemperance. The Cambridge Platonists wrote that our passions and affections can be involved in moral good. They speak about the moral worth of love, friendship, gratitude and charity. This range of emotions was not discussed by the rationalists.

Samuel Clarke illustrates in a clear manner the general issues outlined. His *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* was first presented as a series of sermons, the Boyle lectures, of 1704 and 1705. For Clarke the central point is that there are 'eternal *different relations*, that different things bear one to another.'⁹ God establishes the fitness

⁸ Between the Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists there are differences of emphasis whether natural or revealed religion is taken to be basic, and whether there is perfect congruity between the two, or whether revealed religion 'completes' natural religion. Benjamin Whichcote and Henry More lean towards a positive assessment of natural religion, whereas Samuel Clarke prefers to see it completed by revealed religion. See Clarke's *A Discourse of Natural Religion in British Moralists 1650-1800*, ed. D.D. Raphael, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press (1969), vol. 1, § 261, where Clarke writes '... *moral virtue* is the foundation and the sum, the essence and the life of all true religion: for the security whereof, all positive institution was principally designed: for the restoration whereof, all revealed religion was ultimately intended'.

⁹ *ibid.*, § 225.

or unfitness of the various relations, himself acting in a way which is 'agreeable to justice, equity, goodness and truth, in order to the welfare of the whole universe.'¹⁰ These same necessary and eternal relations, continues Clarke, 'ought likewise constantly to determine the wills of all subordinate rational beings, to govern all their actions by the same rules, for the good of the public, in their respective stations.'¹¹

For Clarke, the crucial point about these eternal fitnesses is that they are known by our reason or understanding. Clarke speaks generally of a 'natural sense of moral obligation'¹², referring to the mind, judgement or conscience. While his language is very broad, sensation, feeling or the emotions do not occur in his list.

In a passage dealing with the vagaries of dissembling or even self-deception, Clarke puts forward a claim about the role of reason in moral judgement. He writes:

But the truth of this, that the mind of man naturally and necessarily assents to the eternal law of righteousness; may still better and more clearly and more universally appear, from the judgement that men pass upon each *other's* actions, than from what we can discern concerning their consciousness of their *own*. For men may dissemble and conceal from the world, the judgement of their own conscience; nay, by a strange partiality, they may even impose upon and deceive *themselves*... But men's judgements concerning the actions of *others*, especially where they have no relation to themselves, or repugnance to their interest, are commonly impartial; and from this we may judge, what sense men naturally have of the unalterable difference of right and wrong.'¹³

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*

¹¹ *loc. cit.*

¹² This is taken from a marginal heading in Samuel Clarke's, *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, 2 vols. in one. London: James Knapton (1716), vol. 2 p. 58. (All references to this edition are to the second volume in this joint work. Its title on its own title page reads *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. I follow the abbreviated heading as given in the Knapton publication, and refer to this volume as *The Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*. This is to distinguish it from material in Raphael's edition, which will be referred to as *Natural Religion*. I follow Raphael's numbering of paragraphs, thus '§'. The above marginal heading would be located at Clarke, *Natural Religion*, § 237.

¹³ Clarke, *Natural Religion*, § 237.

The moral sense writers agree there is a natural sense discerning the unalterable standard between right and wrong. The major difference is that they attribute this to sentiment or sensibility, rather than reason or judgement.

Clarke acknowledges that errors of this natural sense occur, and he characterizes them under four headings: carelessness, inconsiderateness and want of attention; prejudice and false notions from 'evil' education; strong and unreasonable lusts, appetites, and desires of sense; and blindness introduced by superstitious opinions, vicious customs, and debauched practices.¹⁴ Clarke discusses these failings at some length, and his tone is always stern. He writes that people are prodigiously careless in making use of their reason in just and worthy apprehensions of divine attributes and perfections¹⁵, and '*Now Nature has given us only some small Sparks of right Reason, which we so quickly extinguish with corrupt Opinions and evil Practises, that the true Light of Nature no where appears.*'¹⁶ Clarke chooses a biblical text to preface his discourse. It comes from Isaiah v. 20, and warns '*Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*'¹⁷ The implication is that moral right and wrong are as clearly and eternally distinguishable.

Clarke shares with the Cambridge Platonists and the Calvinists the belief that the biblical Fall in the Garden of Eden has left mankind in a corrupt state. Unlike the Calvinists, Clarke and the Cambridge Platonists consider that it is always worthwhile for individuals to strive for redemption. For Clarke, the immortality of the soul is a necessary assumption for the correct distribution of rewards and punishments not obtained in our present life. This correct balancing is a fine detail; the more important

¹⁴ Clarke, *The Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, p. 155.

¹⁵ *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ *ibid.* p 158.

¹⁷ *ibid.* title page (to vol. 2).

idea is that by following the dictates of revealed religion we can best hope for the rewards of virtue, *both* in the present, and after death.¹⁸

2:3 Providential teleology

The Cambridge Platonists were mostly in agreement with one another in their beliefs about God's nature, his benevolence, and his careful design of human nature.¹⁹ An exchange of letters between Benjamin Whichcote and Anthony Tuckney captures the difference between the Cambridge Platonists and the Puritans on the inseparable issues of God's attributes and the true description of human nature.²⁰ Tuckney upheld what Roberts understands as a 'Reformation' view of mankind.²¹ Its cornerstones are predestination and man's depravity. God's stern, judgmental qualities are emphasized above other qualities. In temper the Cambridge Platonists were similar to a very different group, the Renaissance Neoplatonists.²² The Cambridge group spoke highly of the dignity of mankind, and exalted his use of reason. According to the 'Renaissance' view, God directs all things in a providential manner: there is cohesion, unity and order among all parts of his creation. God is benevolent and good, and he is especially concerned with the moral order of mankind.

¹⁸ Clarke, *Natural Religion*, § 248 and § 250.

¹⁹ For the purposes of this thesis I have concentrated on the similarities, rather than the differences, among the Cambridge Platonists. There is current disagreement about how cohesive a group they were, and how Platonic they were. See Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, ch. 9, especially pp. 206 and 209. Of those writers that I survey, Nathaniel Culverwell was most unlike the Cambridge group in that held Calvinist views. See Robert A. Greene's and Hugh MacCallum's 'Introduction' to Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press (1971), p. xiii. (This I hereafter abbreviate as *Light of Nature*.)

²⁰ Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, pp. 64-65 discusses the irresolvable nature of the debate, and the seeming agreement that both Whichcote and Tuckney acknowledged their differences amicably.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 64.

²² *ibid.*, ch 2, especially p. 33 for the Neoplatonic background. Roberts here suggests that the difference between the Italian and the English school is that the Continental group were sceptical about matters of religious faith, whereas the English humanists were not sceptical, but were 'concerned to further the interpretation of the sources of Christianity.'

The whole purpose of the Cambridge Platonists is to argue for important moral similarities between God and mankind. Hence it is only possible to draw artificial boundaries between the Cambridge Platonists' thoughts on God, and on man's moral nature, as man is taken to be made in God's image. By dealing with this material in this and the next section I draw nominal distinctions. The Cambridge Platonists would find these distinctions ephemeral.

God's nature, according to the Cambridge Platonists, consists in perfection. He has attributes or aspects which divide into two groups; those which people can understand only incompletely, and those which can be understood perfectly. Omnipotence (relating to the problem of evil), ubiquity and eternity are among the first group of attributes. God's moral aspects form the second group: they include God's 'goodness, wisdom, liberty, justice and power.'²³ The cornerstone of God's nature is his goodness, and it is proper that man too understands and shares in this part of God's nature. All of God's attributes are consistent with his goodness. Our fallibility and finiteness may cause us to see some attributes as sometimes conflicting, but in reality they are always perfectly reconciled.

It is the aspect of goodness which explains the existence and the nature of the whole of God's creation. The universe and all of its parts form a single entity. Unity, order, harmony and beauty are its qualities. John Smith (1616-1652), for example, writes that:

God made the Universe and all the Creatures contained therein as so many Glasses wherein he might reflect his own Glory: He hath copied forth himself in the Creation; and in this Outward World we may read the lovely characters of the Divine Goodness, Power and Wisdom. In some Creatures there are darker representations of the God, there are the Prints and Footsteps of God; but in others there are clearer and fuller representations of the Divinity, the Face and Image of God.²⁴

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

²⁴ John Smith, 'The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion' in C.A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1980), p. 184.

John Smith thus assumes that the universe forms a teleological order: that it is brought into being by God to express his ineffable goodness, and that all parts of it express this goodness as far as they are able. The Cambridge group never doubt that God performs this role as the Author of nature, and they are eager to imply that all parts of God's universe have worth or value inasmuch as they exhibit God's goodness. As with Plato and the Neoplatonists we have here a chain of being, a ladder of perfection.

By identifying the universe as a teleological system the Cambridge Platonists mean to imply that the whole forms a cohesive unit, and that the parts of this unity, inasmuch as they fulfill their own nature to the highest degree possible, further the purpose of the whole unit. Plants grow and provide nutriment for animals, the lower animals provide food or beasts of burden for mankind, and so on. The teleology is a providential one. Divine foresight is such that by fulfilling its nature, any animal or any part of the universe both reflects the glory of God and is sustained and provided for itself.

Mankind is that which most shares in God's nature, and it is fitting that God has special and personal care for every one of mankind. But we are unusual in that we are the only creatures with a dual nature. Not only are we made in the image of God, but unlike the angels, we share in the lower nature of the animals too. We have a body with its needs and desires and a range of instincts fitted to help serve the body's original impulses. Unlike the Calvinists, the Cambridge Platonists are sufficiently ambivalent about the status of the body, its passions and instincts, so that these are not necessarily destructive and debased. For, they ask, how could God, out of the whole of his creation, have made mankind imperfect creatures?

Henry More, 1614-1687, discusses the dual nature of the passions in his *Enchiridion Ethicum* of 1666. He agrees with Descartes that the passions are 'Treasure

of the Soul', and that unlike other perceptions, we cannot be deceived in them.²⁵ Moderation is required with our passions, but they animate our life, and aid us to seek what we require for our sustenance and propagation. Neither the passions nor the desires must eclipse our reason, but those who propose the rooting out of our passions are woefully misguided. More writes on this point:

This to me would sound no better, than as if one, to prevent Discord on the Harp, should let down all the Strings; or than as if another should with Drugs set all the Humors of his Body in a Ferment, for fear of falling sick. Wherefore *Theages* the *Pythagorean* said very elegantly; *That it was not the part of Virtue to discharge the Passions of the Soul, such as Pleasure and Pain; but to temper them aright.*²⁶

Man's dual nature is unique among creation, and with it God imposes a special responsibility on mankind. To no other creature has God given free-will, or the genuine possibility of turning away from the best in their nature. The animals follow their instincts as and when they arise, and in doing so they follow the whole of their nature. Their lust or anger deserve no admonition. Mankind is different. We are given the faculty of reason as well as conscience and moral discernment. It is by embracing these 'higher' parts of our nature that we are honourable towards God and morally worthy. This dual nature allows both the possibility of our fallibility leading to debasement, and at the other extremity, a genuine communion between ourselves and God.

2:4 Man's moral nature

The Cambridge Platonists were alike in attributing to mankind a dual nature, partaking both of God's divinity and the lower nature of the animals. Man's moral nature involves

²⁵ Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum. The English Translation of 1690*, trans. Edward Southwell, London (1690), New York: Facsimile Text Society (1930). More writes 'For altho (say he) we are apt to be deceived by the many other ways of Perception, and cannot be certain if things be the same as they are represented; yet as to the Passions, there is not room for Deception in them, since they are so annexed to the Soul, that it were impossible to feel them, if they were not', p. 39. Descartes is the author referred to by name on p. 39. (Hereafter I refer to this by its English title, *Account of Virtue*.)

²⁶ More, *An Account of Virtue*, pp. 41-42. The analogy comparing the body to a musical instrument is often used throughout the moral sense tradition.

what this group considered the 'higher' faculties of reason, free-will, conscience and moral goodness (sometimes meaning by this virtue generally, and sometimes benevolence more specifically). Man's moral attributes are not unlike God's moral attributes, and it is by God's conscious design that he has given man reason, with which to comprehend his existence and nature. It is thus reason which makes us most like God, and because of this similarity the Cambridge Platonists were alike in admonishing mankind to use their reason to supplement and scrutinize their faith. In speaking of man's moral nature, Whichcote, 1609-1683, emphasizes that we are good insofar as we resemble God.²⁷ He writes in one of his posthumously published sermons:

God is especially known to us by righteousness and holiness; and if we be like God, we must be so too; and then we harmonize with God, when we are in reconciliation with righteousness, goodness and truth. The matter of the gospel, when received, is an internal disposition and byas upon the mind of man: for it is inwardly received, so as to dye and colour the soul; so as to settle a temper and constitution; and in this way it is restorative to our natures.²⁸

This 'internal disposition and byas upon the mind of man' is no other than the tailoring of man's nature to comprehend and partake in God's moral designs. Whichcote at this point implies that this disposition involves the whole of man's moral nature with its moral discernment, its genuine concern for the interests of others, its concern for its own best interests and the like.

In their description of human nature the Cambridge Platonists allow that people can be both good and bad. Their goodness is in proportion to following their rational nature, conforming to the truths of natural religion; and their badness is in neglecting to

²⁷ See Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, pp. 93-96 for his assessment that Whichcote is in difficulties as far as he allows man both the necessity of a good and morally neutral nature. The specific difficulty is that this seems to deny the genuine possibility of being evil. Roberts writes that Whichcote never brought the conflicting ideas together, but always assumes that reason and conscience will never seriously conflict, but will always be in alignment. See also C.A. Patrides, "'The High and Aiery Hills of Platonisme": An Introduction to the Cambridge Platonists', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C.A. Patrides, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1980), pp. 19-23 for the Cambridge Platonists' claim that mankind is made in God's image.

²⁸ Benjamin Whichcote, *The Works 1751*, 4 vols. Aberdeen (1751). Facsimile edition, New York and London: Garland Publishing (1977), vol. 3, p. 77. This collection was not prepared by Shaftesbury, though his 'Preface' is reprinted at the beginning of vol. 3 of this series. The title page to this facsimile edition gives no editorial information, indicating only that it was printed by J. Chalmers for Alexander Thomson, Aberdeen.

live up to the potentialities in their nature. What is implied is that people do not have a static nature, but one which individuals have responsibility for in developing to the best of their given ability.

However, there is not too much room for latitude. For the Cambridge Platonists, all people are given the capacity to behave in morally good ways, and what is seen as morally good or correct is in no manner open to personal interpretation. The notion of the *prima facie* correctness of the moral sense is especially important, for the later moral sense writers are often interpreted as endorsing subjective moral values. The features of equal capacity and some form of objectivity give a strong measure of stability to the notion of what the *best* in human nature implies. But even the features of an equal capacity for moral goodness and eternal and immutable moral distinctions are insufficient to show that the human nature of individual people is unchanging. Whether we have a static or an educable moral nature is an important question. What is at stake is the later moral sense writers' insistence that mankind's moral sense is of a minimal standard, yet capable of cultivation.

Reason is man's highest faculty, according to the Cambridge group. The term 'reason' is used by these writers in a wide sense. Roberts, in his account of Benjamin Whichcote gives us at least four important meanings. Summarizing Whichcote, Roberts writes:

It would appear that [Whichcote] makes [reason] include both the mental processes by means of which we arrive at a conclusion, and also the insight we possess into self-evident principles which condition these processes. It seems to stand, too, for our capacity to acknowledge God, the source and sustainer of all that is good, beautiful and true. Furthermore, reason appropriates these values and incorporates them within the soul in such wise that they form its disposition and become its temper; and so it is the governing principle which directs our appetites and controls our passions.²⁹

At this point we can see why the Cambridge Platonists and the rationalists are not divided on all issues. Both the Cambridge Platonists and rationalists attribute to man the power to discern moral good and evil, and both think that reason has a major role in this

²⁹ Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 66.

discernment. The differences are minor by comparison. The Cambridge Platonists speak of a 'sense of right and wrong', and it is this that later commentators sometimes take to be incompatible with 'reason'. In the seventeenth century this line of argument was not yet made clear. One purpose of this present thesis is to trace the ramifications of the dichotomy between reason and sense or sensibility into the eighteenth century. The second point of difference between the Cambridge group and the rationalists is one that we have already seen: the Cambridge group discern between helpful and destructive passions, whereas the rationalists consider overwhelmingly that most passions on most occasions are detrimental to our moral well-being. Both of these differences have to be recognized if we are to understand what later moral sense writers took from the Cambridge Platonists, and hence how these later writers took the rationalists to be among their most stringent opponents.

The broad range of what is meant by 'reason' allows the Cambridge Platonists to support their identification of moral and religious truths. Religion for such writers is not confined to modes of public worship, but involves the wholehearted pursuit of what is religiously and morally good. They scorn the notion of religion which does not touch a person's behaviour. Whichcote writes that neither religion nor moral behaviour are served by coolness of religious observance. He writes:

For, *this* you must understand; that *Religion* is not satisfied in Notions; but doth indeed, and in reality, come to nothing, unless it be in us not only Matter of Knowledge and Speculation; but doth establish in us a Frame and Temper of Mind, and is productive of a holy and vertuous Life.³⁰

In effect, what is being argued for is both the need for religious observance of a genuine kind, and the need to behave as morally well as we are able. In another sermon Whichcote expounds upon a Biblical text from Philippians iv. 8. The text reads:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things

³⁰ Whichcote, 'The Manifestation of Christ and the Deification of Man' in *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 71.

*are seemly, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.*³¹

Whichcote charges his audience with thinking seriously on these exhortations to virtuous behaviour.

It is not barely, have these things in your thoughts; but, in the use of your reason recommend all these things to yourself; think that you do not acquit yourself, that you do not do that which becomes you, that you do not raise a connatural superstructure to the foundation of nature, that you do not do that which is suitable to a christian, that you have your reason to little purpose; if you do not in the reason of your mind think all these things worthy of you.³²

As Whichcote makes clear, the identity of moral and religious truths is part of the argument to exhort people to behave in morally good ways. This conception of morality has no place for the cynical belief that one only acts morally out of prudence. Neither is it a morality based on fear, one in which we must behave well to placate God and win his favour. The Cambridge group's purpose is to insist that morally good behaviour is a matter of virtuous or benevolent intention, and not a prudential or fearful concern for our own well-being. As the highest part of God's nature is his goodness and benevolence, so the highest part of man's nature is his use of reason to behave well and to worship his God. Whichcote has this purpose in mind when he writes:

*'To act contrary to the Reason of one's own Mind, is to do a thing most unnatural and cruel: it is to offer Violence to a Man's self; and to act against a Man's truest Use and Interest. For, all manner of Wickedness is a Burthen to the Mind: and every Man that doth amiss, doth abuse himself.'*³³

These moral and religious truths are known both by 'first inscription' and by revelation. By 'first inscription' is meant that which God gives to mankind as his moral nature. According to Whichcote, God communicates himself to us in two ways. The first is by giving mankind conscience, a 'connatural' thing that interweaves into our very frame and

³¹as quoted by Whichcote, *The Works*, vol. 3, p. 368.

³² *ibid.* p. 369.

³³ Whichcote, 'The Manifestation of Christ' in *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 72.

constitution the knowledge of God's law.³⁴ By conscience we comprehend God, and understand our moral possibilities and responsibilities. Whichcote writes of this first way in which God communicates with us:

In the moment of the creation; and that we call *truth of the first inscription*, or the light of God's creation, or the principle of natural conscience, the true issue of reason. ... For God doth not call any one to an account for that talent he never gave ... Now by this principle of God's creation, man is obliged to all things that are substantially good: all things that are immutable and unalterable are founded upon this principle: therefore the report of our faculties, which God made true (and it is impossible a monster should come out of God's hands) is true; as sure as God made them true, so sure they are true. The proper result of a faculty is true, as it is true that the sun is light.³⁵

The second way in which moral truths are known is by revelation. By this the Cambridge group refer to the Bible. They are acutely aware of the divisiveness of textual interpretation: even different sects within the Anglican church disagreed perennially on matters which they took to be irreconcilable. The Cambridge Platonists sought to minimize these differences, partly by minimizing their dependence on written texts, and partly by beginning to minimize the relative importance of Church worship. They looked to what the period contended was the Book of Nature, the natural world, and found there the moral truths which they felt all right-minded people would agree upon. Whichcote was thus ill-received when he argued that non-Christians can live up to the truths of Christianity better than professed Christians.³⁶ What was most abhorred by the Cambridge Platonists was atheism, for with this, they claimed, there was a purposeful turning away from moral and religious truths.³⁷

Whichcote writes that there is nothing in real and true religion that does not tend to either '*conserve, or restore* the Soundness and Perfection of our Minds', this

³⁴ Whichcote, *The Works*, vol. 3, p. 122.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

³⁶ Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 70.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

soundness being a quiet conscience.³⁸ He goes on to describe the sense of good and evil natural to mankind:

Man by his Nature and Constitution, as God made him at first, being an intelligent Agent, hath *Sense of Good and Evil, upon a Moral account*. All inferior Beings have *Sense of Convenience or Inconvenience, in a natural Way*: And, accordingly, all inferior creatures do chuse, or refuse. For, you cannot get a meer Animal, either to eat or drink that which is not good and agreeable to its Nature. And, whereas we call this *Instinct*; it is most certain that, in intelligent Agents, this other is INSTINCT, at least. And, for this Reason, Man is faulty, when either he is found in a naughty Temper, or any bad Practice. For, he hath Judgement and Power of Discerning: He is *made* to know the Difference of Things: And he acts as a mad Man, that knowing what is *better*, chuseth the *the worse*.³⁹

Whichcote constantly returns to his themes that man has conscience and a sense of moral good and evil. These need not necessarily be the same thing, though there is no doubt that they both have a motivating role in man's moral life. It is beyond our present task to compare closely the notions of moral sense and conscience. What is germane is that both 'faculties' presuppose that we have an ability to discern between right and wrong, moral good and evil.

Whichcote was not alone in attributing some kind of moral sense to mankind. Nathaniel Culverwell brings up the notion of conscience in *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*. For our purposes, Culverwell (?1618-?1651) is most atypical of the Cambridge group. This has to do with his Calvinist leanings. He is less confident than the other Cambridge Platonists that we achieve any comprehensive understanding of God in our present life. Only with the aid of God's freely given grace can we obtain after death a clear view of God' nature.⁴⁰ However, with the Cambridge group he agrees that God makes us with a conscience. He writes:

³⁸ Whichcote, 'The Manifestation of Christ', p. 73.

³⁹ *ibid.* pp 73-74

⁴⁰ See Greene and MacCallum's 'Introduction' to Culverwell's *Light of Nature*, pp. xiv- xx for their assessment of the discourse as a Calvinist rebuttal to Antinomian arguments for free grace . See p. xlviii for Greene and MacCallum's criticism that Culverwell, and even Whichcote, have 'little claim to inclusion among even the most broadly defined Platonists.'

This Law of *Nature* as it is thus brancht forth, does binde *in foro Conscientiae* [in the court of conscience]; for as that noble Author, (whom I more then once commended before) speaks very well in this; Natural Conscience 'tis *Centrum Notitiarum Communium* [the centre of general knowledge], and 'tis a kinde of *Sensus Communis* [common sense] in respect of the inward faculties, as that other is in respect of the outward senses. 'Tis a competent Judge of this Law of *Nature*: 'tis the Natural Pulse of the Soul, by the beating and motion of which the state and temper of men is discernible.⁴¹

Culverwell discusses in the surrounding material a distinction between natural conscience and natural laws. Human laws require only external obedience, but natural laws are welded into the very core of our existence, and to follow them we must willingly consent with the whole of our being.⁴² Conscience, for Culverwell, is sometimes satisfied with only external conformity, and it retrospectively judges, as well as helping us decide how to act in prospect. In these ways conscience is an adjunct to, but different from our apprehension of natural laws.

Henry More did not use the terminology of conscience, yet he gave one of the most extended discussions of that faculty which is involved in moral assessment and motivation. More, in his *Account of Virtue* speaks of a 'boniform faculty of the soul'. This is man's highest faculty, and that in which he most resembles divine nature. As such it inherently involves the use of right reason, but this is not exhausted by what we would now consider instrumental reason. In this More shares the breadth of meaning that Whichcote attaches to 'reason'. More seems to attribute two major tasks to the boniform faculty. One involves cognitivity, or the recognition and apprehension of those things which the 'inward Sense' is sensible of.⁴³ The other involves the pleasure that right-minded people necessarily take in what is morally good. More concentrates this material

⁴¹ Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, pp. 56-57. The square brackets here contain material by the editors, Green and MacCallum. They note that the reference to 'that noble Author' is to Suarez, the author of *De Legibus*.

⁴² Culverwell, *Light of Nature*, p. 57.

⁴³ More, *Account of Virtue*, p. 16. More likens the deliverances of this inward sense to the knowledge that we have of our own passions.

in a chapter 5 of the *Account*, called 'To shew which are the *Faculties* whereby we do find and understand what is simply, and in its own nature good.'⁴⁴ He admits that there is such a thing as the pleasure and gratification of the animal appetites, but he continues, that those who confuse these pleasures for true pleasures are in gross error.⁴⁵ He writes:

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*.⁴⁶

Given the very close association between the roles of right reason and the boniform faculty, we can see that More considers moral pleasure to be by definition pleasure in the morally best thing to be done. This sense of pleasure is radically opposed by the sceptics and egoists, later opponents of the moral sense writers who make the hedonistic claim that pleasure is in the eye of the beholder.

What begins to emerge is the very clear view that the Cambridge Platonists were alike in attributing to mankind a natural sense of discernment between moral good and evil, virtue and vice. The Cambridge Platonists were not concerned to raise finely grained questions about the psychological status and the tasks of this still vague moral sense. Their purpose was to insist against rivals such as the Calvinists that mankind did indeed have this natural discernment of moral good and evil. For, they argued, it is by means of their moral sense that individuals have a genuine role to play in their moral behaviour in this life, and their eventual redemption.

2:5 Aspects of the moral sense

The previous two sections have dealt with what the Cambridge Platonists argue for regarding human nature, its moral faculties and its design by a benevolent God. This

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 28.

section draws together some generalizations that can be made about the moral sense or ability. There are five subsections. The first deals more with the metaphysical presumption that there is a divinely ordained ontological reality which our moral and sensory discernments match in accurate or inaccurate ways.⁴⁷ The second to the fifth deal with psychological presumptions made about the moral sense. In order, these involve claims of the universality of the sense, its operation in a non-willed manner, and its predominant correctness. Often the non-willed aspect of the moral sense is taken in a confused way to corroborate the correctness of the sense.

The final and fifth section indicates that the Cambridge Platonists were sometimes inconsistent by overemphasizing man's goodness, and yet still needing to allow his viciousness. There is a strain in the Cambridge Platonists' work that mankind, like God, has a natural bias towards good. The Cambridge group discuss less often the potentiality towards vice or evil. This helps foster the confusion, also to be found in later writers, that the moral sense is the whole of virtue, or that the moral sense is benevolence itself.⁴⁸

Ontological realism

The Cambridge Platonists' belief in a well-designed human nature is based upon the view that God has designed all things in the universe, and made us sensitive to those things which impinge upon our way of living. These views are consistent with ontological realism. This is an ontological thesis about God's design of objects as belonging to eternal categories. The Cambridge Platonists do not explicitly defend this ontology, but they assume in the strongest possible sense that there are objectively existing eternal and immutable distinctions to be discerned by all well-designed and

⁴⁷ This becomes significant in later chapters because it undercuts in a certain way subjectivist interpretations of the moral sense writers made by such critics as William Frankena, Bernard Peach, and more recently, Elizabeth Radcliffe. All write with respect to Hutcheson, and it is in chapter 4 of this thesis that I deal at length with these issues.

⁴⁸ The confusion between the moral sense and benevolence is something I look at with particular respect to Hutcheson in chapter 5.

attentive creatures. Animals' instincts are sufficient for their mode of life. They are not misled by the report of their senses, and acting in a manner fitting to their senses is what God requires of them. Man is not different. We are unlike other creatures in that we discern differences between moral good and evil, and we have the ambiguous quality of free will. But people, like the animals too, are made with a sensitivity towards those things that effect how they live. And it is a sensitivity towards moral matters that is most human.

The moral realism of the moral sense tradition has been strongly defended by David Norton in a series of articles and books. Norton identifies what he calls the moral realism of the moral sense tradition, while noting that specific writers among the moral sense tradition may or may not support epistemological scepticism.⁴⁹ Norton acknowledges the roots of the moral sense tradition lay with the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century. He discusses Ralph Cudworth's epistemological theory, with its rejection of scepticism and its belief in moral realism.⁵⁰ He contrasts such a theory with Shaftesbury's philosophy. Shaftesbury may hold himself at some distance from epistemological scepticism, but he shares with Cudworth a rejection of moral scepticism. The minor difference between Cudworth and Shaftesbury, according to Norton, is that Cudworth takes moral qualities to be like primary qualities, whereas Shaftesbury takes them to be like secondary qualities.⁵¹

On the matter of epistemological scepticism, it is well recognized that Henry More was one of the first English philosophers to correspond with Descartes. More became

⁴⁹ See, for example, Norton, *From Moral Sense; David Hume*; 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism'; 'Hutcheson on Perception and Moral Perception', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 59 (1977), pp. 181-197; and, 'Shaftesbury and Two Scepticisms', *Filosofia*, supplement 4, 19 (1968), pp. 713-724;

⁵⁰ Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 27-33 and p 42, fn 30.

⁵¹ Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 26-27. I argue in the following chapter that Shaftesbury's teleological views support his moral realism. Norton, I suggest, does not give sufficient weight to this argument for ontological realism based on teleological beliefs. He does, however, discuss the issue. See *David Hume*, pp. 87-92.

disenchanted with the scepticism that Descartes entertained.⁵² It is not too wide of the point to say that, as Descartes felt he had no proof or certainty to bring against his doubt of the evil genius inverting the moral order without our apprehending it, the Cambridge Platonists proclaimed triumphantly their belief in God and the moral order. They are so intertwined that since we cannot doubt God's existence neither can we doubt the moral order.⁵³

In the opening chapter of his book *David Hume: Common Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician*, Norton provides an account of the intellectual currents of the seventeenth century out of which the moral sense tradition grew. But, he does not provide any material specific to the Cambridge Platonists, and so does not indicate that the moral sense tradition believed in moral realism *because* of a related confidence about ontological realism. It is this cluster of defences for ontological and moral realism that the moral sense writers took over from the Cambridge Platonists. Both groups are certain that God has created pertinent differences between things that are morally good and evil, and created us with an ability to discern these differences.

This renders some explanation necessary to help us understand Norton's claims about the scepticism of the moral sense tradition, and their use of an introspective method. I suggest that one of two things may be the case. Either writers in the early moral sense tradition embrace epistemological scepticism in a weak manner (Hume is, of course, a watershed), being more concerned to argue for ontological realism and so moral realism. Or, we acknowledge that Norton is correct to point to the empirical and introspective methods of the moral sense writers, but hold that the use of these methods by such writers does not amount to epistemological scepticism. This appears to be a

⁵² See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press (1979), chs. 9 and 10 on Descartes's scepticism, and especially p. 237 for More's eventual rejection of Cartesian doubt as a form of atheism. See also Alexander Jacob's 'Introduction' to Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, Dordrecht, etc.: Martinus Nijhoff (1987), pp. lxxviii-lxxviii for an assessment of More's use of Descartes's psychological theories.

⁵³ Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 73, reports Whichcote's view that 'The best proof of God's existence is a man's awareness of his self-activity'. Elsewhere, on p. 57, and fn. 4, Roberts marks his disagreement with de Pauley, arguing for the view that Whichcote was non-Cartesian.

more cogent alternative, as it acknowledges the concern these early writers have for defending moral realism, rather than giving a full account of either epistemological certainty or scepticism. These empirical and introspective methods are not inconsistent, in the moral sense writers eyes, with the ontological realism that they embrace but never satisfactorily explain. The suggestion that I make is that Norton is partly right in his assessment of the later writers, but that he has not taken sufficiently into account the type of ontological realism embraced by the Cambridge group in defiance of moral scepticism. Their belief in ontological realism is part of their belief in God and design. The moral sense writers predominantly share this belief, and while they appeal to introspective methods of searching out truth, this is not inconsistent with their belief that God is the First Cause of all things.

Of the moral sense tradition only the later writers, David Hume and Adam Smith, seriously questioned the role of God in explaining the moral order. Hutcheson in the 1720s and even Kames in the 1750s often appealed to God as the fundamental source of both moral distinctions, and of a human nature able to discern these distinctions. The moral realism that they argued for was not just an intersubjective realism, depending on agreement within a community that certain distinctions and values are such. The moral realism that the Cambridge Platonists and the majority of the moral sense tradition assumed was based on an ontological realism that they had no desire to question.

Roberts remarks that the belief about ontological realism held by the Cambridge group can be contrasted not with sceptical doubt, but rather with subjectivism or solipsism. Roberts suggests that a problem might arise that, as truth, for Whichcote, is heavily emphasized as something that is personally experienced, is there not a risk that moral and religious truths are subjective? Roberts responds to the possible objection by reminding the reader that Whichcote believes that truths have an objective reality answerable to the idea of them in the divine mind.⁵⁴ Roberts writes of Whichcote's position:

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

When these truths are grasped by the mind, the mind is acting according to its true nature; for God created the mind to comprehend reality. Truth belongs to those things which have eternal and immutable existence prior to the mind's apprehension of them and the mind's apprehension of them properly agrees with their objective reality.⁵⁵

One of Whichcote's aphorisms captures the objectivity which is the result of God's design. It reads:

Good and Evil are not by *positive* Institution; are not things *arbitrary*; or during any Pleasure whatsoever: but Just Right and Holy, Wicked Impious and Profane, are so by their own nature and quality. If we understand this, as we ought, we abide in the Truth: if not, we are Self-flatterers; and live in a Lye. Things are, as they are; whether we *think* so or not: and we shall be judged by things as they be; not by our own presumptuous Imaginations.⁵⁶

Universality

In virtue of their describing it as a faculty, the Cambridge group claim that every one has a moral sense, or the *ability* to discern between moral good and evil, virtue and vice. This discernment is basic to each person's ability to live a moral life. De Pauley, in his book *The Candle of the Lord*, picks out Henry More, and considers him responsible for reifying the discernment of moral good and evil to a distinct faculty. De Pauley writes 'More is so anxious to delimit his vision of the ideal life, that he assigns it to the care of a special faculty, known as "the Boniform Faculty".'⁵⁷ It is this confinement of our moral abilities to a distinct moral sense that heralds the beginning of the moral sense tradition.

The moral sense is also understood by the group as a *capacity*, one that has to be properly exercised if it is to be used to the best advantage. It is this ambivalence between a potential capacity and the full use of the capacity that accounts for some of the obvious differences in the degree of virtue that people display. The Cambridge Platonists are

⁵⁵ *loc. cit.*

⁵⁶ Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C.A. Patrides, p. 328, Aphorism 116.

⁵⁷ W.C. de Pauley, *The Candle of the Lord: Studies in the Cambridge Platonists*, London: Church Historical Society (1937), p. 142.

astute enough to recognize that they have to account for what they see as the wide range in the use of a universal moral faculty.

Whichcote writes that no person is without this moral faculty. He is born with it, and over the period of his life he exercises it to a weaker or stronger degree. This can be seen clearly in a passage dealing with reason's place in our religious life. The moral sense is not mentioned, but the close identification between reason and the moral sense justifies our consideration of this passage. Whichcote writes:

I will say of all men, and indifferently of all our ancestors, that though they might acquire inheritances and worldly conveniences, yet they could not acquire for, or leave to any of us, mental endowments, no habitual dispositions: but in respect of these 'tis true, that every body is master of his own fortune under God; every man hath himself, as he useth himself. ... No one is born to this [proper human nature], more than another: but if you will be intellectually improved, if you will be refined in your spirits, refined in your morals; if you will be more than the *vulgus hominum*, you must set yourselves in the way of reading, meditation and conference, and self-reflection, and awaken your intellectuals; or else you shall come to nothing.⁵⁸

Here Whichcote makes it apparent that the way to religious and moral improvement is in our own hands. Unlike the Calvinists with their doctrine of predestination, the Cambridge group are insistent that all people are morally capable and responsible for themselves. If they fail to behave well this detracts from their own life and later worthiness for redemption, and from the quality of the moral community of which they are a part. Nevertheless, all people are originally made capable of a morally good life.

The Cambridge group recognize that there are unrepentant and vicious people: their way of dealing with them is to call them moral monsters. Effectively however, this disguises rather than solves the issue, for it amounts to the idea that such creatures are not really full moral agents, but those who have in the past consistently turned away from moral good. Members of this group bar themselves from a full life, and their estimations of good and evil have no authority. Whichcote writes at one point that :

We are not Men, so much by bodily Shape; as by Principles of Reason and Understanding: wherefore those, who discharge Reason from having any

⁵⁸ Whichcote, *The Works*, vol. 4, pp. 141-142.

thing to do in matters of Religion, do not true Service to Religion: do rather pursue the Apostasy of the first *Adam*, and raze the foundations of God.⁵⁹

The unsatisfactoriness is that the contrast between the morally good and the morally debased is largely uninformative. This is because the Cambridge group make no attempt to explicate moral goodness in terms other than what is virtuous, and what is in keeping with God's design.

Non-willedness

On the strength of claiming that the moral faculty is natural the Cambridge Platonists appear to assume that the use of the moral faculty is non-willed or spontaneous. This is conveyed by the comparison of the moral sense to other senses such as sight and taste. The implication is that if persons are sufficiently attentive, they will see anything in their field of vision that is there to be seen. Similarly, the use of the moral sense is spontaneously engaged as and when it discerns moral situations.

There is an important disanalogy between the sense of sight and the moral sense. This is implicit in the Cambridge Platonists' work, though it is never stated explicitly. As well as occasional errors due to lack of attention, and non-willed errors such as those caused by diseases such as jaundice, some people are born without a sense of sight. This lack is obviously beyond their ability to correct. This is not taken to be so in the moral case. The presumption made by the Cambridge group is that all people have an adequate capacity to discern real moral distinctions. Moral fallibility or blindness is a lack of use on the individual's part, and cannot be attributed to any failing in God.

If the Cambridge Platonists dwell on the use of the moral faculty, then they recognize that few people use it to the full. This can be seen in Henry More's *Account of Virtue*. In this work More divides people into two categories; those that use their

⁵⁹Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, in *The Cambridge Platonists*, p.335, Aphorism 1004.

boniform faculty effortlessly, and those who need recourse to right reason.⁶⁰ The second group are good insofar as they use right reason, but as their use of it is limited, so is their virtue less than perfect. The implication is that right reason, even if its use is not actually willed, is within our capacity and responsibility. So, while the morally best people are so spontaneously, those that need recourse to right reason are limited to the extent that, if they do not realize their moral failings, they will not use their capacity to reason to improve their virtue.

More describes the boniform faculty as one of 'sense', 'feeling' and 'delectation'.⁶¹ These have in common the feature of being non-willed or spontaneous in their exercise. With the broad range of meanings that 'reason' can take it is not possible to generalize about the degree of will or conscious attentiveness that 'reason' as a whole involves.⁶² Some meanings of 'reason' allow the possibility of practice and the cultivation of better moral standards. Nevertheless, the important point here is that the Cambridge group are eager to suggest that the use of the moral sense is by and large effortless and non-willed.

Correctness

Another feature to be noted has already been dealt with in passing. It is that the deliverances of the moral sense, whether they are of sense, reason, feeling, judgement, apprehension, delection or whatever, are most often correct. The consistent claims that

⁶⁰ More, *An Account of Virtue*, pp. 15-16, 20.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 8 ('a Sense of Virtue'); p. 16 ('Sense and Feeling'; an 'inward Sense, which I confess, I should rather have called, *The Boniform Faculty of the Soul*'); and p. 28 ('... 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 ...').

⁶² More sometimes speaks of 'right reason' as a distinct faculty with a moral role. It discerns moral truths, whereas the boniform faculty either motivates us to moral behaviour, or causes us to feel pleasure at the sight of virtue. But More also contrasts right reason with other, broader forms of intellectual reason, so it is not possible to generalize about the spontaneity of reason. See *An Account of Virtue*, pp. 12-15.

have emerged from this brief consideration of the Cambridge group show they take mankind to be well made by a designing and benevolent God. Unlike the animals we are not made solely for survival and propagation. The use of our reason and understanding in properly worshipping God, in caring for our fellow creatures, and ministering to our own genuine interests are the highest activities that we can be engaged in. The proper use of our moral faculty is the foundation with which these tasks are performed. It is unthinkable that God has made us less than adequate to these tasks. As discussed above, Whichcote writes that God does not judge us for talents that we do not have.⁶³

The Cambridge Platonists are aware that they speak of a capacity that is exercised in both a dispositional and occurrent way. Nevertheless, their emphasis is upon the responsibility each person has to use their faculty to the full. They do not dwell upon the possibility that the moral faculty is occasionally wrong. In an unusual concession that moral distinctions are sometimes hard to make because of the nature of the material, Whichcote writes:

In many cases it is hard to fix the utmost bounds of good and evil, because these part as day and night which are separated by twilight, so that there is a dim day-light between both. Thus it is a very nice point for a man to know how far he may go and farther he may not.⁶⁴

Roberts goes on to say on Whichcote's behalf that the very difficulties involved in making moral decisions renders the proper development of our moral faculties even more important than otherwise.⁶⁵

Bias towards benevolence

Previously we have seen that the Cambridge Platonists describe man as having a dual nature. They also consider that man has a positive bias towards moral good and

⁶³ Whichcote, *The Works*, vol. 3, p. 121.

⁶⁴ Whichcote, quoted in Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 93.

⁶⁵ *loc. cit.*

benevolence. On this notion of bias towards benevolence their reasoning seems to be, as God is good, so man is more likely to be good than evil. This is utterly unlike the Calvinists, who believe that mankind is unregenerate, and that God's grace is necessary if even the elect are to be saved. Whichcote speaks of a bias towards good that is natural to mankind. One passage dealing with this idea has already been quoted above. The same idea can be seen in the following passage by Whichcote:

Nothing is deeper in human nature than righteousness, fairness, benevolence, and this ingenuity of carriage... Universal benevolence, which God... did sow in the nature of man when he made man... That universal benevolence which spirits the intellectual world, doth require each man towards another, faith and truth.⁶⁶

Roberts raises two pertinent objections against this view. The first is whether Whichcote is fair to neglect to mention the inhumanity that people are capable of towards one another. The second is whether self-interest cannot mix with the motive of benevolence. Both concessions seem necessary, in Roberts's mind, to account for aspects of human behaviour that do not seem explicable in Whichcote's scheme. However, our present purpose is not to answer these objections, merely to be aware of them, as we shall find they are brought against later moral sense writers as well.

The confusion between the proper use of our moral sense and the virtue of benevolence, seemingly as the most encompassing virtue, is something that is apparent in later writers, especially Hutcheson. Accordingly we postpone a discussion of this issue until later.

2:6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has conducted a brief survey of some of the thought of the Cambridge Platonists to establish their role as a source for the later moral sense writers. Their intertwining of religious and moral thought is central to their concern to reject a

⁶⁶ Whichcote, quoted in Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 108.

view of mankind put forward by the Calvinists. The portrayal of man as morally destitute they found abhorrent, a scandal to both man and God. Other responses to the harshness of Calvinism were available. The rationalists shared with the Cambridge Platonists a more optimistic assessment of man's possibilities. Though the rationalists wrote later than the Cambridge group, they differed from them in arguing that the passions and affections were morally destructive. By contrast, the Cambridge group firmly believed that some of man's affections were morally good.

The Cambridge Platonists attributed to every person a natural and God-given ability to discern between moral good and evil, and the freewill with which to choose either possibility. But, as God's nature encompasses his goodness, so they found that man is more naturally inclined to be good. This ability is given equally to every person, and the Cambridge group consider that its use is what we have called non-willed, and most often correct. Henry More reified this ability into a sense, a distinct and *sui generis* psychological faculty responsible for our moral judgement and delight in what is morally good. Any consideration of the moral sense theories of the eighteenth century needs to take into account the thought of the Cambridge Platonists.

CHAPTER THREE

THE THIRD EARL OF SHAFTESBURY

3:1 Introduction

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713, has long been recognized as one of the preeminent founders of the moral sense tradition. His essays contained in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* were an extremely influential source for almost all of the later moral sense writers. Shaftesbury forms a bridge between the Cambridge Platonists and the body of the moral sense tradition exemplified by such figures as Francis Hutcheson and Bishop Butler. Like the Cambridge Platonists he too describes mankind as having a moral sense, a discernment between right and wrong. Unlike Hutcheson, he never solidifies his account into something as stringent as a moral sense theory. Shaftesbury's account of the moral sense contains in nascent form many of the themes that later writers dwell upon, as well as posing many of the problems and tensions that appear inherent in the tradition.

The chapter falls into four major sections. The first introduces Shaftesbury's works and his recognition of the Cambridge Platonist group. The second looks at Shaftesbury's Stoic providential teleology which animates his optimistic assessment of human nature. This optimism distances him from John Locke, his former tutor and friend. The third section looks directly at what Shaftesbury says about the moral sense, both as a discernment of moral good and ill, and as a natural sense akin to the sense of beauty. This raises problems whether the moral sense is a natural sense that all people are born with, or whether it is also open to cultivation. These issues are postponed until we discuss them in relation to Hutcheson in the following chapter. The fourth section deals with Shaftesbury's recognition that there are questions to do with the correctness and the authority of the moral sense. The most important consequence is that Shaftesbury discusses the cultivation of virtue, or what he elsewhere calls moral taste.

Shaftesbury's writings were numerous, and carefully edited at his own direction. His first work was an edition of select sermons by Benjamin Whichcote, published in 1698.¹ Shaftesbury wrote a preface for the collection. In 1699 there appeared *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, in Two Discourses; viz. I Of Virtue, and the Belief of a Deity. II. Of the Obligations to Virtue*, published by John Toland, though without Shaftesbury's permission.² This was soon followed by a series of essays on aesthetic, political and moral subjects, collected together and first published jointly in three volumes under the title *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1711. The *Characteristics* included *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord ******, dedicated in 1707³; *Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author*, first printed in 1710⁴; *Sensus Communis; An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend*, first printed 1709; and a new version of *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit. Formerly Printed from an Imperfect Copy: Now Corrected, and Publish'd intire.; and Miscellaneous Reflections on the preceding Treatises, and other Critical Subjects*. The *Characteristics* also included *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody. Being a Recital of certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects*. This had first appeared anonymously five years earlier in 1704 as *The Sociable Enthusiast; a Philosophical Adventure, written to Palemon*.⁵

¹ Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury 1671-1713*, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press (1984), p. 111. (This is hereafter abbreviated as *Third Earl*.)

² Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Standard Edition Complete Works, selected Letters and posthumous Writings*, ed. and trans. into German by Gerd Hemmerich and Wolfram Benda, 4 vols., continuing series, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog (1981-1989), 'Editorial Principles of the Standard Edition', vol. I,1, p. 12. (I abbreviate the complete volume as *Standard Edition*. The titles available are in two series: aesthetic works are in volumes I,1 and I,2; and moral and political works are in volumes II,1 and II,2)

³ Shaftesbury, *Standard Edition*, vol. I,1, p. 305. This is a facsimile reproduction of the 1723 *Characteristics* first page.

⁴ *ibid.*, vol I,1, p. 34.

⁵ Hemmerich and Benda, 'Editor's Note' in Shaftesbury's *Standard Edition*, vol. II,1, pp. 13 and 17. See also Voitle's bibliography for references to political tracts and several sources of letters (*Third Earl*, pp. 417-418); as well as Voitle's reference to a short Latin piece by Shaftesbury entitled 'Pathologia', a Stoic piece on the emotions (p. 256, fn. 61).

Benjamin Rand early in the present century edited some later works of Shaftesbury, either previously unpublished, or written in 1712-1713.⁶ Principally these include Shaftesbury's *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*; and *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*.

A note of caution is appropriate as we begin our discussion of Shaftesbury's thought. His writings are self-consciously literary. He uses devices of style that are not presently taken to be appropriate to philosophical writing. Occasionally he uses the form of the dialogue, and it is difficult to be certain whether any single voice is Shaftesbury's own. The difficulties in interpreting Shaftesbury are multiple. Nevertheless, I have found that Shaftesbury provides an interesting and cohesive account of human nature and the moral sense that is not too distant from what is to be found in the Cambridge Platonists.

It is significant that Shaftesbury began his writing career with an acknowledgement of the Cambridge Platonists. He shared their optimistic assessment of human nature, though he accepts a Stoic providential teleology rather than a Christian one. According to this teleological view human nature is potentially good and all people are made with an ability to discern genuine distinctions between moral good and evil. It is this discernment, and man's free will, which makes feasible morally good behaviour.

Shaftesbury was responsible for the first edition of select sermons by Benjamin Whichcote.⁷ Shaftesbury's preface is exceedingly interesting, because it contains in a condensed form Shaftesbury's own position in relation to the intellectual currents of the period. Basically he joins Whichcote in supporting an optimistic assessment of human nature against two groups of opposition. He gives an historical account of the debate. According to Shaftesbury, Hobbes had grossly misdescribed human nature and the

⁶ This material has not yet become available in the *Standard Edition* of Hemmerich and Benda.

⁷ Shaftesbury's selection was published after Whichcote's death. Other selections appeared independently of Shaftesbury, though Shaftesbury did publish first. See Voitle, *Third Earl*, pp.111-119 for a discussion of how the manuscripts reached Shaftesbury's hands, and Voitle's assessment of the differences between Whichcote and Shaftesbury. He suggests that this first work shows Shaftesbury's antipathy to Hobbes, and that his first book, the *Characteristics*, shows his antipathy to Locke (*Third Earl*, p. 118).

passions and affections which hold society together. Shaftesbury writes that Hobbes 'forgot to mention kindness, friendship, sociableness, love of company and converse, natural affection, or any thing of this kind.'⁸ In its place Hobbes substituted 'only one master-passion, *fear*'.⁹

In Shaftesbury's view, these atheistic and immoral principles should have been universally challenged, but instead at least one Christian sect supported them for their own purposes. While this sect is unnamed, Shaftesbury implies the Calvinists of his time. According to Shaftesbury they found it reasonable to build the strength of their religion upon this depressed view of human nature. Shaftesbury is caustic: 'As if good nature, and religion, were enemies' he chides.¹⁰ Even the heathens are aware that piety and virtue support one another.

Shaftesbury thus questions the motives of those who deprecate mankind:

Thus, *one party* of men, fearing the consequences which may be drawn from the acknowledgement of moral and social principles in human-kind, to the proof of a Deity's existence, and *another party* fearing as much from thence, to the prejudice of revelation; *each* have in their turns *made war* ... even on *virtue* itself: having exploded the principle of good nature; all enjoyment or satisfaction in acts of kindness and love; all notion of happiness in temperate courses and moderate desires, and, in short, all virtue or foundation of virtue; unless *that*, perhaps, be called *merit* or *virtue* which is left remaining, when all generosity, free inclination, publick spiritedness, and every thing else besides *private regard*, is taken away.¹¹

Whichcote opposed both currents in his defence of natural goodness, and Shaftesbury goes so far as to call him '*the preacher of good nature*'.¹² Shaftesbury leaves no doubt

⁸ 'Earl of Shaftesbury's Preface', as reproduced in Whichcote, *The Works*, vol. 3, p. iv.

⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. v.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. vii-viii.

¹² *ibid.*, p. ix.

that he sympathizes with Whichcote's assessment of human nature, rather than Hobbes'.¹³

3:2 Shaftesbury's account of human nature

Stoic providential teleology

Robert Voitle makes the point that Shaftesbury was a Stoic, and that this permeated the manner of his life and the content of his writings. Shaftesbury's *Philosophical Regimen*, first published only in 1900, contains private exercises and exhortations on such topics as 'Deity', 'Providence', 'The End' and 'Good and Ill'. Benjamin Rand, the editor of this collection, argues that Shaftesbury joins Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus as being one of the great exponents of stoical philosophy.¹⁴ The limited task at the moment is merely to show that Shaftesbury argues for a providential teleology, and that it is Stoic rather than Christian in temper.

Both in his published writings and his *Philosophical Regimen* Shaftesbury argues that the universe is created by a single intelligent and benevolent mind. He poses a choice between chaos and design, finding the former immediately distasteful. He writes:

Where the principle or cause is chance the product and effect must be disorder and madness. Where the cause is design and a mind, the effects must be order and harmony. Which of these is the case?¹⁵

¹³ Shaftesbury rarely makes explicit reference to other Cambridge Platonists. The most direct reference is in *The Moralists*, where Shaftesbury likens himself to the author of the '*Intellectual System of the Universe*'. Ralph Cudworth, though not mentioned by name, is like Shaftesbury in being falsely charged with atheism. See Shaftesbury, *The Moralists*, in *Standard Edition*, vol II,1, p. 132. John Robertson identifies what he takes to be allusions by Shaftesbury to Ralph Cudworth and Henry More. See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols. in one, Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill (1964), vol. 2, pp. 197-198.

¹⁴ Benjamin Rand, 'Prefatory Introduction' in *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, London: Swann Sonnenschein (1900), pp. xi- xii. (This title I abbreviate as *Philosophical Regimen*.)

¹⁵ Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, pp. 18-19.

He finds that the choice between them is obvious. Shaftesbury thus acknowledges a providential teleology in his belief that this ordering and benevolent mind is responsible for all that exists; and the nature of this being informs the order and interconnectedness of all the many parts of this single structure.¹⁶ Similar ideas insisting on our sensibility towards order and harmony are expressed in *The Moralists*. There Shaftesbury writes that:

NOTHING surely is more imprinted on our Minds, or more closely interwoven with our Souls, than the Idea or Sense of *Order* and *Proportion*.¹⁷

The principal ideas here are twofold. The first is a confidence that everything is well-designed and fitting for its ends. Explanations will be found necessary to explain why things don't function perfectly according to their nature (in man's case, his higher nature). The discrepancies which do occur are never in such numbers as to cause hesitation or doubt about the purposeful status of things as they stand.

The second point is closely related. As things serve the ends of nature, or the benevolent mind, they fulfill a whole series of ends that contingently never conflict. Shaftesbury also sees harmony existing at every level of organization to do with people. At the political and individual levels, and even within the emotions themselves there is harmony to be found.¹⁸ The pursuit of genuine private interests not only will not conflict with other people's interest, but it will help to further their genuine interests as well. Here Shaftesbury's language is particularly fluid: not only does the pursuit of private interests secure personal ends, but it secures the good of the person as well. 'Good', as the highest term, implies a moral good in Shaftesbury's scheme. In effect, this puts

¹⁶ See, for example, Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, 1st ed. (1711). Edition prepared by G. Hemmerich and W. Benda, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog (1987). In *Standard Edition*, vol. II,2 pp. 44-54. (This I will hereafter abbreviate to *Concerning Virtue*. Hence the present reference will be to *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 44-54.) Another example is in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*, 1st ed. (1711). In *Standard Edition*, vol. II,1 p. 274 ff. (This will be abbreviated to *Moralists*.)

¹⁷ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 164.

¹⁸ See *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 174-176 for Shaftesbury's thesis setting out to prove the harmony of the affections.

certain questions about the conflicts of interests and the variety of moral good beyond question. This is because, for Shaftesbury, they are already answered satisfactorily with the 'knowledge' of how a benevolent deity would work. Shaftesbury also puts forward the view that there is a balance of the affections within a single person, though it is not always clear what he means by this.

Shaftesbury speaks of the Author of Nature, or the Deity, but he never openly acknowledges a Christian God as such. Nor does he intimate that there is an afterlife in which our moral behaviour and deserts are reconciled. In this way he seems to deny the existence of, or at least the importance of the personal God that Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists take as paramount. The impersonal Deity of the stoics has taken over this role in Shaftesbury's writings.

Shaftesbury makes the point that we lack the ability to see the whole structure of the teleological system. Our knowledge and our power are tailored to each other, and both are finite.¹⁹ Even though we may have a limited ability to be aware of the constitution and coherence of 'Nature her-self' we know that that there is a right and wrong state of every part of nature, and we can thoroughly understand the good of these smaller parts. He writes in *The Moralists*:

NOW as this Difference [between order and disorder] is immediately perceiv'd by a plain Internal Sensation, so there is withal in Reason this account of it; That whatever Things have *Order*, the same have *Unity of Design*, and concur *in one*; are Parts of *one WHOLE*, or are, in themselves, *intire Systems*.²⁰

Shaftesbury thus acknowledges both limitations in seeing the whole structure, and confidence in knowing parts of that totality well. He mixes explanations in terms of final causes, and knowledge to be gained from careful empirical study. He writes:

WHEN we reflect on any ordinary Frame or Constitution either of Art or Nature; and consider how hard it is to give the least account of a particular *Part* without a competent Knowledge of *the Whole*: we need not wonder to find our-selves at a loss in many things relating to the Constitution and

¹⁹ Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, p. 40.

²⁰ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 164.

Frame of *Nature* her-self. For to what End in Nature many things, even whole Species of Creatures, refer; or what purpose they serve; will be hard for any one justly to determine: But to what End the many Proportions and various Shapes of Parts in many Creatures actually serve; we are able, by the help of Study and Observation, to demonstrate, with great exactness.²¹

Shaftesbury's position with regard to epistemological matters is thus somewhat ambiguous. He appeals to a seemingly empirical method and self-scrutiny as sources of knowledge, while generally committing himself to the more ambitious ontological claim of unity and design behind those limited things that we apprehend. Norton's understanding of Shaftesbury is a little different. In an article, 'Shaftesbury and Two Scepticisms', Norton's main point is that Shaftesbury was like Pierre Bayle in his epistemological scepticism, while maintaining a view that Norton identifies as moral realist.²² I am less sure that Shaftesbury is consistently sceptical with regard to epistemological matters. Whether or not he is, he still maintains a providential teleology, a belief that the universe is designed in a purposeful manner, and that we are able to perceive those categories of things that impinge upon us.

Shaftesbury's relationship with Locke

Shaftesbury not only takes over from the Cambridge Platonists an optimistic assessment of human nature, but he specifically follows them in attributing to mankind a moral sense, a natural ability to discern between moral good and evil. His moral theory is entirely different from that of John Locke, his former tutor.²³ This present subsection looks at several areas in which Shaftesbury and Locke differ. I consider that, despite an early close association, the two writers differed profoundly in their assessment of human

²¹ *Concerning Virtue*, p. 44.

²² Norton, 'Shaftesbury and Two Scepticisms', pp. 713-715. On Shaftesbury's friendship with Bayle, see Voitle, *Third Earl*, pp. 86-91.

²³ Voitle, *Third Earl*, pp. 7-11; 64-70.

nature, and its moral tone. The contrast between the two philosophers will serve to clarify Shaftesbury's own positive position.

Shaftesbury and Locke disagree with respect to mankind's inherent goodness. Shaftesbury agrees with the benevolent strains in the Cambridge Platonists' thought: mankind has a dual nature and is capable of good and evil. Nevertheless, goodness is more in keeping with our 'true' or 'higher' nature, and everyone is given the ability to understand and bring about this higher nature. Locke is much more cautious in his assessment of human nature. Man is capable of good, but so often he fails to achieve it. Short-term interests distort our judgement, so that we constantly follow misconceptions of what good and evil are.²⁴ Shaftesbury can seemingly agree with this, but he does not condone what he takes to be Locke's pessimism about our ability to discern intrinsic differences between good and evil. Locke writes in a vein of realism:

[W]e should take pains to suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsic good or ill, that is in things; and not permit an allow'd or supposed possible great and weighty good to slip out of our thoughts, without leaving any relish, any desire of it self there, till, by a due consideration of its true worth, we have formed appetites in our Minds suitable to it, and made our selves uneasie in the want of it, or in the fear of losing it.²⁵

Whereas Locke finds that we are overwhelmingly unable in practice to discern and relish this real good, Shaftesbury will argue that Locke is wrong; that we can discern and relish this good. Shaftesbury further argues that our knowledge of what is good is often sufficient to motivate us, and that we don't need the faculty of will to do the work of original appetites towards moral good. In a 1709 letter to Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury writes several years after Locke's death:

Thus virtue, according to Mr. Locke, has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom; morality, justice, equity, depend only on law and will, and God indeed is a perfect free agent in his sense; that is, free to anything, that is however ill: for if He wills it, it will be made good; virtue may be vice, and vice virtue in its turn, if he pleases. And thus neither right nor wrong, virtue nor vice, are anything in themselves; nor is there any trace

²⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch, (1975), Oxford: Clarendon Press (1985), p. 271.

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 268.

or idea of them naturally imprinted on human minds. Experience and catechism teach us all!²⁶

Shaftesbury here indicates the depth of his disagreement with Locke. He accuses Locke of a mixture of moral relativism, in his denial of natural differences between virtue and vice, and voluntarism, in which the moral worth of actions depends entirely on their conformity to the commands of God.²⁷

It is possible that Shaftesbury misunderstood Locke's argument, and that they actually share the view that there are eternal and immutable differences between moral right and wrong. Locke's view, according to Colman, is that people are weak, and not able to discern these differences with consistent success. Whereas Shaftesbury strongly argues for a natural difference between virtue and vice, and a closely tailored ability to discern that difference, Locke is ambivalent. He both argues that moral distinctions are divine handiwork, and the product of human need and intervention. They are in his terms 'mixed modes', or a confluence of real and nominal essences.²⁸ That moral terms, including virtue and vice terms, are influenced by human needs is insufficient to make them the exclusive product of mankind. It is at some such point that Shaftesbury is likely to have misinterpreted Locke as denying stable and divinely ordered differences between virtue and vice, right and wrong.

In his denial of any innate practical principles Locke denies that as human beings we are naturally constituted with a moral sense such as Shaftesbury would describe. Locke points to the evident disagreements between people on all moral matters, and remarks that in questions of morals it is always reasonable to ask why we should

²⁶ Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, p. 404. Norton quotes this in *From Moral Sense*, p.72.

²⁷ See John Colman, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1983), chs. 1-4, for his assessment of Locke as a theological voluntarist. Colman contrasts Locke's position with that of two versions of innate morality, rationalist and moral sense versions. See ch. 3, especially pp. 59-61).

²⁸ Colman, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy*, pp. 120-129 and 135-137.

conform to standards or obey moral principles.²⁹ Locke draws a distinction between speculative and practical knowledge. Neither kind is innate. Speculative truths, such as those whose denial involves self-contradiction, are known by any one careful enough to consider the relations between the various ideas. Practical moral principles can be true or false; they are learned by demonstration and experience, even if it requires a degree of perspicuity to achieve this knowledge. Locke writes:

[M]oral principles require Reasoning and Discourse, and some Exercise of the Mind, to discover the Certainty of their Truth. They lie not open, as natural Characters ingraven on the Mind; which if any such were, they must needs be visible by themselves, and by their own light be certain and known to every Body.³⁰

And on the matter of adhering to moral principles Locke concedes that different people can appeal to different reasons for following what is ostensibly an agreed moral principle. All men agree that compacts should be kept, and yet some do so for fear of punishment, either civil or divine, and others say it is below man's dignity to behave otherwise. Locke attributes this last view to 'old *Heathen Philosophers*',³¹ but it is this view which Shaftesbury will champion as well. Locke's view is much sterner. He describes the place of God in our moral life:

I grant the existence of God, is so many ways manifest, and the Obedience we owe him, so congruous to the Light of Reason, that a great part of Mankind give Testimony to the Law of Nature: But yet I think it must be allowed, That several Moral Rules, may receive, from Mankind, a very general Approbation, without either knowing or admitting, the True ground of Morality; which can only be the Will and Law of a God, who sees Men in the dark, has in his Hand Rewards and Punishments, and Power enough to call to account the Proudest Offender.³²

²⁹ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 68, where he writes 'Another Reason that makes me doubt of any innate practical Principles, is, That I think, *there cannot any one moral rule be propos'd, whereof a Man may not justly demand a Reason.*'

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 66.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 68.

³² *ibid.*, p. 69.

Colman identifies Locke as a theological voluntarist, though he also finds what he calls intellectualist strands in his work.³³ The ideas seem basically to be these: Locke finds that moral right and wrong are dictated by God, and we ought to obey whatever God decrees good or right. But extra and motivating reasons for obeying Gods commands are that they are in keeping with human nature as God has contingently made it. Colman writes that:

[Locke] is careful to gloss his statement that moral duties arise necessarily out of the features of human nature with the rider that 'this is not because nature or God ... could not have created man differently. Rather, the cause is that, since man has been made such as he is, equipped with reason and his other faculties and destined for this mode of life, there necessarily results from his inborn constitution some definite duties for him, which cannot be other than they are.'³⁴

Shaftesbury does not mention Locke by name in the body of his work as he discusses natural faculties. Shaftesbury seems to find that Locke denies innate faculties with his denial of innate knowledge: Shaftesbury counters this by insisting there is a repertoire of natural faculties, including the faculty of moral discernment. Locke's position, as far as Shaftesbury is concerned, is that moral notions are acquired soon after birth, and that their proximate source is the community of which any person is a part. Shaftesbury deflects the issue by conceding that whether the moral sense develops before birth or shortly after birth is not significant. What is germane is not when a faculty arises, but whether it is entirely acquired at birth, or modified afterwards by '*Art, Culture or Discipline*'.³⁵ Shaftesbury himself does not hold consistently to this point. He occasionally takes it that the moral sense is an instinct that we are born with, as well as being an instinct that is modified over time. This seeming concession is not sufficient to allow Locke and Shaftesbury to agree. Shaftesbury puts forward his own view that we have impressed on our conscience a discernment of those things that are fair and beautiful. Not only the outward human form, but the soul with its actions and affections

³³ Colman, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy*, pp. 37-42, especially p. 42.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁵ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 340.

are discerned as being either beautiful or ugly, virtuous or vicious.³⁶ Shaftesbury finds that Locke denies innate faculties. This difference helps explain Shaftesbury's reluctance to positively identify Locke, and discuss Locke's own account of moral motivation.

In the above argument Shaftesbury does not really do justice to the issue between himself and Locke. The issue is not one of when a natural faculty develops, but whether we have more natural appetitive faculties than Locke's meagre list of desire and aversion, the sensibility to pursue pleasure and recoil from pain. It is one of Shaftesbury's major contentions that we are moved to enjoy and pursue virtue, and to dislike and shun vice. In giving a much wider list of original motives for action, and giving moral categories as original motives, Shaftesbury conceives human nature as radically different from Locke's conception.³⁷

3:3 Shaftesbury on the moral sense

Shaftesbury is like the Cambridge Platonists in that he wavers between attributing to mankind both a natural *sui generis* moral faculty, and more cautiously, merely an ability to discern between moral right and wrong, virtue and vice. Like the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury gives an optimistic assessment of human nature, and his discussion of the moral sense is an indispensable part of this assessment. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury is not methodical in his description of the moral sense in the way that Francis Hutcheson later was. Whereas Hutcheson gives a fully self-conscious moral sense *theory*, Shaftesbury does not. Shaftesbury consistently appeals to a universal moral ability, and often remarks that its natural objects are beauty or ugliness. These comments do not constitute a theory, for Shaftesbury often seems unconcerned with the

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 340-344 .

³⁷ Robert Voitle has specifically attributed to Shaftesbury a use of Locke's epistemology, particularly in his earlier works. I criticize this view, but not until chapter 4, when the matter can be discussed in relationship to Hutcheson as well. I have suggested here that the disagreements between Locke and Shaftesbury are heavily ingrained, and involve their whole outlook on human nature.

inherent weaknesses in his claims and shows no interest in dealing with such discrepancies for the sake of internal consistency.

Shaftesbury uses a broad range of terminology to discuss aspects of the moral sense. In what follows I consider four areas of material in which Shaftesbury focuses upon the moral sense, drawing out themes as they occur. The first subsection deals with Shaftesbury's notion that every one has a natural moral sense, the second looks at Shaftesbury's ideas on conscience and the third at his discussion of the moral sense as a sense of beauty. The fourth subsection discusses Shaftesbury's rejection of moral egoism and scepticism, giving some background to his insistence on a natural moral sense.

The moral sense

Shaftesbury attributes to man a natural moral sense or an ability to discern between moral good and evil, virtue and vice. Sometimes he calls it a sense of right and wrong, and occasionally he likens it to conscience. The new standard edition by Hemmerich and Benda contains Shaftesbury's original marginal headings, and these are an important aid in identifying sections where Shaftesbury discusses the moral sense and related notions. Often the marginal headings indicate Shaftesbury's intention to discuss the moral sense, even when the body of the work itself employs a much broader range of terminology.

Shaftesbury discusses the moral sense on a number of occasions. The most important occurrences are in *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, and *The Moralists*. He attributes to the moral sense a number of related tasks, all of which involve the moral assessment of ourselves or others. The basic task of the moral sense is to make its owner aware of the moral beauty and deformity that comes within the person's survey.³⁸ Shaftesbury envisages that the recognition of this moral beauty or deformity has

³⁸ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 66-68 and 212-222; and *Moralists*, pp. 344-346.

ramifications in a person's behaviour. People are pleased to notice moral beauty in themselves and others, and motivated to pursue this beauty, and try to bring it about. Similarly, they have an antipathy for moral deformity, and are naturally disinclined to instantiate it in their behaviour.

Shaftesbury's discussion of the moral sense begins in Book I of the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*. He is distinguishing goodness from moral goodness. All creatures are capable of goodness insofar as they contribute to the well-being of their group or species. By following their natural temper they directly bring about good *simpliciter*, rather than bringing about good in a secondary or accidental way.³⁹ When a creature's affections and passions are suited to the good of its group then its natural affections are entirely good.⁴⁰ Man is different from other creatures because he can form general notions or reflective ideas. These can span physical objects, actions and affections. And when persons reflect on their own actions and affections, they can judge that they are morally worthy or unworthy. Shaftesbury writes:

THE Case is the same here, as in the ordinary *Bodys*, or common Subjects of Sense. The Shapes, Motions, Colours, and Proportions of these being presented to our Eye; there necessarily results a Beauty or Deformity, according to the different Measure, Arrangement and Disposition of their several Parts. So in *Behaviour* and *Actions*, when presented to our Understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent Difference, according to the Regularity or Irregularity of the Subjects.⁴¹

Not only are people by the aid of reflection able to understand the difference between moral beauty and deformity, but they can allow this to affect their behaviour or be impervious to it. Shaftesbury makes this apparent:

THUS the several Motions, Inclinations, Passions, Dispositions, and consequent Carriage and Behaviour of Creatures in the various Parts of Life, being in several Views or Perspectives represented to the Mind, which readily discerns the Good and Ill towards the Species or Publick; there arises a new Trial or Exercise of the Heart: which must either rightly and soundly

³⁹ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 56-62.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

affect what is just and right, and disaffect what is contrary; or, corruptly affect what is ill, and disaffect what is worthy and good.⁴²

In a condensed manner Shaftesbury seems to be putting forward two important ideas. The first is that there are 'sound' or 'right' estimations of what is morally worthy and unworthy. Shaftesbury consistently opposes himself to those who believe that moral standards are a matter of personal choice or taste. He writes scathingly of such opponents. They may be motivated by false notions of atheism, scepticism or egoism, but they have in common a profound misunderstanding of the shared nature of moral life and moral standards. This is discussed at the end of this section (3:3).

The second idea that Shaftesbury puts forward suggests that people can live up to their sound estimations of what is right and wrong, or, having made a sound estimation, can fail to do so. In effect, Shaftesbury is denying that people can be wrong, or consistently wrong about what is morally worthy and unworthy. To an extent at least, this endorsement of what is right and wrong engages a person's affections. The 'heart' does not remain neutral, but is constantly engaged. Even if it is corrupt on other matters, if the heart is disinterested in the case at hand the person cannot fail to find pleasure in what is virtuous. In such disinterested cases the person 'must approve in some measure of what is natural and honest, and disapprove of what is dishonest and corrupt.'⁴³

Shaftesbury introduces the moral sense as a natural sense discerning moral beauty and deformity. While this may seem to us to involve a category mistake, Shaftesbury has no hesitation in likening virtue to beauty. Indeed, he seems to delight in the idea that moral qualities, qualities of people's actions and characters can be either beautiful or ugly. In Shaftesbury's idiom, moral beauty and deformity seem the most general terms

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴³ *loc. cit.* . Shaftesbury's emphasis on being properly affected is evident in the 1711 version of the *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, but is much less explicit in Toland's 1699 edition, the full title of which is *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue*. Several paragraphs added to the later and authorized edition clarifying what is meant by affections of moral approbation towards that which is morally good. See *Inquiry* pp. 68-69. The two editions are on facing pages: the more accessible 1711 version on even page numbers, and the 1699 version on uneven page numbers. (I retain the abbreviation *Concerning Virtue* to refer exclusively to the 1711 version.)

for virtue or vice. Actions and affections can be graceful, and they can be morally graceful. Proportion, order and harmony are those aspects which in Shaftesbury's view cause different things to be beautiful. In pursuing an accurate conception of our own good, in pursuing the good of the public, or merely in the judicious balance of our affections we seem to be able to display moral beauty.⁴⁴

Shaftesbury argues, often by rhetorical means, for the existence of a natural sense of moral beauty. He remonstrates in the *Inquiry Concerning Merit* that it is impossible that a creature should be so ill constituted that it should have no social affection towards its kind. The same preposterousness would be the case if rational creatures were indifferent to such things as justice, generosity, gratitude and other virtues.⁴⁵ The social affections, indeed, consist in subscribing to these virtues. Shaftesbury writes:

A Soul, indeed, may as well be without *Sense*, as without *Admiration* in the Things of which it has any knowledg. Coming therefore to a *Capacity* of seeing and admiring in this new way, it must needs find a *Beauty* and a *Deformity* as well in *Actions*, *Minds*, and *Tempers*, as in *Figures*, *Sounds* or *Colours*.⁴⁶

Importantly for the moral sense tradition, Shaftesbury succinctly links the notion of discerning our own moral worth and meriting the approval or disapproval of onlookers or observers. He indicates that he will discuss the causes of virtue and vice, though he concentrates on the loss and corruption of the natural moral sense. In a section with the marginal heading 'Moral Sense' Shaftesbury writes:

THERE is in reality no rational Creature whatsoever, but knows that when he voluntarily offends or does harm to any one, he cannot fail to create an *Apprehension* and *Fear* of like harm, and consequently a *Resentment* and *Animosity* in every Creature who observes him. So that the *Offender* must

⁴⁴ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 164-166 and 176. Shaftesbury here speaks of the harmony, concordance, proportion, unity and form of the universe and its parts, including man's constitution.

⁴⁵ *Concerning Virtue*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ *loc. cit.*. Shaftesbury goes on to qualify that if there is no real amiableness in the moral acts, then there is an imaginary amiableness of real force. His qualification seems concerned to answer possible objections about the naturalness or subsequent cultivation of the discernment, rather than its possible subjectivity or objectivity.

needs be conscious to himself of being liable to such Treatment from every one, as if he had in some degree offended All.⁴⁷

As part of his insistence that no rational creature can be unaware of the differences between right and wrong, he states that such creatures are aware when they voluntarily offend others and hence deserve disapproval.

Conscience

With this linkage between self-assessment and our assessment by others set out to his satisfaction, Shaftesbury turns to the place of conscience in people's realization that they have done wrong, and so merit disapproval. This occurs in Book II of the *Inquiry Concerning Merit*. Shaftesbury here advances the discussion in terms of a natural or moral conscience and a religious conscience. As is often the case, Shaftesbury is brief in his formulations. In a paragraph entitled '*Conscience*' he writes that two things are grievous to any person: to reflect on any unjust action and know that it merits disapproval, and to reflect on any foolish action and know that it is prejudicial to his own interest or happiness.⁴⁸ In the first of these conjunctions Shaftesbury may be referring to the reflection of our own injustice or the injustice of others. Given his confidence that the same standard informs our self-assessment and the assessment of others this is not a point where he makes a distinction.⁴⁹

In the following paragraph on '*Moral Conscience*', Shaftesbury remarks that only the first case, that of ill-merit, properly deserves to be called conscience. Prejudice to our

⁴⁷ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 88.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴⁹ Shaftesbury discusses the recognition that we have been prejudicial to our own interest in a section with the marginal heading '*Conscience from interest*', in *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 220-222. Conscience here is purely retrospective, though Shaftesbury's main point is that viciousness cannot be concealed, but is noticed by others and leads to a loss of confidence and friendship on their part to our own eventual detriment.

own interest does not deserve this appellation.⁵⁰ Shaftesbury goes on to say, however, that awe of the deity does not guarantee a correctly working conscience, because we can be misled to believe wrongly in a devilish nature rather than a divine one. Conscience seems exclusively to be concerned with wrongdoing, though Shaftesbury does not give enough information to know whether he intends it to be both retrospective (in helping us judge what has happened) as well as prospective. In a passage that again shows his antipathy towards Locke, even though he is not named, Shaftesbury discriminates between a natural and a religious conscience:

AND thus *religious Conscience* supposes *moral or natural Conscience*. And tho the former be understood to carry with it the Fear of divine Punishment; it has its force however from the apprehended moral Deformity and Odiousness of any Act, with respect purely to the Divine Presence, and the natural Veneration due to such a suppos'd Being. For in such a Presence, the Shame of Villainy or Vice must have its force, independently on that further Apprehension of the magisterial Capacity of such a Being, and his Dispensation of particular Rewards or Punishments in a future State.⁵¹

'False conscience' leads a person to idolize a false species of virtue and affect as noble and worthy that which is really irrational or absurd.⁵²

The sense of moral beauty

A third major cluster of passages deal with the moral sense. In Part III of *The Moralists*, an extended essay in the form of a dialogue championing the status of moral philosophy, Shaftesbury is perhaps at his most eloquent and most diffuse. He is discussing moral beauty, and the 'meditation' that he is engaged in speaks of universal beauty. Structurally he is proposing a Platonic hierarchy of beauty or beautiful things. Loosely echoing the *Symposium* he writes of three major categories of beauty: the beauty of inanimate forms,

⁵⁰ See also the 1699 version, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, p. 213, where Shaftesbury writes that both unjust actions and actions prejudicial to our own interest and happiness deserve the title of 'conscience'.

⁵¹ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 212-214.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 216-218

the beauty of animate forms, and the beauty of creative mind.⁵³ The progression between the categories is unclear. Shaftesbury may confuse the categories with the range of products belonging to the different categories.

Somewhat incongruously, in a section dealing at length with the cultivation of moral taste, Shaftesbury reverts to insisting that moral beauty is discerned by a natural sense. Shaftesbury compares simple and complex beauty with respect to bodies or figures, and then with respect to the way a soul may be beautiful. His purpose is to explain what causes the beauty. Commonly, he writes, beauty is taken to be caused by something inexpressible or mysterious. But, he counters, the beauty of bodies must relate to their figure, colour, motion or sound.⁵⁴ Nor need we take examples from architecture or sculpture:

'Tis enough if we consider the simplest of Figures; as either a round *Ball*, a *Cube* or *Dye*. Why is even an Infant pleas'd with the first View of these Proportions? Why is the *Sphere* or *Globe*, the *Cylinder* and *Obelisk* prefer'd; and the irregular Figures, in respect of these, rejected and despis'd?⁵⁵

The answer, Shaftesbury finds, is that in certain figures there is a natural beauty 'which the Eye finds as soon as the Object is presented to it'.⁵⁶ Similarly there is a beauty of the soul which is immediately appreciated as soon as its objects are discerned. One party to the dialogue insists:

No sooner are ACTIONS view'd, no sooner the *human Affections* and *Passions* discern'd (and they are most of 'em as soon discern'd as felt) than straight an *inward EYE* distinguishes, and sees the *Fair* and *Shapely*, the *Amiable* and *Admirable*, apart from the *Deform'd*, the *Foul*, the *Odious* or the *Despicable*.⁵⁷

⁵³ See Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 146-148 for the idea of a religious hierarchy of instruction towards sublimity. Shaftesbury re-works the hierarchy several times in the *Moralists*, and there are differences between the various accounts. I particularly refer to one section of the *Moralists*, pp. 332-338.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 344.

⁵⁵ *loc. cit.*

⁵⁶ *loc. cit.*

⁵⁷ *loc. cit.*

Shaftesbury asks whether this is not sufficient to show that the distinctions and the discernment are natural? The other party is not sure: is there not disagreement, or rather, perpetual variance among men concerning what is base or worthy, fit or unfit? Shaftesbury here seems to give both sides of his disagreement with Locke concerning the variability of virtue and vice. He is thus closer to the first party in his answer that while there is controversy this in itself presupposes the reality of a standard, even if there is not universal or widespread agreement in different people's judgements. 'All own the *Standard, Rule, and Measure*', and if there are disorders in applying the standard due to ignorance or passion this does not detract from there being a measure.⁵⁸ All people own the measure because they are all, according to Shaftesbury, made with a natural sense which discerns moral beauty that is there to be perceived in people's actions, sentiments and characters.

Why Shaftesbury discusses the moral sense

Shaftesbury's insistence on the naturalness and correctness of the moral sense is designed to counter a range of insidious opposition from two different groups who may loosely be called egoists on the one hand and sceptics on the other. In Shaftesbury's works they are unnamed contemporaries who, in his eyes, are the current Epicureans and religious zealots. These groups are usually thought of as disparate: they are only alike in that Shaftesbury is equally dismayed by the hedonism of the Epicureans, and the selfish claims of the zealots. The Epicureans equivocate on the meanings of 'good' and 'ill' to suit their personal and short-term purposes, and the sceptics or religious zealots are no better in misunderstanding the nature of moral distinctions. Shaftesbury consistently opposes such figures. For him, they are the epitome of what is most wrong in moral argument, as they engage in argument only for purposes of self-justification. He writes in the *Inquiry Concerning Merit* that people of dubious moral stability follow perplexed

⁵⁸ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 346.

or false notions of honour and virtue. In doing so they become tormented by a 'Proteus' of honour, an ever-changing conception of good. Shaftesbury contrasts this with 'real virtue, which alone is able to secure esteem, approbation and a good conscience.'⁵⁹

A similar concern about the brittleness of false forms of virtue is voiced in *The Moralists*. There Shaftesbury writes in a highly rhetorical style against those who argue that opinion is arbiter of moral beauty. He puts forward what may broadly be called the egoists' position by writing:

There can be no such thing as real *Valuableness* or *Worth*; nothing in itself estimable or amiable, odious or shameful. All is OPINION; 'Tis *Opinion* which makes Beauty, and unmakes it. The Graceful or Ungraceful in things, the Decorum and its Contrary, the Amiable and Unamiable, Vice, Virtue, Honour, Shame, all this is founded in *Opinion* only. OPINION is the *Law* and *Measure*. Nor has *Opinion* any Rule besides mere CHANCE; which varies it, as *Custom* varies; and makes now this, now that, to be thought worthy, according to the Reign of *Fashion*, and the ascendent Power of *Education*.⁶⁰

Shaftesbury finds this argument abhorrent, and begins a series of arguments to show that even this type of opponent appeals to arguments and aspects of human nature when they are slighted by other people in real moral situations. No person can be devoid of gratitude or resentment, pride or shame, a sense of justice or injustice. If such an opponent is grateful, Shaftesbury asks, what are his reasons for feeling so? If he is angry, and indulges revenge, what are the details of the case? Does he revenge himself on a stone or a madman, for a chance injury or an unintended accident. 'Who is so Unjust?' Shaftesbury asks.⁶¹ He thus considers 'just' and 'unjust' as notions that belong to a natural 'presumption' upon which resentment or anger are founded.

The case is the same with feelings of shame or honour. To be able to have even incorrect notions of what is shameful and ridiculous we need to have the basic ability to

⁵⁹ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 216-218.

⁶⁰ *Moralists*, pp. 348-350.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 352.

recognize that some of our behaviour may warrant these estimations. We do not feel shame because of what is hurtful in its consequences.

For the greatest Danger in the world can never breed Shame: nor can the *Opinion* of all the World compel us to it, where *our own Opinion* is not a Party. We may be afraid of appearing impudent, and may therefore feign a Modesty. But we can never really blush for any thing but what we truly think *Shameful*.⁶²

That we do blush is, for Shaftesbury, irrefutable evidence that we are not indifferent to moral right and wrong. What he does not deal with is whether our sensitivity is to natural or learned moral categories, or both. Given that we respond and act with many seemingly immediate feelings of approbation and disapprobation, this is sufficient in Shaftesbury's view to corroborate the existence of a natural moral sense that most people have in working order.

Some modern criticisms of Shaftesbury's account of the moral sense emphasize a distinction between perception and sensibility. Robert Voitle suggests that Shaftesbury used a Lockean terminology of sense perception in the early works, and changed to a use of aesthetic terminology in the later works. David Norton makes the different suggestion that Shaftesbury's notion of moral (or aesthetic) perception is dependent on the external perception of physical objects. In Norton's terms, this dependence can either be logical or temporal.⁶³ By this, Norton means either that seeing a beautiful object *as* beautiful is logically dependent upon seeing the object; or that, as a matter of causal temporal sequence, seeing an object as beautiful comes after first seeing the object.

Hutcheson read Shaftesbury carefully, and transposed the same themes and their incumbent difficulties to his own account of the moral sense. As Hutcheson is a much more methodical writer, I postpone a discussion of the above issues until chapter 4.

Shaftesbury is an unsystematic and sometimes effusive writer. There are occasional passages where he makes a tentative distinction between the *perception* of

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 350.

⁶³ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 82.

moral qualities, in some broad sense the virtues and vices, and the *perception* of moral beauty and ugliness. This is further confused by the more frequent distinction that he makes between a natural moral sense and a heightened sensibility towards moral beauty and ugliness. There is a similar shift of emphasis in Shaftesbury's thought between the *observer* (whether reflecting on their own or others' thoughts and affections) and the *agent* (who behaves in either a morally adequate or morally exemplary way). But in Shaftesbury's thought these issues remain only nascent themes.

3:4 *The correctness of the moral sense*

One theme that assumes greater importance in the works of the later moral sense writers, though it is present in Shaftesbury's work, is what may be called the correctness of the moral sense. Shaftesbury concedes that deliverances of the moral sense, or its acts of discernment and apprehension, are not always correct or appropriate. Further, he recognizes that some account of such error has to be given to protect the privileged status of the moral sense. He gives a general outline of reasons why disagreement or error might occur. Other writers, such as the Cambridge Platonists, are much less ready to admit that errors of the moral sense occur, and are correspondingly much less detailed in their discussion of such errors. Shaftesbury's concession concerning errors of the moral sense is necessary if the moral sense writers are going to make credible their insistence that all people have a well functioning and veridical moral sense.

Shaftesbury provides a number of reasons for possible errors of the moral sense that have immediate plausibility. Even more importantly, he categorizes the reasons for moral error into two groups, errors of fact and errors of right. Any terminology here is potentially misleading, but I choose to call the first of these categories errors of cognitive correctness. The second I call errors of normative correctness. The distinction that I think can be attributed to Shaftesbury is that the first category raises problems to do with the correctness *simpliciter* of specific deliverances of the moral sense, and the second raises

problems with the authority, the normative correctness or the long-term correctness of the moral sense.

Shaftesbury introduces this distinction in an early section of the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue*. He does not make extended use of it either in this work or elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is a useful distinction that shows that even the early moral sense tradition recognized the issue of the authority of the moral sense. Shaftesbury writes:

A MISTAKE therefore *in Fact* being no Cause or Sign of ill Affection, can be no Cause of Vice. But a Mistake *of Right* being the Cause of unequal Affection, must of necessity be the Cause of vicious Action, in every intelligent or rational Being.⁶⁴

The first category (mistakes of fact) encompasses what we may call cognitive correctness. Shaftesbury, as with all the moral sense writers, recognizes the variety and disagreement in people's estimations of what is morally worthy or unworthy. But Shaftesbury suggests that this is only surface variation caused by such things as a lack of knowledge, sudden passions, or a distorted understanding of what is in our real self-interest. The lack of knowledge that Shaftesbury has in mind is non-culpable ignorance: in this case a person is not taken to be morally vicious.⁶⁵ Sudden and vehement passions cause cognitive mistakes as well. Anger, fear, amorousness and a passionate temper are examples of such things which can disrupt a person's conception of what is to their real good.⁶⁶ Thus temporary distortions of self-interest form a sub-class within this larger category of mistakes of fact. All people are capable of such errors, and such errors may occur with great frequency. Nevertheless, such occasional lapses do not make a person

⁶⁴ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 74. Within a short space Shaftesbury provides a different categorization of what he calls the 'Causes of VICE'. This is a marginal heading he uses in *Concerning Virtue*, p 86. The section spans Part III, sections I-III. The categorization here is threefold: the first category deals with those things that take away from a natural sense of right and wrong; the second creates a wrong sense of right and wrong; and the third category opposes the right sense with contrary affections. I cannot compare these two categorizations (between mistakes of fact and right, and what takes away from a natural sense of right and wrong, etc..) They seem tolerably compatible, and the second is structurally more prominent, I find the first more useful.

⁶⁵ For example, see Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 74 .

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

morally vicious, for a stable notion of real self-interest reasserts itself, and prevents such depravity.

This first category thus includes a mixed collection of ways in which the moral sense can be in error. They necessarily involve, though Shaftesbury does not use this terminology, what I have called cognitive errors. The issue is both supported and complicated by Shaftesbury's tendency to link or even confuse a balanced set of emotions or affections with a well-functioning moral sense. As the notion of 'appropriate' affections involves the Aristotelian notion of the right emotion on the right occasion to the right degree, so Shaftesbury sometimes describes the moral sense as involving the right moral response to the situation at hand. If a person is unwittingly misled to believe a friend honourable, then there is no wrong in behaving as though that friend were honourable. But if a person honours a friend's ambition, fame or boastfulness, then they follow a false notion of honour, and are responsible for the moral errors which flow from their mis-estimation.⁶⁷ This is the contrast which Shaftesbury wishes to draw between cognitive and normative errors.

Cognitive errors seem to disrupt temporarily or occasionally what is otherwise acknowledged to be a universal standard. This is what I mean by saying that cognitive errors are confined to challenging only specific instances of the moral sense. The important point to be drawn is that Shaftesbury argues consistently for a universal moral standard. In Shaftesbury's view this standard exists to be recognized by right-minded people. The fact that most people have a well-functioning moral sense is irrefutable support, in Shaftesbury's eyes, that such a standard is available.

Shaftesbury's discussion of the second category (normative correctness) does not deal with mundane types of apparent disagreement. Instead it postulates and defends the notion of the highest moral standard that is available. This categorization gives us the

⁶⁷*ibid.*, p. 74.

possibility of conjecturing what we may call the normative correctness of the moral sense. Correctness here involves adhering to a high moral standard; and error involves the erosion of this standard. Shaftesbury includes in this category what he calls in one place errors of reason, or of the leading part.⁶⁸ He allows that there are many occasions when it is difficult to know what is the morally correct thing to do: slight and occasional errors do not destroy the virtuousness of a person's life.⁶⁹ But errors of superstition and ill custom are also of this kind. Complicated, frequent and gross mistakes detract from a person's appropriate affections and eventually diminish their virtue.⁷⁰

The important point is that normative errors, or errors of reason, undermine a person's conception of a stable moral standard. This is what I mean by saying that normative errors challenge the authority of the moral sense. Normative errors postulate false moral standards, whether deriving from false religious or secular beliefs. As with the Cambridge Platonists Shaftesbury often writes of moral and religious beliefs mutually supporting one another. Shaftesbury vehemently castigates atheism and superstition as their consequence is a distorted and depressed moral standard. Shaftesbury's emphasis is always on secular rather than religious beliefs. Nevertheless, he does discuss the notion that a person with weak moral standards must have an inaccurate conception of the deity. Shaftesbury's belief in a providential teleology draws together the threads of these complicated and seemingly circular arguments.

Shaftesbury's recognition of an important, if overlapping and unstable, category difference between cognitive or normative moral errors is dependent upon a distinction which he never explains. He attributes to people a natural moral sense and a moral sense that can be raised and cultivated. One possible analogy is between a sense of balance,

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷⁰ For extended discussion of virtue, see also Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 76-78 and 94-102; and *Moralists*, pp. 120-156, especially p. 126 and p. 140. In the *Moralists*, p. 140 Shaftesbury writes of a plan to defend the reality of theism on the grounds of moral realism. This in itself indicates the depth of Shaftesbury's support for providential teleology.

and an ability to dance gracefully. No person can be without the first, but may or may not build on this natural ability and become competent at the second. Both are 'natural', one in the sense that all people have this ability from birth and without effort; and the second in that this is the highest strain to which any particular basic ability (here: the sense of balance) can be brought. The comparison is not perfect. As we saw in the previous chapter to speak of a natural sense in no way settles the issue whether the sense is acquired complete at birth, or fostered over time. Some rare instances of a person devoid of balance, or moral sensitivity may occur, and making good this lack of a natural sense is not within a person's conscious control. Neither Shaftesbury nor the Cambridge Platonists show much concern with these issues that we now see as problematic.

Moral taste

A final point or two can be made about Shaftesbury's discussion of the high moral standard. Shaftesbury considers this standard personified by the temperate man or the man of taste. Both the temperate man and the man of taste are accurate judges of pleasure and moral worth: the difference is the minor one that temperance is one virtue among many. Even this distinction is somewhat fluid, as Shaftesbury writes so highly of temperance in *The Moralists* that it becomes the whole of virtue rather than a part of virtue.⁷¹

As for taste, Shaftesbury writes in the *Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author*:

If *Civility* and *Humanity* be a TASTE; if *Brutality*, *Insolence*, *Riot* be in the same manner a TASTE; who, if he cou'd reflect, wou'd not chuse to form himself on the amiable and agreeable, rather than the odious and perverse Model? Who wou'd not endeavour to *force* NATURE as well in this respect, as in what relates to a *Taste* or *Judgement* in other Arts and Sciences? For in each place the *Force* on NATURE is us'd only for its Redress. If a natural

⁷¹ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 112-120, especially p. 120. Here Shaftesbury writes of temperance as the 'nursing Mother of the Virtues', particularly mentioning fortitude, magnanimity, justice and honour. In the same volume, p. 152, another list of virtues includes temperance, patience, meekness and magnanimity.

good TASTE be not already form'd in us; why shou'd not we endeavour to form it, and become *natural*?⁷²

Shaftesbury's *Moralists* is a model for the cultivation of moral taste. This is apparent in the contrast he makes between the person of moral taste and the frivolous *beau monde*. Shaftesbury's purpose is to make attractive the notion that moral cultivation and the pursuit of moral excellence are worthy in themselves. Correspondingly, he exhorts people to improve to the best of their ability. Shaftesbury is not satisfied to give an account of the morally adequate: he describes what is involved in moral excellence rather than moral mediocrity. Shaftesbury's highest moral exemplar is personified by what he calls 'the real philosopher'. Such people must strive to achieve virtue, but by doing so they cultivate worth, sincerity and a sound heart. They enjoy orderly affections, a freedom from passion, they have generous thoughts, and a mind commanded by reason.⁷³ This, for Shaftesbury, is structured around a life of moderation and practised reason. This exemplar is not confined to *The Moralists*. In the *Miscellaneous Reflections* Shaftesbury writes:

'Tis not *Wit* merely, but a *Temper* that must form the WELL-BRED MAN. In the same manner, 'tis not a *Head* merely, but a *Heart* and *Resolution* that must compleat 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*. Accordingly, the respective Conduct and distinct Manners of each Party are regulated: *The one* according to the perfectest Ease, and the good Entertainment of COMPANY; *the other* according to the strictest Interest of MANKIND and SOCIETY: *The one* according to a Man's Rank and Quality in his private NATION; *the other* according to his Rank and Dignity in NATURE.⁷⁴

The *beau monde*, by contrast, have no sure understanding of real beauty, and little motivation to change their ways. They enjoy pleasure in brittle and unsuitable objects. Shaftesbury writes that such aesthetically inept people admire superficiality rather than

⁷² Shaftesbury, *Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author*, 1st ed. (1711), Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog (1981). In *Standard Edition*, vol. I,1, pp. 270-272.

⁷³ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 376-382, especially p. 380.

⁷⁴ Shaftesbury, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, 1st ed. (1711), Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog (1989). In *Standard Edition*, vol. I,2, pp. 196-198. The *Miscellaneous Reflections* often have the task of expounding on Shaftesbury's own earlier work.

real beauty. They try to appear stylish or well-bred, and may specifically cultivate a refined palate, or concern themselves with ephemera such as cabinet curiosities and gardens.⁷⁵

Shaftesbury implies that what is most distressing about the *beau monde* is that unless they conceive a need for change, there is nothing in their way of life that can convince them of such a need. *The Moralists*, as a dialogue, seeks to provide such an insight for those who read it appropriately. If the readers by a stroke of insight recognize themselves as members of the *beau monde*, then the dialogue invites them to change to being persons of true virtue. The Platonic hierarchy of beauty that Shaftesbury describes in *The Moralists* provides the framework within which people can improve and cultivate their moral taste. By embracing a 'higher' conception of beauty, culminating in the realization that social, moral and religious standards are consistent and contained within one another, Shaftesbury has achieved his purpose in exhorting people to the height of virtue.

3:5 Conclusion

We have seen that, like the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury attributes to mankind a natural discernment between moral right and wrong. He shares with them an optimistic assessment of human nature based on providential teleology and a commitment to ontological realism. Further, like these earlier writers, he sometimes discusses the moral sense in terms of 'conscience'.

Shaftesbury's literary style and his rejection of systematic presentation make him a difficult author to come to terms with. To some extent because of these features, he provided a rich source for the moral sense tradition. Most important for our purposes are the ideas that the moral sense is closely linked with the appreciation of moral beauty and

⁷⁵ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 366-372, especially p. 366.

ugliness, the related idea that the moral sense can be cultivated, and the explicit concession that errors of this sense occur and can be corrected by reference to real or unbiassed self-interest. We now turn to Hutcheson, the most astute and systematic of the moral sense writers, who elevated the doctrine of the moral sense to the status of a theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUTCHESON'S MORAL SENSE EPISTEMOLOGY

4:1 Introduction

Francis Hutcheson, 1694-1746, has given us one of the most detailed moral sense theories of the eighteenth century. He is significantly indebted to Shaftesbury, and yet he brought a rigour to his account of the moral sense which it had not had before. The detail that he is prepared to commit himself to, and the objections that he raises and counters allow him to achieve a clarity of exposition that Shaftesbury does not. This comes at a high price, for in so doing the inherent weaknesses of the moral sense theory also become evident. These weaknesses were not acknowledged by Hutcheson, and only with Adam Smith's assessment of the moral sense theory do we get the theoretical tools with which to understand the problems in Hutcheson's account. Certainly the moral sense theory that Hutcheson inaugurated had many adherents and admirers in the period 1725- 1760.

Hutcheson's place in the histories of moral philosophy tend to concentrate on his contributions to the moral sense theory. However, this is only one aspect of his overall moral account. The direct objects of the moral sense are the virtues and vices as they are displayed in people's actions and characters. Hutcheson casts a large part of his account in terms of a virtue theory. In this he was not unusual. Shaftesbury, Butler, Turnbull, Kames, and even Hume and Smith make use of the terminology of the virtues as an integral part of their moral theories. Accordingly, the following two chapters look more widely at Hutcheson's moral theory. I claim that the moral sense aspects of his theory answer epistemological questions: this material is confined to this chapter. In the fifth chapter, I tentatively trace a relationship between the moral sense aspects and the virtue aspects of Hutcheson's account. This allows us to note that Hutcheson tends to confuse the moral sense with virtue and with benevolence.

This chapter has five major sections. After the introductory material the first section considers Hutcheson's opposition to rationalist and egoist doctrines, particularly the work of Bernard Mandeville. Mandeville made current a cynical and egoistic view of human nature that Hutcheson found scandalous. The second section outlines Hutcheson's own account of human nature. This shows that Hutcheson is close to the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury by insisting on an optimistic assessment of human nature, complete with an innate moral sense. In the third section I discuss some basic themes of Hutcheson's moral sense account. Hutcheson describes the activity of the moral sense as involving either perception or sensibility: I consider whether this necessarily involves an opposition or unclarity. The fourth section draws out some leading questions that can be asked if the moral sense is spoken of as a perceptual ability. Particularly important is Norton's assessment of Hutcheson's 'moral perception' here. The fifth section deals with what is meant by speaking of the moral sense as a sensibility towards moral beauty, or virtue. Here we consider Voitle's assessment of Shaftesbury, and by implication, Hutcheson, on whether the moral sense involves *either* perception *or* sensibility. The elements or the structure of Hutcheson's moral sense epistemology are best captured by a triadic scheme that Peter Jones puts forward in expounding Hume on the aesthetic sense. This structure, I claim, allows us to locate the assortment of features that Hutcheson attributes to the moral sense. This does not necessarily make the moral sense theory true, but it provides a way of understanding the disparate tasks that Hutcheson makes the moral sense responsible for.

Although Francis Hutcheson is currently regarded as an early and transitional figure in the development of eighteenth century moral sense theories he was regarded by his own age as a moral writer of great stature. He was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, having studied arts and theology there himself. William Scott, in his biography first published in 1900, indicates that Hutcheson *preached* moral philosophy, and that he greatly altered the mode of teaching by using English as the language of instruction, instead of Latin. Hutcheson, according to Scott, was almost universally

loved and respected by his students for his gentleness and moral goodness, though he enjoyed mixed favour with the reactionary and Calvinist university administration as he sought to advance the appointment of those who fostered moderate 'New Light' ideas.¹ In Scott's estimation Hutcheson left a profound and humane legacy upon the Scottish universities, and that his written output is a pale testimony to his actual influence.²

Hutcheson produced a number of written works. Of major influence were his early writings. His later output tended to be compendiums used in his university teaching of adolescents. There are longstanding discussions asking whether Hutcheson's corpus is consistent throughout, or shows major developments.³ I do not raise this issue in any direct way in the following chapters, but I incline to the view that Hutcheson does not radically change his moral orientation over time. The most important texts in the present account are *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and the *Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense* (1728). The first is composed of two treatises, the first (called by Hutcheson himself *Treatise I*) being *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, &c.*, and the second (*Treatise II*), *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*.⁴ The *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* was published as the second part of a further

¹ William Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy*, Cambridge (1900); New York: Augustus M. Kelley (1966), ch. 5, 'New Light in the University', (hereafter cited as *Francis Hutcheson*). See also Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press (1985), p. 152 for Hutcheson's role as a bridge, among others, between the rigid Calvinism of the post-Revolution period and the polite Presbyterianism of the Moderate era.

² Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, pp. 146-148.

³ William Scott in 1900 proposed a four stage development (*Francis Hutcheson*, chs 9-12. The idea of development over time is stated, for example, on pp. 184-185). James Moore has recently argued for a two stage difference, the early work endorsing a virtue-based theory, and the later work accommodating in a major role the duty-based language of Puffendorf and Cumberland. This has been challenged by Knud Haakonssen, who finds that the differences do not constitute a major reorientation, but are merely differences of emphasis. Haakonssen's larger task is to argue that virtue and duty theories were largely compatible with each other in the period, and did not pose the radical discontinuity that we now take for granted. See James Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson' and Knud Haakonssen, 'Natural Law and Moral Realism'. The issue of Hutcheson's development is brought up briefly at the beginning of chapter 5.

⁴ I have used facsimile reproductions of Hutcheson's work. References are to Francis Hutcheson, *Collected Works*, 7 vols.. Facsimile edition prepared by Bernhard Fabian. Hildesheim: Olms (1969-1971). Occasional cross-references are made to a recent edition of Hutcheson's *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. with an introduction by Bernard Peach, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (1971).

volume, the third treatise being *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*. Occasional references are also made to Hutcheson's other major works, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (1747), and *A System of Moral Philosophy*, a two volume work published posthumously by William Leechman in 1755.

Hutcheson, like Shaftesbury, faces different sorts of philosophical opponent, and while he does not consistently indicate what his focus of opposition is, a general clarification at this point can be of assistance. Hutcheson often doesn't name his opponents. Two major groups can be identified in the Preface to his first work, *An Inquiry into our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. They are the rationalists and the egoists, and they remain major opponents throughout the whole of Hutcheson's corpus.

The opening paragraph of the Preface counters rationalist doctrines that knowledge itself is able to move us to morally good behaviour. In contrast to his own account, which proceeds upon 'a just Knowledge of human Nature, and its various Powers and Dispositions.'⁵ Hutcheson disparages recent inquiries that had given methods for obtaining truth, saying that such inquiries lead fruitlessly into areas of speculative knowledge. According to Hutcheson such theories cannot show that knowledge or truth are lasting or important pleasures for us, as their advocates claim.

After his rejection of the rationalists, Hutcheson goes on to indicate his intention to deal in a full and systematic way with the nature of pleasure, both to prove the reality of virtue, and to show that the pursuit of virtue secures the most certain happiness of the agent.⁶ Hutcheson goes on to distance himself from those who believe that pleasure depends on what is willed, or what is in our self-interest. This diverse group can be taken to include the egoists and the Epicureans to the extent that they believe that we

⁵ Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 1st ed. 2 vols. in one, London (1725). Hildesheim: Olms (1971). In *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. iii. (Of the two treatises in this volume, I hereafter cite the first as *Concerning Beauty*, and the second as *Concerning Moral Good*. Both treatises share a single preface; and when I refer to the two treatises as a unit, I use the abbreviation *Inquiry*.)

⁶ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. v.

pursue pleasure to the exclusion of other ends, and that we choose at will what constitutes and what does not constitute pleasure. By contrast Hutcheson firmly pronounces that pleasures of the external senses and the internal senses⁷ are necessarily caused by determinate objects. The 'Frame of our Nature' is such that some objects necessarily please us, and others displease us, or cause us pain.⁸ Hutcheson is especially concerned to provide an account of the pleasures of the mind. Introducing a major theme that regularity and harmony cause intellectual pleasures, he writes of the uniformity beneath the apparent diversity of such pleasures:

*Thus we shall find our selves pleas'd with a regular Form, a piece of Architecture, or Painting, a Composition of Notes, a Theorem, an Action, an Affection, a Character: and we are conscious that this Pleasure necessarily arises from the Contemplation of the Idea, which is then present to our Minds with all its Circumstances.*⁹

Hutcheson indicates his intention to argue for a determinate relationship between pleasures, the moral sense and the sense of beauty.

Hutcheson opposed to Bernard Mandeville

The full title of Hutcheson's first work brings us to the major point of the present section. Hutcheson writes that he will defend the principles of Shaftesbury against the author of the *Fable of the Bees*. This was the notorious Bernard Mandeville, who had forcefully brought to the public gaze the doctrines of egoism and hedonism. According to

⁷ Hutcheson makes the distinction between the internal and external senses as early as his *Inquiry*, pp. iv-v. In its first formulation, Hutcheson wavers on the distinction. The internal sense is taken to be a singular sense of beauty, distinct from the moral sense. By the *System* (1755) Hutcheson writes that there are a range of internal senses, including a sense of beauty the moral sense, and other senses such as the sense of honour, and the sense of dignity. See Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 1st ed., London (1755). Hildesheim: Olms (1969). In *Collected Works*, vols. 5 and 6; this reference is to vol. 5, ch. 2, . 'Concerning the finer Powers of Perception'. (This is hereafter abbreviated as *System*. All references made to Hutcheson's *System* are contained within vol. 5 of this edition.)

⁸ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. v. Scott finds that Hutcheson is a hedonist (*Francis Hutcheson*, pp. 192-193), but this disregards Hutcheson's moral realism, yet to be presented, and the caution with which Hutcheson argues that moral pleasures are of a higher kind. Hutcheson consistently defends the notion that universal calm benevolence, the most worthy moral pursuit, is practised to foster the good of others, and not for the good that incidentally does accrue to its bearer.

⁹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. v-vi.

the first, people pursue their self-interests, which as it turns out are most often selfish; and according to the second, people pursue what they envisage as pleasurable, and hence worthy of pursuit. Mandeville's pithy maxim 'private vices, public benefits', the sub-title to *The Fable of the Bees*, was taken to capture the shocking idea that people do no better than pursue their own private vices¹⁰, but that fortuitously and unintentionally this brings about the happy state of affairs in which public well-being, though not strictly virtue, obtains.

Mandeville is a witty and satirical writer, deeply cynical about the nature and extent of virtue in human nature. His wit makes it difficult to weigh the tenor of much of what he says. Despite the warranted uncertainty Hutcheson and most of his contemporaries looked on Mandeville as a new Hobbes, propounding again theories in which individuals are self-interested and disregarding of others.

Shaftesbury had died in 1713, before many of Mandeville's writings were published. *The Fable of the Bees* appeared over a number of years, though it was first published in the format that we now know it in in 1723.¹¹ It provided the focus for much of Hutcheson's vehement rejection of ideas of a vicious and amoral human nature, self-interested hedonism, and the imposition of morality on an unwitting populace by crafty and self-interested lawgivers. Hutcheson claims that mankind has a natural moral sense and a genuine bias towards benevolence, whereas the most Mandeville furnishes us with is a sense of pride, an ambiguous natural faculty that makes us concerned to appear as

¹⁰ An assessment of Mandeville's moral theory is contained in John Colman, 'Bernard Mandeville and the Reality of Virtue', *Philosophy*, 47 (1972), pp. 125-139. Colman finds that Mandeville satirically pointed to the excesses of Augustinianism, with its insistence on the depravity of mankind. Nevertheless, Mandeville denied innate goodness, even though he allowed the rare possibility of genuine virtue. See especially pp. 129 and 131-136.

¹¹ F.B. Kaye, 'Introduction' in Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*, London (1714-1732). Edited by F.B. Kaye, 2 vols. (1924). Oxford: Clarendon Press (1957), especially the section 'History of the Text', p. xxxiii ff. The 1723 edition was an enlarged version of material that grew from Mandeville's poem 'The Grumbling Hive' of 1705. (Hereafter I abbreviate this collected work by Mandeville as *Fable of the Bees*.)

morally worthy to others, while hiding what is really our reluctance to adhere to the spirit of morality.¹²

Many of these points can be seen in Mandeville's rejection of Shaftesbury: it is unsurprising that Hutcheson castigates Mandeville in turn. One of the clearest formulations against Shaftesbury is found in Mandeville's 'A Search into the Nature of Society':

The Generality of Moralists and Philosophers have hitherto agreed that there could be no virtue without Self-denial; but a late Author, who is now much read by Men of Sense, is of a contrary Opinion, and imagines that Men without any Trouble or Violence upon themselves may be naturally Virtuous. He seems to require and expect Goodness in his Species, as we do a sweet Taste in Grapes and China Oranges, of which, if any of them are sour, we boldly pronounce that they are not come to that Perfection their Nature is capable of. This Noble Writer (for it is the Lord *Shaftesbury* I mean in his *Characteristicks*) Fancies, that as Man is made for Society, so he ought to be born with a kind Affection to the whole, of which he is a part, and a Propensity to seek the Welfare of it. ... In respect to our Species he looks upon Virtue and Vice as permanent Realities that must ever be the same in all Countries and all Ages, and imagines that a Man of sound Understanding, by following the Rules of good Sense, may not only find out that *Pulchrum & Honestum* both in Morality and the Works of Art and Nature, but likewise govern himself by his Reason with as much Ease and Readiness as a good Rider manages a well-taught Horse by the Bridle.

The attentive Reader, who perused the forgoing part of this Book [the *Fable of the Bees*], will soon perceive that two Systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship's and mine. His notions I confess are generous and refined: They are a high Compliment to Human-kind, and capable by the help of a little Enthusiasm of inspiring us with the most Noble Sentiments concerning the Dignity of our exalted Nature: What Pity it is that they are not true.¹³

Mandeville here rejects Shaftesbury's major claims that mankind is genuinely virtuous and irreducibly social, not only existing in communities, but genuinely seeking and promoting the welfare of others in those communities. More specifically, Mandeville shows that he intends to challenge Shaftesbury's idea that sound understanding and good sense are sufficient to discover that which is beautiful in morality, art and nature. Mandeville scorns this idea. He gives his own definition of virtue in an earlier work, and

¹² Adam Smith uses Mandeville's point to refute him: according to Smith, people are not only concerned to appear moral, they are genuinely concerned to be moral. See *TMS*, p. 117.

¹³ Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, London (1732). Ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1957), vol. 1, pp. 323-324.

it is strongly ascetic. The definition occurs in 'An Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Virtue'. Mandeville stipulates three conditions. It is not immediately clear how disjunctive they are. The overall effect is of a stringent definition that few, if any, can live up to, and that the incidence of their success is rare. Mandeville writes that he gives:

... the Name of VIRTUE to every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the Benefit of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good.¹⁴

Mandeville's asceticism, his belief that we contravene nature by trying to benefit others, his disparagement of the passions¹⁵, and his belief that the rational desire to bring about good is very rarely a genuine possibility all distance him from the moral sense writers. Shaftesbury argued for their opposites, and it is left to Hutcheson to directly reject Mandeville's conception of human nature, with its belittlement of genuine moral concern for others.

On the source of morality, Mandeville cannot give a teleological account in the mould that we have seen in the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, for this would be to disparage God, or at least the present state of his creation, by pointing to the desperate fallibility of mankind. Mandeville turns elsewhere, and considers that morality, or the most substantial trappings of morality that we have, are imposed on us by more astute members of our community. Skilful moralists and philosophers, crafty lawgivers and politicians are pointed to as the arbiters of moral distinctions and the progenitors of moral and social institutions. Mandeville has been identified as an early inaugurator of an evolutionary picture of social change. Douglas Den Uyl substantiates Mandeville's

¹⁴ Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, vol. 1, pp. 48-49.

¹⁵ Colman finds that Mandeville holds that the passions are destructive to both our reason, and our own and others' well-being. Thus Mandeville's view of the passions denies Shaftesbury's thesis that there is a natural category of benevolent passions that help secure good. See Colman, 'Bernard Mandeville and the Reality of Virtue', pp. 128-131. Mandeville's view, according to Colman, is that pride can be moulded in seemingly endless ways, so that behaviour that mimics benevolence indeed occurs. Douglas Den Uyl does not deal primarily with Mandeville's views on the moral status of the passions, but with their general psychological status. He identifies Mandeville as one of the first, after Spinoza, to claim that the passions are causally efficacious in almost all actions. See Douglas Den Uyl, 'Passion, State, and Progress: Spinoza and Mandeville on the Nature of Human Association', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), pp. 369-395, at pp. 374-375.

influence on Hume and Adam Smith in their treatment of the changing nature of human association over time.¹⁶

Mandeville differs from Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's general conception of moral and social institutions and their appeal to different original faculties taken to explain our long-term conformity to moral standards. Shaftesbury, and as we will see, Hutcheson appeal to the moral sense. Both take it as a connatural or original faculty that is a constituent of, and a guarantee of, our genuinely benevolent nature. Mandeville considers genuine benevolence to be extremely rare. But responsible for much that is attributed to benevolence is the passion of pride. He writes that pride is a dominant and inseparable facet of human nature.¹⁷ Praise and flattery, our desire for encomiums, can lead us to disguise our motives and appear to obey the moral standards of our society. Pride does more than this: it is that coin in which we are paid when we do appear to conform. Mandeville asks what people can find pride in, and his answer is the sobering one that we can find pride in anything that other people will praise us for. Hutcheson and later writers will denounce this. One of the things such writers are actually deflecting is Mandeville's remark that:

[T]he nearer we search into human Nature, the more we shall be convinced, that the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride.¹⁸

It is no surprise that Hutcheson feels he has a dangerous opponent in Mandeville; one who will deceive the reading public into misunderstanding their own moral nature, and so become lax in their pursuit of virtue.

4:2 *Hutcheson on human nature*

¹⁶ Den Uyl, 'Passion, State and Progress', p. 371 for his assessment that Mandeville's influence was of this kind.

¹⁷ Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, vol. 1, pp. 44-45

¹⁸ *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 51.

A large part of Hutcheson's philosophic effort went to providing an alternative account of human nature to that given by the egoists and the rationalists. In this he has significant affinities with the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury. Hutcheson's task appears twofold: it was to provide an optimistic account of human nature, one in which mankind was not left wholly corrupted by original sin; and it was to exhort people to conform to the best in their moral nature, and hence improve their 'real', or higher nature.¹⁹ Hutcheson writes in the Preface to *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*:

*[The author's] 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.' The weakness of our Reason, and the avocations arising from the Infirmary and Necessitys of our Nature, are so great, that very few of Mankind could have form'd those long Deductions of Reason, which may shew some Actions to be in the whole advantageous to the Agent, and their Contrarys pernicious. The AUTHOR of Nature has much better furnish'd us for a virtuous Conduct, than our Moralists seem to imagine, by almost as quick and powerful Instructions, as we have for the preservation of our Bodys: He 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.*²⁰

In this early work, Hutcheson, like the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, indicates that he presumes a providential teleology. Hutcheson thus takes it as nonsensical to dispute that there is a wise, good, and benevolent God who has designed the universe, and continues to watch over it. Among those things God has a hand in is casting human nature in a determinate way. Hutcheson opposes those who profess to investigate God's nature by *a priori* methods. He had corresponded with Samuel Clarke on this matter in 1717, though the letters do not survive.²¹ Hutcheson strongly opposes Clarke, by drawing a corollary of Clarke's position: we can understand God's existence and moral

¹⁹ According to Scott, Hutcheson's life was the strongest exhortation to others to morally improve. See Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, pp. 2 and 146-148.

²⁰ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. vi-vii.

²¹ Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, pp. 15-17.

perfections because of our certainty in the constitution of a human nature, and the 'moral administration' we feel within ourselves.²²

Human nature, according to Hutcheson, involves the composition and balancing of many facets. We are made with a range of internal and external senses, faculties, affections, desires, pleasures, reasoning, judgement, habits, interest, goods and the like. His terminology is thus very broad, and without wanting to discuss any of these facets in detail here, we may say that Hutcheson makes three principal points about this constitution. The first is that real human nature is neither unregenerate nor ideal. The second point is that this real human nature is known both by empirical observation and teleological considerations. Thirdly, there is the point that real human nature involves the use of a moral faculty, the moral sense.

Real human nature

What Hutcheson means by a real human nature can be illustrated by a passage from *The Nature and Conduct of the Passions*. Hutcheson writes first about the general condition of mankind, and then about the condition of individual people:

To assert that 'Men have generally arrived to the *Perfection of their Kind* in this Life,' is contrary to Experience. But on the other hand, to suppose 'no Order at all in the *Constitution* of our Nature, or no *prevalent Evidences* of good Order,' is yet more contrary to Experience, and would lead to a Denial of PROVIDENCE in the most important Affair which can occur to our Observation. We actually see such Degrees of *good Order*, of *social Affection*, of *Virtue* and *Honour*, as make the Generality of Mankind continue in a tolerable, nay, an *agreeable State*.²³

He continues:

²² Hutcheson, *System*, p. 114.

²³ Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and the Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 1st ed., 2 vols. in one, London (1728). Facsimile ed. Hildesheim: Olms (1971). In Hutcheson, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, pp. 200-201. (Of the two treatises in this volume I abbreviate the first as *Nature of the Passions*, and the second as *Illustrations*.)

However, in some Tempers we see the *selfish Passions* by Habits grown too strong: in others we may observe *Humanity, Compassion, and Good-Nature* sometimes raised, as we say by Habits, to an Excess.²⁴

Hutcheson describes people as being in a state between the kind of perfection achieved only by superior beings who are not human,²⁵ and a corrupt nature, tainted by original sin. Consistent with his theological beliefs, he is committed to the idea of a less than perfect present state of human nature, and yet his ideal of perfect human nature is not that of divine beings who do not have a share in our faculties and pleasures.

In discussing the disparate nature of pleasures, Hutcheson writes in a way close to Shaftesbury that the good and temperate man, rather than a divine being, is the best judge of moral taste: 'But of mankind these certainly are the best judges who have full experience, with their tastes or senses and appetites in a natural vigorous state.'²⁶ This is part of a larger theme, in which Hutcheson argues that not all people are of a single sort. They enjoy pleasure in all manner of things, and their pleasures can be graded into some incommensurable groups. Sensual pleasures, and pleasures of the palate are fleeting, and of little intrinsic worth. Often the true pleasure of such short-lived experiences comes from the social aspects or settings of which they are a part. For example, Hutcheson says, the pleasures of a fine table have much to do with the company present, rather than the gustatory pleasure of the food itself. People with such limited tastes can temporarily or occasionally satisfy their present pleasures, and not notice their limited conception of pleasure.

Those with a more expansive notion of pleasure recognize that some pleasures are more excellent than others, and that the social, or benevolent pleasures procure the most good to their bearers. In Hutcheson's view, it is a further fact about the cohesion of the world that such pleasures involve bringing about the good of other people. Hutcheson

²⁴ *loc. cit.*

²⁵ Hutcheson, *System*, p. 121 is one place where Hutcheson contrasts superior beings with divine intellects who have may have intuitive knowledge of perfection, with mankind.

²⁶ *loc. cit.*

repeatedly insists that people pursue things for the good they procure, and not the pleasure that is incidentally concomitant. This argument is part of his rejection of egoism. Hutcheson, like Shaftesbury, gives an account which differentiates pleasures into higher and lower forms. By 'lower pleasures' he means particularly sensual pleasures, but they also in strictness should include pleasures of the external senses. 'Higher pleasures' are sometimes intellectual or ascetic pleasures, though Hutcheson mimics an important stand taken by Shaftesbury when he focuses on the social pleasures such as friendship, gratitude and benevolence, with the express intention of elevating these above all other pleasures. Hence, on the matter of 'higher' pleasures, Hutcheson predominantly means to insist that benevolence and the social pleasures are the highest, and that in human nature there is genuine concern for the advancement of other people's moral and social well-being.²⁷

Empiricism and providential teleology

Hutcheson, like Shaftesbury, insists that his account of a real human nature, while teleological, is not derived in an *a priori* manner. Rather, it is culled from empirical observation, and consistent with what is to be found by introspection. We have already noted Hutcheson's disagreement with Samuel Clarke concerning the *a priori* investigation of God's attributes, and the ramifications this has for a proper study of human nature from within an humanly accessible perspective. In this vein, Hutcheson writes in the opening paragraph to *A System of Moral Philosophy*:

THE INTENTION OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IS TO direct men to that course of action which tends most effectually to promote their greatest happiness and perfection; as far as it can be done by observations and conclusions discoverable from the constitution of nature, without any aids of supernatural revelation: these maxims, or rules of conduct are therefore

²⁷ See, for example, Mark Strasser, 'Hutcheson on the Higher and Lower Pleasures' for arguments that Hutcheson's highest pleasures, unlike J.S. Mill's, are necessarily social and moral. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), pp. 517-531, at pp. 518 and 525 for the comparison between Hutcheson and Mill.

reputed as laws of nature, and the system or collection of them is called the LAW of NATURE.²⁸

Hutcheson's point is that regularities in conduct can be observed or discovered, and that such regularities can be known independently of our knowledge of God. Even though Hutcheson's account is supposedly built up from observational regularities, it remains an account based on divine teleology. The persistence of this teleology can be seen in his defence of the view that the regularities we observe are consistent with what we would be able to see were there a benevolent God, and that given that these regularities are observed, there is such a God. Hutcheson is a writer of his age, and it is unthinkable to him that people would seriously question the importance of God in designing and creating the universal order such as we see it. Different religious sects disagreed about God's most important attributes, and proper forms of worship, but few people doubted the existence of God as the Author of Nature.

There is a tension between Hutcheson's emphasis on empirical investigation and his belief in providential teleology. In a way, his teleological beliefs are more basic, as they involve his belief in a wise and benevolent God who orders the universe in a cohesive and good manner. Empirical beliefs would confirm this for him, but no amount of contrary evidence would count as suspicious or cause him to question his theological beliefs.

This is somewhat of an inversion from the modern view of 'scientific' or empirical evidence. Hutcheson has been classed as a Newtonian for his confidence that empirical generalizations can be made which conform to natural laws, and for his project of unifying seemingly disparate moral phenomena under a few universal, natural laws.²⁹ But he is only in part influenced by the modern, scientific spirit. His work was really a synthesis of this scientific approach with Christian theology. Science confirms

²⁸ Hutcheson, *System*, p. 1.

²⁹ Mark H. Waymack, *Moral Philosophy and Newtonianism in the Scottish Enlightenment: A Study of the Moral Philosophies of Gershom Carmichael, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith*. diss. (1986). Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International (1986), pp. 62-63.

what God has wrought. Mark Waymack writes of Hutcheson in a thesis entitled *Moral Philosophy and Newtonianism in the Scottish Enlightenment*:

In the study of human nature, Hutcheson argues that through induction from empirical generalizations we may similarly arrive (by way of the analytic method) at a theoretical description of that human nature which is the cause of the behaviour which we observe. By thus coming to know our natural constitution, we may readily perceive our function, i.e. the purpose which the great Author of Nature intends for us. For from an understanding of our nature, we may derive (by the synthetic method) our rights and obligations.³⁰

Nevertheless, the scientific spirit is very strong. Hutcheson himself, as Waymack acknowledges, expressly compares his moral system of human nature to Newton's dynamic system of inanimate nature.³¹ Focussing on the observable regularities which constitute the laws of nature, according to Hutcheson, the crucial point about these laws is that they are natural as Newton's laws of gravity are natural. This should not be taken too far: it is not Hutcheson's point that people are impelled in unthinking ways to behave uniformly. He wants to secure the idea that these laws apply to all people, and are constant over time, as well as the idea that they apply whether we are aware of them or not. Ratiocination can show that these laws are perfectly conformable to the positive laws and moral principles that the rationalists set up as the models that we should conform to.³² Waymack argues that part of Hutcheson's Newtonian method sought to explain as much human behaviour as possible through the application of some limited number of universal laws.³³ This desire for explanatory simplicity can be seen, according to Waymack, in *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty*. Hutcheson is discussing the beauty of

³⁰ Waymack, *Moral Philosophy and Newtonianism in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 62.

³¹ See, for example, Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 198-199, where he likens universal benevolence to the principle of gravitation 'which perhaps extends to all Bodys in the *Universe*: but, like the *Love of Benevolence*, increases as the distance is diminish'd, and is *strongest* when Bodys come to *touch* each other.'

³² Compare More, *An Account of Virtue* for a different view according to which moral rules are required by 'second best' people who need such assistance to perform what is their morally best behaviour. *Account*, pp. 14-15 for More's description of people appealing to right reason; and pp. 20-27 for a list of moral rules.

³³ Waymack, *Moral Philosophy and Newtonianism in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 66.

theorems in support of his Platonic notion of the intrinsic beauty of ideas. Hutcheson writes:

In the search of *Nature* there is the like *Beauty* [of theorems] in the Knowledge of some great Principles, or universal Forces, from which innumerable Effects do flow. Such is *Gravitation*, in Sir ISAAC NEWTON'S Scheme; such also is the Knowledge of the Original of *Rights*, *perfect* and *imperfect* and *external*; *alienable* and *unalienable*, with their manner of *Translations*; from whence the greatest Part of moral Dutys may be deduc'd in the various Relations of human Life.³⁴

The moral sense

Like the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson gives special place in his description of human nature to the ability to discern the difference between virtue and vice, moral right and wrong. More consistently than these earlier writers Hutcheson locates this ability under the auspices of a *faculty*, a distinct moral sense. The moral sense is original, meaning that most people are born with it. It is a specific or *sui generis* sense that is used in our moral assessment both of ourselves and others. According to Hutcheson, it is both prospective and retrospective, and it assesses our own behaviour and that of others at the same rate. It is engaged without our willing it; it is most often correct in its assessment, and when it is not, it can be corrected by the bringing to bear of the right sorts of reason. At the same time, it is that faculty which fosters moral improvement and moral excellence.

Hutcheson is ambivalent in the way he describes this faculty. He requires that the moral sense performs many tasks, and that the theory about the sense be resistant to the challenges of the moral sceptics, egoists and rationalists. Depending on the context, Hutcheson describes the activity of the moral sense as involving either the perception of moral distinctions such as virtue and vice, or the recognition of moral beauty and ugliness. This emphasis either on the perceptual role of the moral sense, or the

³⁴ Hutcheson, *Concerning Beauty*, p. 30.

discernment of the categories of beauty and ugliness serves to focus the reader's attention on different aspects of the moral theory as well as different aspects of the moral sense.

Before drawing out the distinctions between perception and sensibility in Hutcheson's account of the moral sense it will be of use to characterize the sense more generally. (The distinction between perception and sensibility is discussed in the following section.) Hutcheson defines the moral sense in this way in the Preface to his first major publication, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* :

THESE Determinations to be pleas'd with any Forms or Ideas which occur to our Observation, the Author chuses to call SENSES; distinguishing them from the Powers which commonly go by that Name, by calling our Power of perceiving the Beauty of Regularity, Order, Harmony, an INTERNAL SENSE; and that Determination to be pleas'd with the Contemplation of those Affections, Actions or Characters of rational Agents, which we call virtuous, he marks by the name of a MORAL SENSE.³⁵

The moral sense is an internal sense, as Hutcheson makes clear by contrasting it to such external senses as sight and taste. The moral sense is that faculty with which we recognize the moral qualities of rational agents' affections, actions and characters. These qualities are typically those of the virtues and vices. Hutcheson makes this evident in the surrounding material by emphasizing the dispositions in our nature to be motivated and to act in a virtuous way.³⁶

There is some difficulty in taking Hutcheson at his word that his moral theory is a moral sense theory. This is because he discusses significant parts of his theory in the terminology of the virtues and vices, duties and obligations. So while some aspects of Hutcheson's moral theory undoubtedly appeal to the moral sense, these are only some aspects among others.³⁷ The virtue theory, I argue in the following chapter, is more basic to Hutcheson's account, in that it can in principle give a procedural account as to

³⁵ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. vi.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. vi-vii.

³⁷ See, for example, Hutcheson's invocation of Shaftesbury in the Preface to his first *Inquiry*. Hutcheson indicates to the reader that he will make reasonable the doctrine of the moral sense, and show, as Shaftesbury did, that it does not appeal to innate ideas, but rather, an innate sense. *Inquiry*, p. vii.

whether particular actions and characters are virtuous or vicious, as well as a conceptual account of the differences between specific virtues and vices.

Hutcheson's moral sense theory is particularly designed to answer a range of epistemological moral questions that he considers important. These basically have to do with his refutation of the egoists and the rationalists, by showing that genuine moral distinctions do exist, and that such distinctions can be known by human beings. The egoists deny the shared or intersubjective nature of genuine moral distinctions, and the rationalists diverge on what they take to be the way in which these shared distinctions are apprehended. Hutcheson's moral sense theory is located in the wider moral theory of the virtues and vices. The moral sense, according to Hutcheson, discerns moral distinctions, particularly the categories of the virtues and vices.

Hutcheson argues against the egoists that the moral sense makes us privy to a stable conception of the moral good; the egoists arguing that no such stable or shared conception is possible. Hutcheson argues against the rationalists, who think reason sufficient to motivate us to moral good, that the moral sense is a necessary aspect of moral motivation. These arguments are often repeated. One such occurrence is in the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, where Hutcheson argues for the *prima facie* durability and correctness (cognitive and normative) of the moral sense. It is here that Hutcheson distinguishes three senses of the question whether our constitution will remain the same.

Specifically, he is discussing how it is that we know that our affections are right when they are kind.³⁸ The context shows that Hutcheson is concerned to defend the durability and the correctness of the moral sense. The first meaning that Hutcheson separates out has to do with durability through time. How do we know that we will *always* approve what we now approve, and that this is because the constitution of our senses remains the same? Hutcheson's answer is a confident one. 'Of the *Continuance* of the same Constitution of our *Sense*, we are as sure as of the Continuance of *Gravitation*,

³⁸ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 279. The corresponding passage is to be found in Bernard Peach's edition of Hutcheson's *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, p. 161.

or any other *Law of Nature*.³⁹ Hutcheson uses the singular term 'sense'. Despite this, the context makes it clear that he speaks predominantly of the moral sense, rather than the senses generally.

The second sense of the question has to do with durability across people: how can we be sure that all others will approve as we do? Here consistency is sought not over time, but over different communities of people. Hutcheson couches his answer in probabilistic terms that tailor to his empirical method. There is no certainty, 'but 'tis highly probable that the *Senses* of all Men are pretty *uniform*.'⁴⁰ Hutcheson goes beyond this tentative answer. Given his belief in a benevolent Deity, his answer also encompasses the certainty that the senses answer specific enduring needs that people have, usually to sustain their life or well-being. The interesting point is that Hutcheson gives a general formulation for what it is for the senses to be distributed over all people, and be normatively correct. This can be seen in the following passage:

That the DEITY also approves *kind Affections*, otherwise he would not have implanted them in us, nor determined us by a *moral Sense* to approve them. Now since the *Probability that Men shall judge truly*, abstracting from any presupposed *Prejudice*, is greater than that *they shall judge falsly*; 'tis more probable, when our Actions are really *kind* and *publicly useful*, that *all Observers* shall judge *truly* of our *Intentions*, and of the *Tendency* of our Actions, and consequently approve what *we* approve our selves, than that they shall judge *falsly* and condemn them.⁴¹

Hutcheson here conflates durability with normative correctness. This is part of his general insistence that by and large all people have been made with a perspicuous set of faculties with which to live in social communities, care for themselves, and bring up their young. Believing in a providential teleology, he is both certain that God has implanted in us a predilection towards kind affections, which, as a matter of fact are publicly useful, and that these kind affections are recognized as such by unprejudiced observers. A further point not made apparent in the quotation is that these kind affections are

³⁹ Hutcheson, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁰Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 280. In chapter 5 I discuss Hutcheson's emphasis on the benevolent aspects of human nature.

⁴¹ *loc. cit.*

recognized as kind not because of the public utility they produce, but because of what they demonstrate or make evident about their bearers' quality of character.

The third sense of the question about the correctness of the moral sense seeks to give assurance that virtue tends to foster both our own happiness and self-interest. 'Correctness' here is not just public usefulness, but personal well-being. In a way, Hutcheson recognizes that in answering this question he is close to over-determining the qualities of virtue. He writes:

If the Meaning of the Question be, 'Will the doing what our *moral Sense* approves tend to *our Happiness*, and to the avoiding Misery?' 'Tis thus we call a *Taste wrong*, when it makes that *Food* at present *grateful*, which shall occasion *future Pains*, or *Death*. This Question concerning our *Self-Interest* must be answered by such *Reasoning* as was mentioned above, to be well managed by our *Moralists* both antient and modern.⁴²

Hutcheson deals in a very brief way with what he sees as the necessary connection between virtue and personal good. His answer is that our pursuit of virtue necessarily brings about our own good. That which is tasteful or virtuous cannot fail to be in our own real self-interest. Here, Hutcheson recurs to a basic idea that virtue is necessarily to its bearers good, though, like his previous argument, this is not to be taken as support for the egoist conclusion that, hence virtue is sought because it is to its bearer's good. His discussion of the third sense of the question seems a little misplaced. If we confine ourselves to this section of the *Illustrations* the weakness is that here Hutcheson provides no argument linking the moral sense with virtue. I take up these issues up in the fifth chapter.

4:3 Hutcheson on the moral sense: basic themes

In his first work Hutcheson describes the moral sense as the discernment of moral good and evil. As part of his argument for a *sui generis* moral sense Hutcheson argues for distinct categories of goods, and different ways of responding to these goods. For

⁴² Hutcheson, *ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

Hutcheson, there are natural and moral goods: no one confuses the difference between the two. We have different sentiments for the different categories of goods, and like Descartes and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson considers that our sentiments or affections are in some way necessarily veridical. On the difference between natural and moral goods Hutcheson writes in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*:

Had we no *Sense of Good* distinct from the *Advantage* or *Interest* arising from the external Senses, and the Perceptions of *Beauty* and *Harmony*; our *Admiration* and *Love* towards a *fruitful Field* or *commodious Habitation*, would be much the same with what we have towards a *generous Friend*, or any *noble Character*; for both are, or may be *advantageous* to us.⁴³

Hutcheson considers that a confusion in our feelings towards natural and moral goods is unthinkable. According to Hutcheson people *do* discern a difference between such goods, and this is the ground for a distinct moral sense. We discern the relevant differences between moral and natural goods by introspecting on our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation. Similarly, our feelings of approbation and disapprobation are sufficiently nuanced so that we feel approbation towards moral good, and disapprobation towards moral evil.

Hutcheson's answer is that we cannot fail to bring different sentiments to bear as part of our discernment of the irreducible difference between various goods. Hutcheson appeals to other people noticing the same difference in their sentiments towards natural and moral goods, and he takes this as sufficient warrant to establish the existence of a *sui generis* moral sense. Structurally this is same as the answer he gives concerning a range of internal senses picking out distinct and *sui generis* goods of their own particular kind. Honour and dishonour are discerned by the sense of honour, benevolence and malevolence by the sense of public good, and so on. Hutcheson does not consider that he multiplies the number of internal senses and yet provides no test of what abilities have the status of senses and which do not.⁴⁴

⁴³ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 107.

⁴⁴ Adam Smith is the first clearly to bring this criticism to bear, though Hume too has an argument against a very large number of affections. See chapters 7 and 8 below.

Degrees of metaphor

Although Hutcheson likens the activity of the moral sense to perception there is a question how metaphorical he takes this perception to be, and whether the degree of metaphor changes. Throughout his writings Hutcheson makes different points about the nature of the moral sense with the aid of different types of non-metaphorical and metaphorical perception.

At the least metaphorical, moral perception is the same as ordinary perception. Hutcheson is always a little more circumspect than this. Only when he is discussing moral error does he directly liken the moral sense to ordinary perception, but when the moral sense is correct, Hutcheson does not draw a detailed comparison between perception by the external senses such as sight and hearing and perception by the moral sense. These things can only be gleaned from isolated comments in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, but they are clearer in the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*.⁴⁵ There Hutcheson writes that our senses of perception may be occasionally deranged, and hence the deliverances of those senses unreliable. Despite this, there is no reason to doubt the general reliability of the sense in giving us accurate awareness of what is there to be perceived.⁴⁶ A further point is that the deranged sensation may be corrected by reason, but that this does not warrant us thinking that the original (incorrect or correct) deliverance was one of reason, rather than sensation. Hutcheson is not concerned to give an extended account of the similarities between external (or normal) and moral perception. Rather, he is concerned to provide an argument for the nature of

⁴⁵ See, for example, Hutcheson's *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 116, for example, where he writes that self-interest may cause us to do something for reward, without making us approve of our action. Hutcheson continues, a physician's advice has no more efficacy in making a nauseous potion pleasant to the taste, even though it may be necessary for our health.

⁴⁶ Norton remarks that Hutcheson does question his presumption of ontological realism. See Norton, *David Hume*, p. 80, fn. 42 (continued from p. 79). The issue comes up in a letter to William Mace, written in 1727.

the moral faculty as a faculty of sensation.⁴⁷ With this he can rebut the rationalist's claims that reason is fundamental to our moral thinking. So while similarities between external perception and moral perception can be drawn, the most important point for Hutcheson is that the nature of the moral faculty involves sensation, and not reason.

Hutcheson generally allows a degree of metaphor in his depiction of the activity of the moral sense. One of his definitions in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* makes the point that:

[the] Power of receiving these Perceptions may be call'd a MORAL SENSE, since the Definition agrees to it, viz. a *Determination of the Mind, to receive any Idea from the Presence of an Object, which occurs to us, independently on our Will.*⁴⁸

Hutcheson here qualifies moral objects. He contrasts them with non-moral, or incorrect moral perceptions of advantage or interest, rather than non-moral things such as coloured or tactile objects and perceptions. The context is one in which Hutcheson is insisting on the negative point that moral perception, as it usually and correctly occurs, does not involve notions of either advantage or interest. As well as wanting to establish beyond doubt that the deliverances of the moral sense are most often non-willed, he accounts for their correctness by saying that they are, or depend on, proper notions of self-interest or disinterest. Hutcheson draws a contrast between the non-willed perception of moral good and the 'perception' of advantage which he considers morally ambiguous. He appeals to intrinsic distinctions between sentiments with which we assess various situations. Hutcheson writes:

SUPPOSE we reap the same *Advantage* from two Men, one of which serves us from *Delight* in our Happiness, and *Love* toward us; the other from Views of *Self-Interest*, or by *Constraint*: both are in this case equally beneficial or *advantageous* to us, and yet we shall have quite different Sentiments of them. We must then certainly have other Perceptions of *moral Actions* than those of *Advantage*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Norton's account of the similarities between perception and moral perception in 'Hutcheson on Perception and Moral Perception', *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 59 (1977), pp. 181-197. See also *David Hume*, pp. 73-86.

⁴⁸ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ *loc. cit.*

Hutcheson speaks in a metaphorical way about the objects of the moral sense. The language of perception is used, but when it is considered closely, it is apparent that Hutcheson consistently claims that with this particular sense we notice morally pertinent features of people's actions, affections and characters. In the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* he provides the most detailed account of those factors that are most pertinent to moral assessment. Briefly, the aspects of people's actions and characters that he points to are threefold: they include the external motion of the action, and its tendency to the happiness or misery of some sensitive nature; and our apprehension or opinion about the affections of the agent. Both these are external to the observer and at least intersubjectively real. Hutcheson's terminology is that these things really exist whether they had been perceived or not, and they have a tendency to certain ends. The third condition involves the perception of approbation or disapprobation arising in the observer. Since this is only one facet among several, and the only strongly subjectivist facet, Hutcheson cannot be claimed to be an emotivist on this point.⁵⁰

A different way in which Hutcheson may consistently use a metaphorical devices is in his depiction of the moral sense as making us aware of beauty, or, specifically, the form of beauty to do with actions and character, the beauty of virtue. The question is how Hutcheson conceives of moral beauty. Does he mean by this no more than having virtues, or does he suggest that moral beauty is in part the cognitive or pleasurable response of onlookers? The capacity for virtue and the cultivation of the virtues pertain to agents, yet the allusion to cognitive or pleasurable responses implies the presence of spectators whose role in identifying moral beauty is not yet made clear.⁵¹ These issues are discussed at length in the final section of this chapter. In sum, Hutcheson uses different degrees of metaphor in discussing different aspects of the moral sense.

⁵⁰ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, pp. 282-283. In Peach's ed. of the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, see pp. 163-164.

⁵¹ These issues about moral sensibility and moral beauty depend on material that has not yet been discussed. I postpone such discussion till later in this chapter.

Ontological realism

Like the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson claims that not only are the perceptual experiences of similarly situated people uniform, but what is perceived is a matter of fact. The ontological realism that Hutcheson endorses is supported by his belief in teleological order. He never explicitly substantiates this view. However, he takes it as indisputable that there are real moral objects with objective qualities that are apparent to right-minded, or well cultivated observers.⁵² These objective qualities are the dispositional qualities of people's actions, characters and affections. Hutcheson thus considers that accurate and inaccurate moral assessments can be made. The accuracy of such assessments depends on how well people understand their own or other people's intentions and motives, for these are the qualities that identify moral actions by bearing appropriate virtue and vice terms.

Related to Hutcheson's presumption of an ontological reality is a depiction of the perceptual analogy that is not without subtlety. Hutcheson never writes as though the moral sense is engaged only in an occurrent fashion, when presented with objects of the relevant sort. This would make nonsense of the idea that people's characters have moral traits, and the crucial idea that we appreciate the moral significance of characters.

Hutcheson, however, does not draw out the connections and the similarities between the general question, what are moral qualities, and the specific question, what moral quality is being instantiated on this occasion? Perhaps he sees the connection as too obvious to need labouring. Because of this lacuna, as well as the diffuseness of his account of the moral sense generally, Hutcheson has consistently been interpreted in recent times either as an emotivist or a realist.

⁵² That Hutcheson speaks of moral objects and moral qualities, and not just perceived qualities or moral pleasures and pains can be seen in the opening pages of his *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 103, where he speaks of objects causing pleasure. This is similar to his terminology in the opening pages of *Concerning Beauty*, pp. 1-2, where he refers to 'external objects'.

William Frankena's article of 1955 has been largely responsible for promulgating the view that Hutcheson was an emotivist.⁵³ Frankena and others found that the moral sense tradition, and Hutcheson in particular, wrote of the use of the moral sense as necessarily involving a personal and subjective response, often an emotional or affective response. The question such an interpretation raised was whether this emotion was cognitive or non-cognitive, consciously present to its bearer, or otherwise. This reading of Hutcheson still enjoys favour. Writers such as Wilker Korsmeyer and Radcliffe argue that Hutcheson gives an account of moral or aesthetic qualities that are identified by means of the personal emotional responses of *normal observers*.⁵⁴ This appeal to normal observers escapes some of the excesses of subjectivism, but retains the notion that intersubjective agreement among like-responding people is the best court of appeal to which disagreements can be brought.

Rival to this is the realist interpretation made current by David Norton, and disputed by Kenneth Winkler.⁵⁵ On Norton's interpretation moral qualities of determinate sorts reside in people's affections, actions and characters. These are qualities of intentions or motives. In more or less a fair and balanced pursuit of their interests and goods people display virtues and vices.

As well as discussing Hutcheson's ontological realism, Norton relates this theme to Hutcheson's commitment to a providential teleology. This teleological view, as Norton reports, is one of the most substantial supports for Hutcheson's realism. Like the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson's belief in a designing and benevolent God substantiates his belief in objective moral standards and people's ability to display

⁵³ Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16 (1955), pp. 356-375.

⁵⁴ Carolyn Wilker Korsmeyer, 'Relativism and Hutcheson's Aesthetic Theory', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), pp. 319-330, especially p. 326. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, 'Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3 (1986), pp. 407-421, especially pp. 412 and 412.

⁵⁵ Kenneth H. Winkler, 'Hutcheson's Alleged Realism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 179-194. David Fate Norton 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 397-418.

or fail to live up to these standards.⁵⁶ It is because of Hutcheson's ontological realism that he is able to make such a strong case for the correctness of the moral sense deliverances, and the possibility of correcting what are occasionally inaccurate deliverances.⁵⁷

Non-willedness and correctness

By discussing the moral sense in terms of perception Hutcheson draws attention to the way the moral sense works independently of our will. According to Hutcheson, the activity of the moral sense involves perception of the morally pertinent features under our purview. As we unfailingly perceive coloured and tactile objects as they present themselves, so we perceive moral objects. As we do not will what we shall see, neither can we will what we notice about the morally pertinent features of characters, actions and affections as they present themselves. Hutcheson writes in the *Nature and Conduct of the Passions*:

In like manner, *Affections, Tempers, Sentiments* or *Actions*, reflected upon in our selves, or observed in others, are the constant *Occasions* of agreeable or disagreeable Perceptions, which we call *Approbation*, or *Dislike*. These *Moral Perceptions* arise in us as necessarily as any other Sensations; nor can we alter, or stop them, while our *previous Opinion* or *Apprehension* of the *Affection, Temper, or Intention* of the Agent continues the same; any more than we can make the Taste of Wormwood sweet, or that of Honey bitter.⁵⁸

Standing behind this idea of non-willedness is Hutcheson's presumption that the senses, including the moral sense, are correct in their deliverances unless countervailing conditions occur. This notion of correctness is underwritten by Hutcheson's belief in a providential teleology. With this presumption of correctness, Hutcheson does not labour the detail of what he considers correct moral perception to involve. This lack of detail is

⁵⁶ Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 87-92, especially pp. 90-91.

⁵⁷ Norton's discussion of Hutcheson on the moral sense is discussed at length below in this chapter.

⁵⁸ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, pp. 3-4. This is very close to Samuel Clarke's use of a biblical tag from Isaiah on the eternal and immutable distinction between moral right and wrong.

noticeable when we begin looking for accounts and explanations of what it is to perceive moral affections and characters. However, Hutcheson does provide accounts of what it is for the moral sense to be incorrect. The incorrectness that he describes involves incorrect notions of (real) self-interest, as well as errors caused by other prevailing conditions, such as errors of education, prejudice, and the incorrect association of ideas. Hutcheson's list is not so different from what we have seen in Samuel Clarke.⁵⁹

Given Hutcheson's presumption that the senses can be correct, he has to give some account of what it is for the senses to be in error. He considers that the moral sense is usually correct, unless self-interest intrudes and causes us to assess situations in ways which are morally incorrect. Hutcheson is concerned about theoretically inclined groups who concede that self-interest *simpliciter* is the only 'moral' perspective. Such are the egoists and the Epicureans, who claim that individuals are the arbiters of moral right and wrong. Hutcheson's vehement rejection of such a view can be seen in his constant reminders that pleasure, advantage or interest do not make moral categories to be what they really are in themselves.

Hutcheson considers and rejects two possible sorts of objections that the egoists may raise. The first is that virtue is in our self-interest, and that therefore we choose to be virtuous to further our self-interest. The second questions whether we would not overturn our notions of virtue in order to secure our self-interest.

Hutcheson responds to the first question, that, while it may be the case that virtue is in my self-interest, this is not my reason for electing to behave in a virtuous way, and neither is it a reason for approving either my own or other people's virtuous behaviour.⁶⁰ This is an important point in the development of his argument against the psychological egoists. These differ from Hutcheson in two ways: they claim that all of

⁵⁹ I do not want to deal with specific forms of error here, because in providing such detail Hutcheson makes clear that errors of the moral sense are only metaphorically errors of *perception*. Since he provides no independent account of the errors of moral sensibility, I will deal with specific forms of moral sense errors in the later section to do with moral sensibility.

⁶⁰ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 118-119.

our actions further our pursuit of self-interest, and they reject the view that any action can be chosen purely to advance virtue.

Posing the second question, whether self-interest would not overturn our notions of virtue, Hutcheson acknowledges the empirical fact that people do occasionally follow their interest, rather than being consistently virtuous. He writes:

I may easily be capable of wishing, that another would do an Action I abhor as *morally Evil*, if it were very *Advantageous* to me: *Interest* in that case may overballance my Desire of *Virtue* in another. But no *Interest* will make me approve an Action as *Good*, which, without that *Interest* to my self, would have appear'd *morally Evil*. The *Sense* of the *morally Good*, or *Evil*, cannot be overballanc'd by *Interest*.⁶¹

Admittedly the argument above is somewhat weak: Hutcheson speaks of the third person case of approving an action, rather than the first person case of choosing to act in a certain way, but the two are indelibly related in that the same standards apply to both. According to Hutcheson, I may wish that other people act so as to advance my natural good, but this cannot alter my moral perception of their action; and we may be bribed to change our overt behaviour towards others to advance our interest. In neither case do we mistake what is morally good.

However, in apparent contradiction to all this, Hutcheson's whole strategy for accommodating errors of the moral sense is to suppose the agent's moral sense is corrupted by spurious self-interest. When this is not the case, then his normal account is one in which there is a moral good and evil of the case, and realizing that this is so, we either elect to act in an appropriate way, if this is itself reasonable, or we approve of what others do, if they act in ways which we understand as appropriate. If distorting notions of self-interest have obtruded, then such notions may become habituated:

IF any one becomes satisfy'd with his own Conduct in such a case; upon what Ground is it? how does he please himself, or vindicate his Actions to others? Never by reflecting upon his *private Advantage*, or alledging this to others as a Vindication; but by gradually warping into the *moral Principles* of his *new Party*; for no Party is without them. And thus Men become pleas'd

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 119.

with their Actions under some Appearance of *moral Good*, distinct from *Advantage*.⁶²

Hutcheson's insistence on the non-willed aspect of the moral sense leads to a significant error of emphasis in his thinking. He confuses the non-willed aspect of the moral sense with the correctness of the moral sense. This is somewhat hard to identify as it does not seem part of Hutcheson's explicit purpose, but it can be located in one or two arguments that Hutcheson uses repeatedly. Generally, it amounts to the presumption that people are correct in the deliverances of the moral sense unless specific countervailing conditions prevail.

The first argument is by analogy, and has to do with the correctness of ordinary perception. By this Hutcheson means to make the point that the senses are correct in their deliverances, or their representations of real objects, unless distorting conditions occur.

In the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Hutcheson questions:

'BUT may there not be a *right* or *wrong State* of our *moral Sense*, as there is in our other *Senses*, according as they represent their Objects to be *as they really are*, or represent them otherwise?' So may not our *moral Sense* approve that which is *vicious*, and *disapprove Virtue*, as a *sickly Palate* may dislike *grateful Food*, or a *vitiating Sight* misrepresent *Colours* or *Dimensions*? Must we not know therefore *antecedently* what is *morally Good* or *Evil* by our *Reason*, before we can know that our *moral Sense* is *right*?⁶³

Hutcheson at this point draws a distinction between two forms of sensations; those which are perceptions in our minds, and not images of any like external quality, and those which are images of something external. The first he calls sensible ideas, and they include colours, sounds, tastes, smells, pleasure and pain. The second Hutcheson calls concomitant ideas of sensation: they include duration, number, extension, motion and rest. Hutcheson thinks that disorders can arise among both sorts of sensations:

As to the *purely sensible Ideas*, we know they are *alter'd* by any Disorder in our *Organs*, and made *different* from what arise in us from the same Objects at other times. We do not denominate Objects from our *Perceptions during the Disorder*, but according to our *ordinary Perceptions*, or those of others in

⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

⁶³ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 281. See Peach ed., pp. 162-163.

good Health: Yet no body imagines that therefore *Colours, Sounds, Tastes*, are not *sensible Ideas*. In like manner many *Circumstances* diversify the *concomitant Ideas*: But we denominate Objects from the Appearances they make to us in an *uniform Medium, when our Organs are in no disorder, and the Object not very distant from them*. But none therefore imagines that it is *Reason* and not *Sense* which discovers these *concomitant Ideas*, or *primary qualities*.⁶⁴

Hutcheson reasonably takes it as indisputable that the external senses exist. His concern is to establish a preliminary point against the rationalists that, even if the aberrant sensation is corrected by reason, no one brings into doubt the basic nature of the faculty (of sight or taste) as a faculty of sensation and not reason. His purpose is analogous in the case of the moral sense. Holding that the moral sense is a *sense*, and not a faculty of reason, Hutcheson assumes its general correctness on the basis of its non-willedness. Here, however, the rationalists do not accept his premise that the correctness of the deliverances of the moral sense does not involve some primary role for reason. The dependability of the senses, and the moral sense, is a subsequent question, dependent on the existence of the sense at issue. Even granting that we all have a moral sense, its operation can occasionally be in error. The important point for Hutcheson is that these errors do not bring in to doubt the reality or the nature of the moral sense as a *sense*. Errors occur in both the moral sense and the other senses. Reason can be brought to bear to correct those errors. According to Hutcheson nobody mistakes vision or corrected vision as a exclusive deliverance of reason. Neither, according to Hutcheson, should they think that the verdicts of the moral sense, whether corrected or not, have their origin in reason.

A second form of argument for the basic correctness of the moral sense concerns the cognitivity of the senses and affections. Hutcheson takes it as indisputable that the senses and affections are cognitive. This can be seen clearly with respect to the affections in the following:

Now, could we by command of the will directly raise what affections we desire, from these motives we could raise kind affections. But a temper or set of affections cannot be thus raised. As esteem cannot be raised, by any

⁶⁴ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 282. Peach ed., p 163.

act of the will, toward an object in which no excellence appears, nor fear where there is nothing formidable, nor anger where there is nothing hurtful, nor pity where there is no suffering, nor gratitude where there has been no evidence of prior benevolence; so neither can a mind wholly determined toward selfish good raise in itself kind affections, by a command of its will. The natural cause must be presented before any affection can be raised.⁶⁵

Hutcheson's argument is that we cannot raise affections by will, but that we learn the appropriateness of affection terms, and see the fittingness of naming affections according to their associated mental states. In Hutcheson's thought, the burden always rests with the affections being passively raised as we find that we stand in a certain relation to a specific object. We realize that we are afraid because we can identify the object of our fear; and we come to see that we have compassionate feelings for people in need, because they present themselves to our consideration under the relevant category.

The closeness in Hutcheson's thought between the spontaneity or non-willedness of the affections, and the fact that they do not primarily involve interest can be seen in his brief but repeated comment that we can be bribed to change our overt behaviour towards someone, but that our affections toward them will not follow suit. Hutcheson remarks that we could be forced to ruin a person who opposes our interests, but we cannot hate him while we see him as morally worthy. Hutcheson formulates it in this way on one occasion:

Nay, when we consult our own Hearts, we shall find, that we can scarce ever persuade our selves to attempt any Mischief against such Persons, from any motive of *Advantage*, nor execute it without the strongest Reluctance, and Remorse, until we have blinded our selves into a bad Opinion of the Person in a *moral Sense*.⁶⁶

This is consistent with his belief that our moral perception of people and situations is independent of notions of our interest or advantage. We do not *morally* assess situations with categories of interest or advantage, though Hutcheson has to concede that such categories occur. What he consistently rejects is the notion that such categories of interest can be mistaken for the virtues and vices. This in itself is supported, in Hutcheson's

⁶⁵ Hutcheson, *System*, p. 44.

⁶⁶ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 129.

view, with the presumption that there is an ontological reality that cannot be ignored. On the whole, then, Hutcheson consistently commits the fallacy of assuming that the non-willed operation of the moral sense is often sufficient warrant for its correctness. As has been quoted above, this point is most explicitly made in the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*.⁶⁷

The moral sense as perception or sensibility

The epistemological detail that Hutcheson gives to his moral sense theory is unusual. Neither Shaftesbury nor Butler devised such elaborate accounts of the epistemological underpinnings of their moral sense theories, and inasmuch as they did, they emphasized very different facets of what can be understood by 'sense'. Shaftesbury, as we have seen, emphasizes sensibility and taste, and Butler, insofar as he gives epistemological detail, describes conscience as involving ordinary perception.⁶⁸ Hutcheson, by contrast, develops two parallel accounts of the moral sense. The differences between these two accounts do not develop over time. Both appear as early as the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* of 1725. In a passage where the two appear together, Hutcheson writes:

THIS *moral Sense*, either of our *own* Actions, or of those of *others*, has this in common with our other Senses, That however our Desire of *Virtue* may be counterballanc'd by *Interest*, our Sentiment or Perception of its *Beauty* cannot.⁶⁹

In his reference to both sentiment and perception, Hutcheson refers to two different ways in which the moral sense may work. Moral beauty, or virtue, may be perceived in some manner yet to be explained; or an observer may have a sentiment while regarding moral beauty or virtue. Here I briefly set out what Hutcheson may mean by perception and sentiment with respect to moral right and wrong, virtue and vice.

⁶⁷ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 280.

⁶⁸ On Butler, see chapter 6 below.

⁶⁹ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 116.

As Shaftesbury had before him, Hutcheson describes the moral sense in terms of its discernment of a specific form of beauty and ugliness pertaining to virtue and vice. Hutcheson's first treatise deals with the origin and nature of our ideas of beauty. In its closing paragraph he indicates that he will go on in the moral treatise to discuss the beauty of action, and specifically, the moral beauty of virtue. God in his goodness has constituted us with a sense of beauty; even more importantly he has made us with a moral sense of beauty. Hutcheson writes:

AS to the Operations of the DEITY by *general Laws*, there is a further Reason from a *Sense* still superior to these already consider'd, even that of VIRTUE, or the *Beauty of Action*, which is the Foundation of our greatest Happiness.⁷⁰

Unlike Shaftesbury, Hutcheson on occasion describes the activity of the moral sense as similar to external perception. He has two possible reasons for doing so. Shaftesbury's thesis of the moral sense had not found favour with everyone. Bernard Mandeville in particular heavily criticized Shaftesbury for his optimistic account of human nature, and his attribution of a genuine moral sensitivity to mankind. Hutcheson in his turn certainly disagreed with Mandeville, and it is likely that his awareness of contemporary opposition made him aware of the need to bolster his account in ways that Shaftesbury need not have considered. The second reason comes from Hutcheson's own manner of philosophizing. He is a more systematic philosopher. For reasons of apparent completeness, Hutcheson may have realized that he could compare the moral sense with the external senses, as well as comparing the moral sense with the sense of beauty.

In chapter 3 above I indicated the need to compare Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on their manner of describing the moral sense. Both use more than one notion to do so. They share the need to discern the difference between a person of average moral goodness, occasionally making mistakes and following self-interest rather than virtue, and a person of high moral sensibility. Shaftesbury consistently makes the distinction in terms of a person being aware of simple forms of moral beauty, or complex forms of

⁷⁰ Hutcheson, *Concerning Beauty*, p. 97.

moral beauty.⁷¹ Hutcheson secures the same distinction by differentiating between the *perception* of moral objects or moral beauty, and the *sensibility* towards moral beauty. The difference is a minor one: both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson use the terminology of beauty, though Shaftesbury more consistently. Hutcheson is more explicit in his use of the terminology of perception, and the similarities between external and moral perception.

Hutcheson's use of the perception model answers possible objections to do with disagreement in moral deliverances. Hutcheson's answer is that, as our other senses are occasionally wrong, so is our moral sense. His argument is that nobody takes this as sufficient to bring into doubt the essential nature of the faculties. According to Hutcheson, the faculties of sense are not faculties of reason, even though on occasions specific deliverances of the senses need to be corrected by reason. Similarly with his defence of the moral sense. His methodology is not to insist on the existence of the sense in question. This is secured implicitly. Rather, his defence is designed to secure the nature of the senses in question as senses.

Like the five external senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch, the internal senses of imagination, the public sense, benevolence, and the sense of honour, the moral sense is primarily a faculty of sensation, rather than reason.⁷² Like these other senses, specific acts of perceiving or sensing that are in error may be corrected by reason, but reason's role is not primary. Hutcheson differs widely from the rationalists on this point.

The analogy with sensibility, by contrast, allows Hutcheson to emphasize the *prima facie* correctness of the deliverances of the moral sense, as well as to acknowledge

⁷¹ See Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 344 where he argues that there is in certain things a natural beauty that is recognized as soon as the person sees the object. Children recognize the beauty of regular, but simple figures, whereas those with cultivation or learning recognize more complex instances of beauty.

⁷² Hutcheson writes in the *System* that the moral sense is not confined to those of 'fine education and much reflection'. 'The rudest of mankind shew such notions,; and young minds, who think least of the distant influences of actions upon themselves or others, and have small precaution about their own future interests, are rather more moved with *moral forms* than others.' *System*, p. 25.

its educability and cultivation. On this analogy, errors are corrected from the point of view of a person with a high moral sensibility.

The next two major sections give an account of what Hutcheson establishes by using what I call these two 'models' of the moral sense, one of perception, and one of sensibility. The first likens moral deliverances to perceptual knowledge: we know a courageous act or character as we know a red object or a loud noise. The second likens moral deliverances to knowledge of a specific form of beauty or ugliness; specifically, that to do with virtue or vice. On this analogy we know honest acts, or the character trait of honesty, as we know the beauty of a fine art object.

4:4 *The moral sense as perception*

One of the first definitions of the moral sense as perception occurs in the opening pages of Hutcheson's *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*. Hutcheson offers it as part of an extended argument that runs something like this: by introspection we realize that we are aware of the difference between moral good and evil, and natural good and evil. We do not confuse the damage caused by a storm with the damage caused by an angry person. Further, we mark the difference between intentional and inadvertent behaviour, and confine our moral assessment proper to intentional behaviour. A third major point is that it would be unthinkable for us to be indifferent to the moral qualities of our own behaviour and the moral qualities of other people's behaviour, at least when that behaviour impinges on us directly. Hutcheson thus defines the moral sense as a power of perceiving moral objects independent of our will.⁷³

The leading idea that Hutcheson wants to secure is that we, without willing it, become aware of moral entities within our purview. As we unfailingly perceive coloured and tactile objects as they present themselves, so we perceive moral objects. Typically

⁷³ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 108-109.

these include people's characters, their intentions and motives. When Hutcheson casts his net to the widest they also include affections, and the tendency of actions to bring about happiness or displeasure. What Hutcheson implies is that acts of kindness do not go unnoticed, nor do the hesitations indicative of laziness. Justice is recognized for what it is, as are veracity and fortitude.

Norton's account of Hutcheson on the moral sense

Hutcheson's analogy between the external senses of perception and the perception of the moral sense often substitutes for argument, and he does not draw attention to various disanalogies that can be made. The most important analogies are of the non-willedness and the correctness of the sense, and the status of the sense as one of *perception* and not *reason*. David Norton provides an account of Hutcheson's moral sense in his chapter on 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism' in his *David Hume* book of 1982. Much of the detail of Norton's account is too specific for the present concerns. However, Norton draws out the analogy that Hutcheson draws between the internal and external senses. By following Norton's account the major aspects arising from taking the moral sense as perception can be covered. Norton's criticism is incomplete in two ways. He does not consider Hutcheson's use of the analogy as specifically leading to the idea that moral sense errors occur, and can be corrected. Nor does Norton discuss the sensibility aspects of the moral sense. The use of the perception model to discuss moral error and the correction of error will be discussed in a later part of this section; the sensibility model in the following section.

Norton draws six points of comparison between the external and the internal senses, including the moral sense.

- (1) Pleasure and pain are produced by the external senses as well as the internal

senses.⁷⁴ The locution that pleasure and pain are *produced* by the senses is problematic. Norton himself would want to deny that pleasure and pain are caused by the senses without there being some causal factors distinguishable from the effect itself. Cognitivity is the fact that is presently being lost sight of. Norton's quotation of Hutcheson compounds the difficulty.⁷⁵ Hutcheson writes in an early definition of the senses that:

By Sensation we not only receive the *Image* or *Representation*, but some feelings of *Pleasure* or *Pain*; nay sometimes the Sole Perception is that of Pleasure or Pain, as in Smells, and the Feelings of Hunger or Thirst.⁷⁶

What Hutcheson leaves out of account, and Norton too, is that smells, at least, are always of specific things, and it is the specific object that occasions our pleasure or pain. We may not be able to name all the ingredients in a well-prepared dish, but when we experience pleasure in the aroma of the dish, it is not the exercise of the olfactory ability which occasions or causes the pleasure, but rather what the ability is exercised in discerning, that is, the qualities of the dish.⁷⁷ Similarly, we can argue, the pleasure of witnessing a courageous act is linked to the recognition that courage is being instantiated.

(2) The perceptions of the external senses and the moral sense are involuntary: they are independent of the will, and even more strongly, they are independent of interest.⁷⁸ This has already been discussed above (in the section on non-willedness and correctness).

(3) The external senses and the moral sense are universal principles of the human condition. Variations occur, but these do not demonstrate that the sense is not universal,

⁷⁴ Norton, *David Hume* p 74.

⁷⁵ Nor does Norton's footnote p. 74, fn. 32 seem to clarify the issue. Norton quotes Hutcheson as saying that 'The Pleasure in our sensible Perceptions of any kind, gives us our first Idea of natural Good, or Happiness; and then all Objects which are apt to excite this Pleasure are call'd immediatly Good.'

⁷⁶ Hutcheson, quoted in *David Hume*, p. 74.

⁷⁷ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 116.

⁷⁸ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 74.

only that it is liable to mistake.⁷⁹

(4) Like the external senses, the moral sense operates immediately, without inference. Reason is too slow and liable to error, but people have been constituted with other faculties which operate immediately and instinctively.⁸⁰ The objection likely to be raised by the rationalists is that reason is a faculty too, and though it may work in different ways, and allow for self-reflection, it is the highest of our faculties and the most worthy of a significant role in our moral life. There is some tension which Hutcheson doesn't directly address between stating that the moral sense operates instinctively and immediately and saying that it is particularly a faculty of self-reflection, operating on ideas and conceptions that we have of our own and others' moral behaviour, understood under the categories of the virtues and vices.

(5) Both the external senses and the moral sense may be mistaken; and may subsequently be corrected by reason.⁸¹ This is an important point in elucidating the notion of the moral sense. Unlike Norton, I suggest that Hutcheson asks the question of the fallibility of the moral sense in two different ways. The first is, what can be made of occasional errors of a fundamentally good moral sense. Hutcheson replies that such errors occur, and can in principle be corrected by appeal to normal observers and normal conditions. The second concerns errors about the abiding standards of moral excellence. Hutcheson allows that such errors occur, and can in principle be corrected by appeal to the person of high moral taste.

This theme, while never a major one in Hutcheson's thought, is being drawn out in the present thesis to show that Hutcheson is not limited to claiming that moral error is only answerable by appeal to 'normal conditions'. Hutcheson does not develop to the full his account of a highly sensitive person. Indeed, he does not often make this direct link between the idea of moral excellence, and the idea of a competent judge being

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸¹ *loc. cit.*

available to answer questions of persistent moral error. Rather, his usual emphasis is that neither self-interest nor ignorance are part of a correctly judging spectator. Nevertheless, if Hutcheson does not draw out the full implications of a cultivated moral sense, then he provides sufficient material to suggest that a discussion of high moral sensibility is germane to an understanding of high moral standards.

(6) Finally, according to Norton, the moral sense, as well as the external senses, are said to apprehend aspects of objective or publicly-available reality through perceptions that are presented directly to our consciousness.⁸² Norton's position regarding Hutcheson as a moral realist has been indicated above.⁸³

This list is a useful one for drawing together in a short space, and without technical detail, the arguments that Hutcheson uses to underpin his major claim that there is a distinct and *sui generis* moral sense.

As well as comparing the external senses and the moral sense Norton discusses how Hutcheson takes the moral sense to operate. Norton draws on his comparison to highlight the difference between the external senses and the moral sense. The following is a summary of Norton's account of Hutcheson.

In the case of external sensation several different types of idea occur which bear different relations to what it is they signal about an objective and external reality. Certain bodily motions, according to the regularities of a natural law established by God, are repeatedly the occasion of determinate *sensible* ideas in the mind. Norton paraphrases Hutcheson:

'These sensible ideas are always accompanied by the *universal concomitant ideas* (duration and number), and some of them are accompanied by the *representative concomitant ideas* (extension, figure, and so forth).'⁸⁴

⁸² Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 76-77.

⁸³ See the section in this chapter on Hutcheson's ontological realism.

⁸⁴ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 81.

Norton postulates that the sensible ideas occasion the concomitant ideas and suggests that, while the sensible ideas are:

not themselves the images or representations of external and objective reality ... [they] are in fact the signs by which external and objective reality is known. In one sense, sensible ideas are mere secondary qualities with only subjective or psychological status, but they are nevertheless the first and absolutely essential part of a process that ends in knowledge of objective reality.⁸⁵

Norton's point is compatible with Hutcheson's emphasis on the experiential nature of the sense in question. This in itself is one reason for claiming that subjectivity is an essential component of the operation of the sense according to Hutcheson. This subjectivity is not a personal or idiosyncratic one, and it is this reminder of an external reality that marks Hutcheson as a moral realist, or objectivist.

Norton then discusses the moral sense, saying that for the internal senses, including the moral sense, their ideas are dependent on sensible ideas and concomitant ideas that arise in the process of perception.⁸⁶ Norton explains in this manner:

By this, Hutcheson means to say no more than that the Internal Sense is dependent upon the external senses in that the Internal Sense cannot operate until the temporally and logically prior processes of external perception have reached a stage of relative completeness. We cannot see that an item is beautiful until we have seen it; only after our sensible ideas and their concomitants are experienced can the uniformities or resemblances they possess be perceived by the Internal Sense.⁸⁷

On Norton's account, Hutcheson can be understood as saying that there can be a temporal and logical dependence between the ordinary perceptions of the external senses, and the 'perceptions' of the internal senses, including the moral sense. I am unsure what Norton means by 'until', as this seems only appropriate to describe a temporal dependence. Norton's point appears to be that we don't 'see' the beauty of an item until we see it both with our eyes, and then 'see' with our sense of beauty. In contrast, I

⁸⁵ *David Hume* p 81. Norton has a footnote quoting from Hutcheson at this point to the effect that when he speaks of signals Hutcheson means that the report of a gun doesn't resemble the distress of a ship, but that it signals the distress of the ship. *ibid.*, p. 81, fn. 45.

⁸⁶ Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 82.

think, Hutcheson's emphasis is that we see that one item among others is beautiful *as we see that item*, and at the same time that we see that an item is of a pleasing hue and a proportionate shape.⁸⁸

On the matter of logical priority Norton gives an account of what it is that, in his view, occasions the (completed) 'perceptions' of the moral sense. Hutcheson, according to Norton, considers these perceptions to include '*Affections, Tempers, Sentiments, or Actions*' which we find in ourselves or others.⁸⁹ In another sense, continues Norton, the moral sense has analogous problems to the external senses. The problem is that ideas or 'perceptions' are signs of, but not representations of an external reality. Hence, Norton continues, there is a need to bring into the discussion the spectator's approbation or disapprobation as being informative and veridical about the moral nature of those affections, actions, and so on. Norton thus seems to accommodate an aspect of Hutcheson's subjectivism, even though Norton's emphasis is consistently to argue for Hutcheson's moral realism or objectivism.⁹⁰

Norton appears to be interpreting Hutcheson in this way. Sentiments, affections, actions and the like occur, and occasion a range of (sensible and concomitant) ideas in spectators. Approbation or disapprobation arise in spectators in regular and determinate ways, and these affective and personally-located responses are taken by their bearers to be informative about what it is they are apprehending. Norton writes of Hutcheson that the moral faculty judges its 'objects':

... not in terms of the pleasure or utility they afford, but according to whether they were done with danger or loss to the agent, or performed with little or no regard to the agent's own utility, honour or fame.⁹¹

⁸⁸ The issue of a temporal distinction takes on its significance only when Hume is contrasted with Hutcheson. In chapter 7 I suggest that Hume does indicate that the moral sense is not engaged until acts of reason have been completed. Hutcheson is much less clear on the matter, most often implying that the moral sense is engaged spontaneously and without reason.

⁸⁹ Hutcheson, quoted in *David Hume*, p. 82.

⁹⁰ In the following section on sensibility I will claim that Hutcheson is both an objectivist and a realist.

⁹¹ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 83.

This is partially correct, but I suggest it misidentifies the primary objects of the moral sense. These are actions and motives which may be virtuous or vicious,⁹² and if Norton intimates this indirectly in the above quote, he could have made the point much more forcefully.⁹³ Norton's machinery allows him to say that the moral concomitant ideas are those of the specific virtues and vices, though he does not make such an explicit comment himself. The point is that actions, sentiments or tempers express or display virtues such as courage, honesty and generosity, and vices such as impatience, greed and cowardice. Hutcheson's fullest account involves both cognitivity and specific forms of pleasure or displeasure in response to specific virtues and vices, not just approbation and disapprobation. I turn now to the question how disjunctive moral perception and moral sensibility are.

The differences between perception and sensibility

In the previous chapter I indicated that the moral sense can be described as one of perception or sensibility. Shaftesbury's discussion of the moral sense is interpreted in different ways by Voitle and Norton. The basic question is *whether* the moral sense tradition attributes different tasks to the moral sense, those of perception and sensibility. The subsidiary question is *how* exclusive these tasks are of one another. Hutcheson, and the moral sense tradition more generally, do not explicitly use the term 'sensibility', and yet many of their claims cannot be understood unless this use of the term is conceded.

⁹² See, for example, Hutcheson, *System*, pp. 59-69. He writes on p. 64, 'There is a plain gradation in the objects of our approbation and condemnation, from the indifferent set of actions ascending to the highest virtue, or descending to the lowest vice.'

⁹³ Radcliffe makes a similar type of error in her account of Hutcheson. She finds that there are no strong objective candidates in Hutcheson's account for the moral concomitant ideas, and hence she finds that Hutcheson is only a subjectivist. See 'Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism', p. 418, where she writes against Norton, saying that '(1) Virtue and vice are powers in actions to cause feelings of approbation and disapprobation in human perceivers... (2) Virtues and vices are themselves ideas or perceptions (of approbation and disapprobation, respectively) experienced upon a perceiver's contemplation of certain actions; thus, the existence of virtue and vice depends upon the minds of human perceivers.' Radcliffe seems to take it that the existence of virtue, and not just the perception of virtue, depends on perceivers.

Voitle attributes to Shaftesbury a developing theory in which Shaftesbury's early descriptions of the moral sense suggest it is a perceptual faculty, and later descriptions see it as a faculty of sensibility. (Voitle of course does not discuss Hutcheson.) I consider this mistaken. The idea that the moral sense is both a faculty of perception and a sensibility, and that these are different is closer to Hutcheson than Shaftesbury. Yet even in Hutcheson this is not a matter of development. Both tasks are always attributed to the moral sense by Hutcheson. I have argued that Shaftesbury predominantly discusses the moral sense as a faculty of sensibility.

Norton deals mainly with Hutcheson's comparison of the external and internal senses. I have already suggested that this neglects what Hutcheson has to say about the moral sense as involving sensibility. Norton compares Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on the moral sense, but his comparison turns on their use of a similarity between the external and the internal senses.

The distinction I wish to make is that both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson are ambiguous about the tasks they attribute to the moral sense. Both describe a person of adequate moral behaviour and standards, and a person of high moral standards and taste. However, they provide no detailed instruction as to how a person is to move from one standard to the other. What is most germane is that Shaftesbury secures the distinction by contrasting people aware of simple or complex forms of beauty; and Hutcheson secures the contrast by describing either making use of moral perception or moral sensibility. Hutcheson's case is complicated by his references to moral beauty. This is discussed below. Let us begin the present discussion by looking at Voitle's account of Shaftesbury.

Voitle on perception and sensibility

There have been claims made by recent commentators that Shaftesbury first embraces and then abandons a Lockean epistemology. Robert Voitle claims that Shaftesbury changed the emphasis of his epistemology, from one of a Lockean sense perception, to

one of sensibility. Norton makes a different claim that Shaftesbury made use of the Lockean distinction between internal and external senses in his exposition of the moral sense. While I discuss the first of these accounts in some detail it should be remembered from chapter three that the differences pointed out between Locke and Shaftesbury are of a much greater order. Their basic views of moral motivation and the reality of benevolence are irreconcilable. Whether Shaftesbury makes use of, or modifies, aspects of Lockean epistemology is a relatively minor matter as far as the moral theory is concerned.

Robert Voitle has suggested that Shaftesbury modifies his moral sense theory by (1) concentrating in the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* on the Lockean language of perception and sensation, and (2) modifying this in the *Moralists* to the more original language of aesthetic sensibility. The claim is an important one. I make a similar claim in this chapter with respect to Hutcheson. The question is whether Shaftesbury conforms to Voitle's model. I suggest not, the main reason being that Voitle errs in thinking that Shaftesbury makes more than superficial use of Lockean language in the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*.

The evidence would be located principally in the *Inquiry*. Evidence of a sort exists, but it is more ephemeral and ambiguous than Voitle allows. He writes that the moral sense in Shaftesbury's early work is a 'sense of right and wrong' that is brought to bear *when* we see an action. On seeing an action we bring it into mind where reason readily discerns the public good.⁹⁴ According to Voitle, to call it a sense is only a manner of speaking 'though it may involve sense perception, as it does when the moral activities of others are being judged':

That Shaftesbury called it a sense is probably due to Locke's habit of referring to reflection- 'that notice which the mind takes of its own operations'- as an 'internal sense,' for, especially in the first version of the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury is very careful to stick closely to the psychological principles outlined in Locke's *Essay*.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Voitle, *Third Earl*, pp. 125-128, especially p. 125.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 125. Voitle refers to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 68-69.

If this was the case in the moral assessment of other people's actions and characters, then Shaftesbury would be committing himself to a naive perceptual view of moral qualities or moral objects, in which such things are not brought to the mind of the observer unless they are elicited from outside. This seems to be Voitle's view of Shaftesbury, given that he writes that the sense of right and wrong is engaged *when* we see an action. This view has it that in seeing an action a person sets in process a chain of thinking that has as its origin the perception of an external action. Shaftesbury, I contend, does not hold such a view, but depends on a more sophisticated epistemology. Shaftesbury's epistemological detail, as far as it is present, consistently invokes sensibility.

According to Shaftesbury, it seems to be the case that the moral sense is engaged not at the level of external perceptions, but always at the level of understanding the significance of those external actions and events. Shaftesbury writes that the sight of the man we have just killed elicits huge remorse.⁹⁶ In this specific case it is not merely the dead body that is capable of bringing about this response: we do not feel remorse unless we consider we have done a wrong that we regret. Not every dead body in front of our feet has that specific significance. Rather, the pertinent fact in the present case is that we have caused a needless death, and are painfully reminded of it by the evidence before our feet.

Voitle locates this shift from sense to sensibility in Shaftesbury's later work. He writes:

[Shaftesbury] moved from a precisely Lockean definition of the moral sense in the *Inquiry* to something more broadly based, what is best defined as a temper- 'all that flows from your good Understanding, Sense, Knowledg

⁹⁶ See Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 216 where Shaftesbury writes 'A MAN who in a Passion happens to kill his Companion, relents immediately on the sight of what he has done. His revenge is chang'd into Pity, and his Hatred turn'd against himself. And this merely by the Power of the Object.' The last sentence quoted does not have such a clear antecedent in the 1699, *Inquiry* published by Toland. There, the passionate man beholds 'the miserable state of a dying Creature', Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, p. 217. [The two versions are on facing pages in the *Standard Edition* prepared by Hemmerich and Benda.]

and Will; all that is engender'd in your Heart ... all that derives it self from your Parent-*Mind*.'⁹⁷

To return to Shaftesbury himself, we have already seen in chapter three that while he writes of the moral sense as involving reflection, he also writes of it as affections towards affections. Particularly in an early section of the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* dealing with virtue as distinct from mere goodness, Shaftesbury alludes to our ability to have affections towards actions and affections themselves. These mental processes can proceed only in those creatures that are capable of forming general notions of things. General notions of affections and actions then become available as new objects for our affections, as distinct from having affections only to occurrent items. Shaftesbury compares humans with animals at this point to argue for our larger range of affections, with its inclusion of reflective or general notions.

To paraphrase Shaftesbury, creatures capable of forming general notions of things can raise affections not only towards actual occurrent objects, but also towards actions and 'Affections of Pity, Kindness, Gratitude, and their Contrarys'.⁹⁸ The implication is that animals have no reflected idea of self-consciousness, whereas people can condone their own original affections and actions, or dislike them. According to Shaftesbury, this reflective ability allows us to consider the affections of others. Hence we are in a position to feel cheered by other people's generosity and courage, and dismayed at their greed or laziness, whether they take from us or from other people.

The burden of these details provides sufficient evidence to deny the claim that Shaftesbury uses predominantly Lockean sensory terminology to characterize the early account of the moral sense. On the contrary, the language of affection, rather than perception and sensation, and the language of moral beauty provide evidence that Shaftesbury consistently conceived the moral sense, or the discernment of moral objects,

⁹⁷ Voitle, *Third Earl*, pp. 319-320. Voitle quotes from Shaftesbury's 1704 edition of the *Sociable Enthusiast*. (A later version of this work was published as *The Moralists*.) Voitle expresses similar opinions about Shaftesbury's modification of Lockean ideas in *Third Earl*, pp. 329 and 339.

⁹⁸ Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 66.

as akin to sensibility. Thus I suggest that Shaftesbury did not greatly change his conception of the moral sense over time, and that it always involved the notion of sensibility.

Norton on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson

Norton, like Voitle, considers it significant that Shaftesbury speaks of the moral sense as a sensibility. Unlike Voitle, Norton makes no claim to the effect that this is a thesis which develops over time in Shaftesbury's thought. In this, I agree with Norton. But I disagree with his interpretation of the activity of the moral sense, specifically, its dependence on ordinary or external perception. Norton writes in an early chapter in *David Hume*:

Although Shaftesbury does not make clear just how this moral perceiving takes place, he does insist on the analogy with ordinary perception Actually, though, he is more helpful when he suggests that moral perception is analogous to the perception of physical beauty, for both of these activities seem dependent upon a prior perception of physical objects (including events and actions), which are then, so to speak, re-perceived by the moral sense or sense of beauty.⁹⁹

A problem of emphasis with Norton's account is that he fails to acknowledge that Shaftesbury describes moral beauty and deformity as *sui generis* moral categories.¹⁰⁰ If I have understood Shaftesbury correctly, then his comparison of virtue with moral beauty is not trivial, and he does presume that there are ontological items of morally beautiful and ugly kinds to be noticed by perspicuous observers. Norton's interpretation does not make this point, but confines itself to explaining the 'perception' of the moral sense as a process set in train by ordinary perception. Norton's emphasis is on the perspicuousness

⁹⁹ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 41. See also Norton's *From Moral Sense*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁰⁰ Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, pp. 344-346.

and the cognitivity of the moral sense, and he does not discuss at any length its similarity to what Hutcheson will afterwards more explicitly describe as a sense of beauty.¹⁰¹

As discussed several pages above, Norton's view of Hutcheson seems to be that seeing x and seeing that x is beautiful or virtuous are different acts. The quotation above makes the same point with respect to Shaftesbury. The first is a single mental act, and the second composed of at least two mental acts, one consequent upon a successful 'seeing x '. I do not think this a fair interpretation of Shaftesbury or Hutcheson. In Shaftesbury's case, his discussion of the distinctness of seeing something and seeing that something is beautiful is cast in the language of desiring things that are truly beautiful. This form of argument occurs repeatedly in Part III of *The Moralists*. In one formulation Shaftesbury contrasts the nature of animals, incapable of knowing beauty, and the nature of man, whose noblest conception of beauty depends on his mind and reason. Shaftesbury writes:

For as the *riotous* MIND, captive to *Sense*, can never enter in competition, or contend for Beauty with the *virtuous* MIND of Reason's Culture; so neither can the *Objects* which allure the former, compare with those which attract and charm the latter.¹⁰²

In Hutcheson's case, there is textual support for my view that the moral sense is either a perceptual ability or a matter of sensibility. Part of the difficulty is that Hutcheson speaks of the moral sense in disparate ways, and does not make it clear how different perception and sensibility are. My principal claim here is that Norton does not sufficiently indicate the degree to which Shaftesbury and Hutcheson liken the activity of the moral sense with the sense of beauty. Hutcheson in particular names a large repertoire of internal senses: the sense of beauty, the sense of honour, the public sense, and benevolence.¹⁰³ Hutcheson appears to have no comprehensive statement about the

¹⁰¹ For Norton's comments on Shaftesbury see *David Hume*, pp. 41-42, especially p. 41; and for Norton's comments on Hutcheson see *ibid.*, especially p. 82.

¹⁰² Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, p. 360.

¹⁰³ Hutcheson, *System*, pp. 15-27. This is part of a chapter called 'Concerning the finer Powers of Perception.'

similarities and the relationships between the internal senses. Nevertheless, it is worth indicating that Shaftesbury and Hutcheson describe the moral sense as involving both perception and sensibility, and that this is related in some way to their description of the moral sense and the sense of beauty. These issues are discussed at more length in the final section of this chapter, in which I consider what Hutcheson understands by taking the moral sense as a moral sensibility. For the present, I next turn to what Hutcheson makes of occasional errors of the moral sense, and the manner in which such errors can be countered.

Perceptual errors of the moral sense

Hutcheson's basic presumption is that the moral sense is accurate as a sense, and correct in its deliverances. However, he allows that errors of the moral sense occur, and his usual comment at this point is that distorted self-interest is the reason for these errors.

Hutcheson asks whether the moral sense can be incorrect in its representations of moral objects, as other senses can occasionally be distorted. As with perceptual discrepancies of the external senses, Hutcheson argues that these discrepancies are realized for what they are, and the reasonable precaution is that in these instances we appeal to other people with properly-working perceptual apparatus, or we suspend judgement until we are ourselves no longer biased. Hutcheson writes that this is the case with the moral sense as well. Most importantly, he denies that the occasional errors of the moral sense should bring into doubt the existence or the nature of the moral faculty, as one principally of sense and not reason. Hutcheson's explanation of what has occurred is that incorrect notions of self-interest have obtruded, and caused us to see things in morally inaccurate ways.

Pragmatically, Hutcheson's response to the question about what should be done on these occasions is to appeal to the normal observer, working in normal conditions. In the case of the perceptions of the external senses, Hutcheson writes that 'we denominate Objects from the Appearances they make to us in an *uniform Medium, when our Organs*

are in no disorder, and the Object not very distant from them.’¹⁰⁴ In the moral case, Hutcheson gives three criteria necessary to the correct identification of an action. These span both objective and subjective features. Hutcheson insists, though, that the subjectivity is of a special sort. This discussion occurs in the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*. There Hutcheson specifies the first criterion as the idea of the external motion, and the second as our inference to the agent’s motives.¹⁰⁵ The first is difficult to understand: I take it to be the ‘external’ action itself, in that both a premeditated attack and self-defence might look exactly alike to an observer unaware of agents’ motives.¹⁰⁶ I leave this aside, however, and deal more narrowly with the third criterion.

Specifically, Hutcheson gives as the last criterion the perception of approbation or disapprobation arising in the observer according as the affections of the agent are apprehended kind in their just degree, or deficient or malicious.¹⁰⁷ He remarks that this approbation is not an image of something external, in the way that neither the pleasures of harmony, nor tastes nor smells are images of something external. Nevertheless, and this is to interpret Hutcheson, approbation and disapprobation are cognitive experiences that cannot be reduced to reason or confused with other internal senses; and in being essentially experienced, they are subjective in that any like-minded person will experience the same object in the same way. In a possible rebuff to Locke on the question of limited categories of pleasure and pain Hutcheson writes of the reality of virtue and vice and the roles of sense and reason in apprehending these things:

But let none imagine, that calling the *Ideas of Virtue 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. But whether our *moral Sense* be subject to such Disorder, as to have *different Perceptions*, from the same apprehended *Affections* in an Agent, at *different times*, as the *Eye* may

¹⁰⁴ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 282.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

¹⁰⁶ Julius Kovesi, *Moral Notions*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

¹⁰⁷ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 283.

have of the Colours of an unalter'd Object, 'tis not easy to determine: Perhaps it will be hard to find any Instances of such a *Change*. What *Reason* could correct, if it fell into such a *Disorder*, I know not; except suggesting to its *Remembrance* its *former Approbations*, and representing the *general Sense* of Mankind.¹⁰⁸

Hutcheson's hesitancy in directly saying that the moral sense can be ambivalent or incorrect is well-founded, for if he allows it too openly then he runs the risk of being paradoxical. The problem is this. Hutcheson's account of the moral sense closely links the idea that we notice moral situations accurately and in normatively correct ways, and that we respond by bringing the appropriate virtue to bear. Seeing a situation in a certain way, the implication is that we are sufficiently motivated to respond in an appropriate and virtuous manner. This is the burden of Hutcheson's moral theory. The presumption behind it is that there is a *determinate* situation to be noticed, and that hence we will notice it. Thus he has a difficulty if he admits that the moral sense can err.

The degree of ambivalence that Hutcheson accommodates in understanding moral situations comes from our role in that situation. Hutcheson makes use of the Ciceronian notion of a single person instantiating a number of determinate roles in relation to other people, each role with a related set of expectations and duties.¹⁰⁹ One specific example that he gives is of the way in which different roles mould and delimit amiableness. He lists somewhat effusively 'the *kind Friend*, the *faithful, prudent Adviser*, the *charitable and hospitable Neighbour*' and so on, saying:

[I]f we consider, that these were *all the good Offices* which his Station in the World gave him an Opportunity of performing to Mankind, we must judge *this Character* really as amiable, as those, whose external Splendor dazzles

¹⁰⁸ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ For example, Cicero writes in his *De officiis* that 'of all those useful and important subjects, which philosophers have handled so largely and accurately, the precepts they have delivered about Offices or Duties seem of the largest extent and comprehension; for they take in every part of our lives, so that whatever we go about, whether of public or private affairs, whether at home or abroad, whether considered barely by ourselves, or as we stand in relation to other people, we lie constantly under an obligation to some duties: and as all the virtue and credit of our lives proceed from the due discharge of this, so all the baseness and turpitude of them result from the non-observance of the same.' *De officiis*, trans. by John Warrington in *Cicero's Offices*, London: Dent (1966), p. 3.

an injudicious World into an Opinion 'that they are the *only Heroes* in *Virtue*.'¹¹⁰

Any other variation or ambivalence concerning determinate situations he has to identify as being caused by self-interest, otherwise he begins to countenance the possibility that the situations are less determinate, or less real, than he has indicated.

The residual difficulty is that Hutcheson realizes that people do not always act in morally exemplary ways. He needs to account for the material that empirical evidence furnishes him with, and his way of dealing with it is to insist that self-interest has obtruded. At times though, Hutcheson takes the explanatory value of his moral theory so seriously, that he will draw corollaries that he should not, to the effect that if an error of the moral sense has occurred, it is because self-interest has occurred. This type of non-falsifiability warns us of the extreme optimism, and the misplaced 'scientific' completeness of Hutcheson's account.

The limitations of moral sense as perception

The strengths of seeing the moral sense as a perceptual ability are twofold. It is agnostic about whether moral qualities are subjective or objective. Hutcheson gives material that supports both subjectivity and objectivity. On the matter of subjectivity, even when aspects of moral assessment are the emotions or affections, this is in itself insufficient to make Hutcheson an emotivist in the modern sense of claiming that an emotional response is exhaustive of that which is involved in moral perception. The second strength of Hutcheson's account is that forms of error are allowed, and accountable to Hutcheson's satisfaction in terms of the errors of partiality and spurious self-interest. This gives Hutcheson support for his claims of ontological realism and hence moral objectivity.

¹¹⁰ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 178. 'They' in the final clause seems to refer princes, statesmen and generals and their virtue.

The perceptual model has severe limitations as well, and it is Hutcheson's awareness of these limitations that makes reasonable his attempt to speak of the moral sense as a sensibility. There are two problems, however. The first has to do with the occurrent nature of the external senses. When impinged upon by features of the physical, and moral worlds, we by and large correctly identify what it is that we are currently perceiving via our array of senses. Our sensations are open to reflection and thought, but the weight and importance that this reflection has in our moral thinking is not captured in a discussion of our moral life as moral perception. Hutcheson appreciates this point, and never discusses our moral life as exhaustively understandable in terms of moral perception. Involved in both his discussion of the moral sense as perception, and the moral sense as sensibility is Hutcheson's frequent appeal to the moral exempla in fiction and history. Although Hutcheson never clarifies the type of ontological status these characters have, he is unequivocal in writing that they bear moral qualities as real and existing people do. The use of these exempla supports my claim that Hutcheson understands the limitations of what I have called the perceptual model of the moral sense. Hutcheson uses this model predominantly to further his description of the non-willed and emotive aspects of the moral sense.

The second limitation of the perceptual model is potentially more damaging, and yet Hutcheson has an answer of sorts in his sensibility model. Hutcheson concedes that errors in moral perception do occur, and his answer has been to appeal to the normal observer. This is most clear in the *Illustration on the Moral Sense*. The problem is that Hutcheson says little more than that such a corrective standpoint is available. He characterizes it in no more positive terms, and it is open to the egoist, the Epicurean or the subjectivist to say that this second viewpoint brings with it its own bias, self-interest, and perspectival limitations. Hutcheson needs an answer against rival positions which claim that beauty and moral worth are in the eye of the beholder. Hutcheson's tactic is to move from the normal observer of the perceptual model to the person of high moral sensibility. Moral beauty is best identified and understood by the person of astute sensibility. I suggest then, that intrinsic limitations to the perceptual model, and

Shaftesbury's role as an aesthetic precursor, drew Hutcheson in the direction of speaking of the moral sense as a sensibility. It is to this model that I now turn.

4:5 *The moral sense as sensibility*

As well as writing of the similarity between the activity of the external senses, and the perception of moral objects, Hutcheson also claims that the moral sense involves the perception of moral beauty. It is this that underlies my claim that Hutcheson thinks of the moral sense as a sensibility as much as a perceptual faculty. The difference is between seeing red and square objects, and apprehending beautiful objects. The presumption of realism is involved in the sensibility case too. In the thought of the period there is no doubt that seeing something beautiful is a subjective response. Such an apprehension involves the cognitive identification by and pleasurable response of observers. Nevertheless, all like-minded and correctly educated people will notice those same features caused by the the same object. As has already been mentioned, it is not the case that the move between perception and sensibility marks discontinuous or developing theses. They both appear in Hutcheson's earliest writings, and seem designed more to answer certain distinct sets of objections, rather than vie as rival theories of how the moral sense works. The analogies of perception and sensibility have largely overlapping sets of moral objects: the perceptual analogy encompassing all moral qualities and distinctions, whereas the sensibility analogy deals especially with moral beauty, or high moral excellence.

In the first part of *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* Hutcheson gives a realist account of beauty, without actually giving anything that might count as a substantial ontology. It is clear, though, that beauty is not always in the eye of the beholder, and that wise and competent judges can be appealed to to give us access to determinate standards of beauty, and hence answer whether particular things are beautiful or not. In terms close to the Euthyphro problem, Hutcheson does not doubt that beautiful things are so because they are beautiful, not because critics agree that such things are

beautiful. In the closing lines of the *Inquiry Concerning Beauty* Hutcheson first indicates that the awareness of moral excellence mimics the awareness of beauty. Virtue, or the specifically moral form of beauty of action, is that which is discerned by the moral sense. As has been quoted above, Hutcheson writes that superior to the sense of beauty is the sense of virtue: it is this latter sense which is which is the foundation of our greatest happiness.¹¹¹

Virtue as beauty

It is possible to disagree about how free-standing Hutcheson's aesthetic theory is. The major views, it would seem, make Hutcheson's virtue theory independent of his discussion of the sense of beauty, or claim that this aesthetic discussion is merely an adjunct to Hutcheson's moral account. I incline to a third view that Hutcheson's aesthetic theory is ancillary to but consistent with his moral theory, and devised specifically to support the moral theory. By emphasizing moral beauty as the highest and most perfect form of beauty, Hutcheson, I take it, seeks to explain the concept of virtue as a moral beauty, rather than seeking to comprehensively explain beauty by one of its types, namely the beauty of virtue.

In accounting for the moral beauty of actions Hutcheson appeals to the idea of agreeable proportions or harmony giving rise to pleasure in the engaged observer. Having described the pleasure that arises from observing the regularity of figures, or aesthetic objects, Hutcheson likens this to the pleasure that we derive from observing agreeable manners, affections, tempers, sentiments or actions.

But there is still the question of what this moral beauty consists in. Hutcheson's lack of detail fails him at this point. Taking some license, moral beauty, or the beauty of virtue can be interpreted in three different ways. First, Hutcheson might simply want to

¹¹¹ Hutcheson, *Concerning Beauty*, p. 97. On the beauty of virtue see also *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 105, 108 and 151. Other references are multiple.

claim that anything which is virtuous, and not vicious, instantiates moral beauty. All of the acts of any virtue, whatever their degree, show moral beauty.¹¹² Universal calm benevolence, as well as the narrower, more personal virtues of pursuing one's own interests, as long as they do not interfere with others, are beautiful in a similar way.

The similarity is still relative to a group of observers, in this case, the widest group of like-minded, morally educated people. This argument about relative beauty comes from *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty*. It is often quoted in support of the subjectivists' claim for personal moral standards. This is to take Hutcheson's claims too strongly. Hutcheson writes that, 'All *Beauty* is relative to the Sense of some Mind perceiving it',¹¹³ but his whole tenor is to insist that people are constituted in a uniform way to have a sensibility to determinate objects, and that similar objects will be perceived by similarly sensitive people.

A second way in which virtue might be beautiful is that virtues can be fulfilled in differing degrees: we can exercise wisdom to the height of our intellectual and social powers, and we can exercise benevolence to the extent of our time and material goods; or we can exercise them in some degree less than our full capacity. Hutcheson would insist generally that distorted self-interest has not been part of any perfect fulfillment of a virtue. Beauty in this case seems to be some type of relation or comparison between an ideal of our exercise of a virtue, and our present instantiation of it. Our virtue is beautiful just to the extent that our capacity for it is realized. Such an ideal presumes that we have strong conceptions about what the height of individual virtues would be.

Given Hutcheson's doctrine of a scale of virtue, rising to universal calm benevolence, a third way in which virtues might be beautiful is that some virtues are 'higher', more perfect or complete than others. Hutcheson's relative neglect of justice, prudence and temperance is one way of claiming that benevolence is a better virtue. The

¹¹² Hutcheson asks the general question whether the sense of beauty is able to be refined or cultivated. For example, he writes, rustics are pleased with bad music. See *Concerning Beauty*, p. 66.

¹¹³ Hutcheson, *Concerning Beauty*, p. 35.

case where he does deal with the full range of virtues is in the guise of a set of moral duties to ourselves, to others, and to God.¹¹⁴ Hutcheson writes that human nature must appear a set of ‘jarring principles’¹¹⁵ until some natural connection is discerned among them, with some governing principle regulating their order. Discerning this order is the main business of moral philosophy. Hutcheson remarks that ‘*God and nature has this strife composed.*’¹¹⁶ He continues:

Of this we may have some notion from what is above explained about that moral Power, that sense of what is becoming and honourable in our actions. Nor need we long dissertations and reasoning, since by inward reflection and examining the feelings of our hearts, we shall be convinced, that we have this moral power or Conscience distinguishing between right and wrong, plainly destined and fitted to regulate the whole of life; which clearly discovers to us that course and conduct, which alone we can entirely approve; to wit, that in which all kind affections are cultivated, and at the same time an extensive regard maintained toward the general happiness of all; so that we pursue our own interests, or those of our friends, or kinsmen, no further than the more extensive interests will allow; always maintaining sweetness or temper, kindness, and tender affections; and improving all our powers of body or mind with a view to serve God and mankind.¹¹⁷

That Hutcheson speaks of moral sense as discerning moral beauty is surely a metaphorical device to enhance and develop his account of this purported natural faculty. When he describes the moral sense in this manner he is very close to the later writers, David Hume and Adam Smith, who speak of a moral sensibility. We have so far seen that Hutcheson is genuinely ambivalent about the range of objects apprehended by the moral sense, sometimes spanning the whole range of the virtues and vices, and at other times confining himself to the moral beauty of virtue.

Reasons for appealing to the person with high moral sensibility

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Hutcheson’s *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 1st ed., London (1747). Hildesheim: Olms (1971). In *Collected Works*, vol. 4. See ‘Table of Contents’ for Book I, chs. 4-6. (This title is abbreviated as *Short Introduction*.)

¹¹⁵ Hutcheson, *Short Introduction*, vol. 4, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ *loc. cit.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

Hutcheson seems to have two types of task for the moral observer, and both have to do with differentiating a person with one form of moral sensibility from another. In the first case Hutcheson differentiates between a person with high moral sensibility and an adequate or normal moral sense. Hutcheson is not troubled by the idea of long-term or persistent moral error, and so he cannot need the high moral spectator to fill this niche. But he is concerned to make the negative point that even the uncultivated have a sufficiently high moral sense. He asks in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* whether only the learned make use of important moral distinctions:

NOW, are the *Learned* and *Polite* the only Persons who are mov'd by such Speeches [of barbarity or selfishness] ? Must Men know the Schemes of the *Moralists* and *Politicians*, or the *Art of Rhetorick*, to be capable of being persuaded?¹¹⁸

He considers that this is not the case, but that all people except moral idiots have an adequate moral sense. Part of this can be seen in his argument that the honest farmer loves his children for their own sake, and not for any benefits that can accrue to him because of their concern for their father.¹¹⁹ Hutcheson's insistence that all people by and large have a moral sense helps to substantiate his claims that he describes a natural faculty, and that it is basically a faculty of sense and not reason. This is despite his frequent description of its tasks as involving sensibility, and not mere external perception.

The second way in which Hutcheson uses the idea of a person with high moral sensibility is to exhort people to improve the standard of their moral behaviour. In the Preface to his first work Hutcheson reminds his reader that virtue is a natural part of their constitution, and one that should be fostered. However, he wants not only an adequate display of the virtues, but behaviour that is cultivated up to a high standard. Hutcheson writes in the *System* that animals have their own repertoire of instincts and powers that they derive pleasure from fulfilling: would mankind be any different? And is our highest

¹¹⁸ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 239. See also *ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

sense, the moral sense, substantially different? He confidently states that ‘To each of our powers we seem to have a corresponding taste or sense, recommending the proper use of it to the agent, and making him relish or value the like exercise of it by another.’¹²⁰ He extends his claims by using the metaphor of beauty:

As we improve and correct a low taste for harmony by enuring the ear to finer compositions; a low taste for beauty, by presenting the finer works, which yield an higher pleasure; so we improve our *moral taste* by presenting larger systems to our mind, and the more extensive affections towards them; and thus finer objects are exhibited to the moral faculty, which it will approve, even when these affections oppose the effect of some narrower affections, which considered by themselves would be truly lovely.¹²¹

Hutcheson does not give an exhaustive account of what it would be to cultivate or educate people up to a high moral standard.¹²² Nevertheless, it is a constant intention on his part to insist we are capable of such improvement. Unlike the Calvinists, he considers that all people are capable of virtue, and should do their best to improve. This occasionally comes out in the comment that he does not describe a minimal account of virtue, but exhorts people to the best of virtue.¹²³

Jones’s account of Hume’s aesthetic sense

This section concerns the complexity of Hutcheson’s account, and shows that his ideas both about moral qualities and the apprehension of these qualities is both subjectivist and objectivist. The term I propose to use is ‘triadic’. As will become apparent, I take this from term from Peter Jones’s work on Hume.

¹²⁰ Hutcheson, *System*, p. 59.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹²² See Hutcheson’s *Concerning Beauty*, pp. 18-21 on the contrast between the naive conception of beauty held by children, and the more cultured sense of beauty held by specialists in their field, such as astronomers and botanists.

¹²³ See Preface, *Inquiry*, p. vii and ix; Preface, *Short Introduction*, p. iv; and William Leechman’s Preface to Hutcheson’s posthumously published *System*, p. xxxiii.

Hutcheson's accounts of the operation of the moral sense has attracted much critical attention. Criticism has been diverse. Standard interpretations read Hutcheson either as a subjectivist, or an objectivist. Hutcheson's account is ambiguous about the status of moral acts, feelings and intentions. At different times he shifts between emphasizing the moral acts of agents, or the apprehension of those acts and the approbation towards them (either the persons or their acts) by observers. In present day terminology some of the elements are either subjective or objective. Hutcheson, I think, can be interpreted as having items of his moral sense account belong to one or other of these exclusive categories. In Hutcheson's eyes, the *categories* remain exclusive. The crucial point is that Jones's triadic structure allows us to locate the whole array of Hutcheson's comments regarding different aspects of the moral sense theory, whether the theory alludes to a sense or a sensibility. The present section has two tasks. It gives a brief account of current Hutcheson interpretation; and then considers Hutcheson's account in the light of the critical tool that Jones provides.

Hutcheson's account, I claim, is triadic, a term and an idea that is now occurring in Hume scholarship, with particular respect to the epistemology and the ontology of moral and aesthetic objects. The triad consists in an object to be perceived, a spectator who perceives the object, and an account of the viewing conditions. Peter Jones and Donald Baxter have independently put forward a triadic interpretation of Hume which, I suggest, is to be found in Hutcheson's thought as well.¹²⁴

The main error to do with the subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of Hutcheson is that they are partial. Given that their fault is one of incompleteness, there is some merit in providing a brief account of the present status of criticism regarding Hutcheson's account of the moral sense.

¹²⁴ Peter Jones, *Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1982), ch. 3, 'Scepticism in Criticism'; Donald L.M. Baxter, 'Hume on Virtue, Beauty, Composites and Secondary Qualities', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 71 (1990), pp. 103-118.

For much of the last thirty years Hutcheson has been interpreted as a subjectivist, meaning that moral responses and moral judgements are no more than personal experiential occurrences, usually of feelings, sentiments or pleasure. Especially since William Frankena's article 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory' this view has found favour.¹²⁵ For adherents to this view, the remaining question was whether this subjectivist and emotivist theory was cognitive or non-cognitive. Hutcheson's similarity to contemporary non-cognitive moral theories was emphasized out of proportion. Hutcheson's account was often taken to be an early form of such non-cognitive moral theories, according to which 'purely moral judgements on actions and persons do not involve a cognition or assertion of a truth of any kind, they involve *only* the feeling, expression and evocation of a peculiarly moral pleasure or pain.'¹²⁶

This non-cognitive account has been discredited by writers such as Elizabeth Radcliffe, and Carolyn Wilker Korsmeyer. Both writers interpret Hutcheson as subjectivist. It is of relatively minor importance that Radcliffe develops her account with respect to both the moral sense and the sense of beauty as found in Hutcheson's account, whereas Wilker Korsmeyer writes with regard only to Hutcheson's exposition of the sense of beauty. What is germane is that they both take it that moral and aesthetic qualities are not known independently of their being observed. According to both writers, the observation of these qualities is pleasurable, and the realization that we experience pleasure of specific sorts (moral or aesthetic) constitutes the ground for saying that the quality is of the relevantly-similar specific sort. Nevertheless, for these writers, there are no non-cognitive pleasures. Hence these subjectivists appear to claim that the cognitive content of the pleasure of witnessing a courageous act is the ground for identifying that act as courageous.

¹²⁵ Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory'. See also William T. Blackstone, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory and its Significance For Emotivism in Contemporary Ethics', *Methodos* 11 (1959), pp. 245-267; Bernard Peach, 'Editor's Introduction' in Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. B. Peach. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press (1971), pp. 3-100..

¹²⁶ Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', p. 372 (my emphasis.)

Consideration of Radcliffe's use of Lockean terminology will further the discussion at this point without entering into too much epistemological detail. Radcliffe writes of the Lockean ambiguity between powers, that is, dispositions which exist independently of observers, and secondary qualities, which are *exercised* powers only.¹²⁷ The ambiguity of the terms 'disposition' and 'quality' allows for the discrepancy that powers exist independently from observers, even though such powers may only be able to be defined in relation to specifically placed observers. Radcliffe writes:

Now when Hutcheson writes of a quality which exists *in* objects and yet exists only in relation to minds, he is most likely thinking of a power or disposition - in this case, the power to affect our minds in such ways as to give us pleasure when the object is beautiful and to give us displeasure when the object is ugly. However, while powers or dispositions are *defined* relationally, their *existence* does not depend on the existence of one or the other object of the relation.¹²⁸

Since Radcliffe thinks that such categories are defined with respect to moral and aesthetic observers, she concludes that Hutcheson is a subjectivist.

Wilker Korsmeyer comes to much the same view with respect to subjective and pleasurable aesthetic responses. Indeed, according to her interpretation of these aesthetic responses, they are themselves the aesthetic pleasures, meaning by this that the aesthetic pleasure *is* the aesthetic object.¹²⁹ According to these subjective but cognitive interpretations, the act of noticing moral and aesthetic objects (or qualities) constitutes those objects. Unless experienced, the qualities do not exist, except as powers to cause such dispositional responses in suitable observers. Such accounts are known as spectator accounts; their focus being on the need for suitable observers to successfully notice moral and aesthetic qualities.

¹²⁷ Radcliffe, 'Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism', p. 414. According to Radcliffe's view of Locke, powers are non-psychological and physical dispositions in objects able to cause determinate responses. Such powers are also known as primary qualities.

¹²⁸ *loc. cit.*

¹²⁹ Wilker Korsmeyer, pp. 319, 320, 328.

An important ontologically-realist and cognitive interpretation of Hutcheson and other eighteenth century figures has been made by Norton. *From Moral Sense to Common-Sense* was completed in 1966, and a series of essays and a book on Hume have appeared since, all arguing for moral realism in the eighteenth century. Norton's view emphasizes the realist presumptions that are to be found in Hutcheson's writings. Accordingly, such presumptions are taken to be centrally important in understanding Hutcheson's account, even though the argument that is bolstered by such presumptions is ultimately a teleological one.¹³⁰ Norton specifically deals with the detail of moral perception in Hutcheson's writings. Some of this material we have considered earlier in the present chapter. But Norton neglects to acknowledge that Hutcheson models the moral and the aesthetic sense on each other.¹³¹ Once this facet of Hutcheson's thought is recognized, there are grounds for understanding Hutcheson both as a moral realist or an objectivist, *and* as a subjectivist.

Peter Jones' work on Hume's epistemology of aesthetic criticism is particularly interesting because it postulates of Hume a triadic unity involving the work under perusal, the critic and the viewpoint, this viewpoint being both literal and metaphorical. By a metaphorical viewpoint Jones understands a person's beliefs and attitudes.¹³² I will more generally speak of a moral object, an observer and viewing conditions, and apply this to Hutcheson's account of the moral sense.

On the matter of objective features of the work existing independently of observers, Jones claims that judgement of any work involves more than a mere report of

¹³⁰ See Hume's letter of September 17, 1739, criticizing Hutcheson on his use of the term 'natural'. This is to be found in Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, p. 117. It also occurs in Raphael's *British Moralists*, vol. 2, § 630-632.

¹³¹ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 63 is Norton's most specific comment on the importance of the sense of beauty. Norton writes 'Hutcheson's interest in the sense of beauty is decidedly subsidiary, intended only, he says, to pave the way for the proof of the moral sense which follows.'

¹³² Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, p. 110.

feeling or sentiment. Jones writes that ‘Judgement involves identifying the causes of the pleasurable sentiment, and these causes are to be found among the properties of the work itself. But they are perceivable only from certain viewpoints’.¹³³ Among those able to perceive the properties of a work are critics.

Jones holds that critics have a special status. Critics have both a sure use of inductive, experiential reasoning, and have acquired a proper discernment of the worth of aesthetic objects, accompanied by the appropriate sentiments. Jones balances these elements in the following:

‘Critics can reason more plausibly than cooks and perfumers’ (G.1.217) because cooks are concerned solely with the physical cause of sensations; critics require *good sense* or sound judgement to discern the consistency of a human performance, and to understand it. It must be stressed, however, that a genuine man of taste must experience a pleasurable sentiment when he attends to a work in a specifiable way, because that is the sentiment whose cause and justification he wishes to locate in the work itself.¹³⁴

The same triadic structure is to be found in Hutcheson’s account of the objects or qualities of the internal senses, and so with the verdicts or judgements to do with those qualities. True to the subjectivists, moral and aesthetic qualities and qualities of honour and shame, decency and dignity as relating to distinct internal senses are essentially experiential, meaning by this that Hutcheson provides an account in which they are pleasurable or painful cognitive responses, often involving or accompanied by affective responses, and tailored to motivate the variously-placed spectators to respond in appropriate and determinate ways.

Subjectivity, however, does not exhaust Hutcheson’s account of moral qualities. The cognitive responses are responses to determinate powers that are to be found, albeit occurring in a dispositional way in people’s actions, characters and affections. While Hutcheson never gives full details how these ‘objects’ cause the relevant moral

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 113.

¹³⁴ *loc. cit.*. Jones’s reference is to T.H. Greene and T.H. Grose’s edition of Hume’s *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, London (1875), vol. 1, p. 217.

responses, there is no doubt that he intends them to have real ontological status, rather than being merely subjective responses.

Hutcheson does not raise in any serious way the question about what we can know about other people, their affections and actions. When he raises possible difficulties about other people's moral worth, it is to answer that we can be reasonably certain about other people's thoughts and motives. Specific information might be ambiguous or incomplete, but we cannot be consistently misled. He continues, we do not assess people in terms of isolated actions, but according to a rounded conception of their character. In an unusually clear formulation of the need to understand people's long-term dispositional traits, Hutcheson writes in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*:

THE *moral Beauty of Characters* arises from their Actions, or sincere Intentions of the *public Good*, according to their Power. We form our Judgement of them according to what appears to be their *fix'd Disposition*, and not according to any *particular Sallys* of the *unkind Passions*.¹³⁵

Such material concerning the virtues and vices as morally basic dispositions will be considered in the following chapter. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that Hutcheson writes of the moral sense in a number of ways, and one predominant way is that he talks of the objects of the moral sense as being dispositional traits, or intentions, these things themselves an integral and necessary part of the virtues and vices.

To recapitulate on the complexity or disparity of Hutcheson's account of moral objects, we have seen that the question is raised in the context of dealing with the central problem common to the moral sense writers: whether a criterion can be found allowing us to discern between virtue and vice, or whether only personal stipulations are possible? Hutcheson thinks that criteria are available; that they are not the *a priori* deliverances of unaided reason, but that they are the complex deliverances of a moral sensibility. While he writes of it as a moral sense, Hutcheson writes of its operations as a composite of perception and awareness of forms of moral beauty able to be corrected by reasoning,

¹³⁵ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 174-175.

and often motivating the person in highly specific ways. Hutcheson considers that like-situated people recognize what it is they notice, and they have relevantly similar feelings of approbation or disapprobation caused by that specific thing that they have identified.¹³⁶

So far, only a general similarity has been claimed to exist between Peter Jones' interpretation of what Hume says about aesthetic judgements, and what can be said of Hutcheson's thesis concerning moral qualities. In what follows I outline those elements of Hutcheson's account which seem to fill out a triadic schema of object, observer and viewing conditions for the moral sense. First, its object.

In discussing the complex nature of moral qualities, according to Hutcheson, we find that he does insist on an independently-existing real 'object', which may be a power to produce dispositional qualities in appropriately-placed observers. This is part of Hutcheson's repeated insistence that self-interest and considerations of advantage do not make or detract from our apprehension that certain things belong to determinate moral categories. Courage is morally good, and certain acts are recognized as displaying courage. Accurate and meaningful moral judgement is predicated, for Hutcheson, on the existence of these observer-independent, and 'real' entities.

According to Hutcheson, it is not just that there is a fact of the matter which makes it meaningful to say that some people are correct in their moral judgements, and others less so, but it is the knowledge or apprehension of such facts by the moral sense which appropriately completes the account. As soon as a person performs a moral action, the intentions, affections, and relevant character traits inform and determine the action to be of a certain sort. This may be witnessed by others, and observers in turn can be accurate (or inaccurate) in their assessment of the moral nature of what has been done. Hutcheson's thesis states that it is by the moral sense that this assessment is made, but

¹³⁶ It should be noted I have not discussed Hutcheson's account of moral motivation which is connected with the present discussion.

the background presumption is that it apprehends features of the case that are determinately there to be noticed.

Then, there is Hutcheson's account of observers. Of course, first-person and third-person observers are a necessary and integral part of moral judgements, both as providing the subject matter, and performing the moral judgements upon that subject matter. Hutcheson's moral sense thesis does not commit him only to a spectator theory. There are several reasons which militate against this. His emphasis on our knowledge of intentions and motives in identifying the moral nature of actions places the agent in a privileged position regarding her knowledge of her own moral behaviour. When Hutcheson raises problems, they are to do with other people having inaccurate or incomplete apprehensions of our affections, motives or intentions. In such cases Hutcheson makes a general pronouncement to the effect that our own sentiments, brought about by our observation of this not yet fully identified action, are then informative about the general moral nature of the action that we have seen or contemplated. This is contained in material from the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* that we looked at previously.

This appeal to a spectator's sentiments is taken by Hutcheson to be both veridical and informative. While we may be in doubt about these points, Hutcheson is not hesitant: when we are unsure about others' moral behaviour or actions, our own sentiments brought to bear by our moral sensibility can assist us by completing in some manner what is otherwise missing information.

What is particularly interesting is that Hutcheson works with more than one idea of a spectator, appealing to different types of spectators in seeking to deal with specific theoretical problems. We have already seen that he appeals to normal observers in cases when questions are raised about the accuracy of moral perception *simpliciter*. In the case of divergences of moral sensibility, he appeals either to a *de facto* spectator, that is, a spectator who, though present, has no special knowledge; or he appeals to a competent judge, someone who has a high moral sensibility. While such persons may not have

special access to facts particular to the present case, they are aware of the full range of moral behavior, appreciating subtle differences between closely related virtues and vices.

The third element for consideration if moral judgements are taken to be triadic is the viewing conditions. In Jones' reading of Hume, these are taken to be both literal and metaphorical conditions integral to the apprehension of aesthetic objects. Both literal and metaphorical conditions can be allowed in the moral case as well. Hutcheson indicates that the moral sense deliberates both upon occurrences that we presently witness, and on those we bring to mind with our memory or imagination. According to Hutcheson, when we dwell upon the actions and the deliberations of figures of history and literature, they become available for the perusal of our moral sense in the way that real characters do. Hutcheson cites the history of Regulus, and the imaginary heroes in romances and epics as being worthy of similar moral assessment as we would make of present-day people in existing moral situations.¹³⁷ In viewing figures from literature and history we see or contemplate moral situations with real and determinate features. Our enjoyment and edification in reading such literature and seeing such plays performed involves recognizing the moral aspirations and quandaries of those psychologically-real figures that are portrayed to us.

Once viewing conditions are recognized as metaphorical, there is some risk that they will collapse into one of the other two points or aspects of moral qualities. This can be resisted by making viewing conditions perform indispensable tasks that are to be found in Hutcheson's writings. Two possibilities are available that do not misconstrue Hutcheson's own account. The first is to say that metaphorical viewing conditions can naturally include relevant information, especially the agent's intentions and his view of what it is he was trying to do. The second option is to use Hutcheson's insistence that Ciceronian roles tailor moral situations. For example, that I am a person's parent or benefactor is reason to notice their needs and offer assistance to a certain degree and of a certain kind. It is the noticing and the willingness to give the appropriate assistance that

¹³⁷ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good.*, pp. 225-226.

means that these roles can have a very full place in giving content to the notion of moral viewing conditions, as opposed to literal viewing conditions, or aesthetic viewing conditions.

In this section I have given some specific content to those aspects and relations that in total form Hutcheson's account of moral objects, and deliverances regarding those objects made by the moral sense. Taking both moral qualities and moral verdicts to be triadic explains both the correctness, and the partiality, of subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of Hutcheson. This interpretation of Hutcheson's account of moral sensations is that they are cognitive *and* pleasurable responses, not just pleasurable responses that are cognitive. The point that pleasure and pain responses are basic, and not controlled by the will, is an important one; but if pleasure is taken to be so basic, there is the difficulty that the pleasurable response is not sufficiently tailored to its present task, which is making us aware of a specific object. These responses are made by appropriately placed agents or spectators, this notion of placement being predominantly a metaphorical way of saying that specific viewing conditions obtain; the person has the relevant information, and is appropriately related to notice and motivated to respond in determinate ways.

4:6 *Concluding comments*

Hutcheson's account of the moral sense fails in a number of important ways. He gives a sophisticated account of its epistemology. Some of his close contemporaries, particularly David Hume and Adam Smith, directly or indirectly refuted such a theory, while retaining residual elements and terminology for their own use. While this account has yet to be given in later chapters, it can be noted here that Hutcheson's account of the moral sense already looks inadequate for a number of reasons. He attributes too many, and conflicting tasks to the moral sense, so that it becomes unlikely that it can perform such a range of things, and yet be a *sui generis* faculty. In the following chapter we will see how Hutcheson not only confuses the moral sense with the sense of beauty, but with

benevolence and the whole of the virtues as well. Perhaps the most damning criticism is that while he concedes that the moral sense can be in error, he always attributes this error to self-interest. This effort to protect the status of the moral sense brings into doubt the idea that he is speaking of a natural faculty, rather than a theoretical entity designed unfailingly to fit certain criteria.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUTCHESON'S VIRTUE THEORY

5:1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I indicated that Hutcheson is presently considered as a transitional figure in the history of moral philosophy. Commentators in the 1950s and 1960s concentrated on dealing with the moral sense aspects of his moral theory, and neglected to deal with its other themes. More recently other criticisms have emerged which attribute to Hutcheson some combination of a natural law theory, a virtue theory and a moral sense theory. At present there is no consensus about whether any particular one of these theories can be considered more encompassing or foundational, in the sense of explaining more moral phenomena than the others. Nor is there consensus about whether these theories are reconcilable or even mutually supporting, or whether they are held together only in an unworkable tension. These larger matters are beyond the scope of my present concerns: the task at hand is much more limited. Basically it is to demonstrate that Hutcheson holds a virtue theory as well as a moral sense theory.

I begin with a brief account of the present state of criticism with respect to Hutcheson's moral theory. Hutcheson is acknowledged to hold a virtue theory. Some critics argue that his moral sense theory is an integral part of his virtue theory. In the second section I propose that Hutcheson's moral sense theory is necessarily related to a virtue theory, as he conceives it. Concentrating on the moral sense theory allows Hutcheson to answer certain epistemological questions, thus rebutting egoists and sceptics who argue that moral values are whatever individual people consider valuable. Hutcheson, however, less often discusses his virtue theory for what seems to be its own sake. I conjecture that this is because he considers his account of the virtues and vices unproblematic.

If the focus is changed from what Hutcheson attributes to the various *theories*, to what he attributes to the psychological faculties themselves then special difficulties can be noted. Hutcheson is apt to confuse the moral sense with virtue on occasions. This is

dealt with in the third section. The fourth section deals with Hutcheson's confusion of the moral sense with benevolence. Hutcheson's emphasis on benevolence is in keeping with the Cambridge Platonists, who believe that a bias towards benevolence is a natural part of our constitution.

Recent Hutcheson criticism

Hutcheson has had a changing fortune in the history of philosophy. For much of the eighteenth century he was highly regarded as an influential moral philosopher, yet by the late eighteenth century he was eclipsed by the dominant figures of David Hume, Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant. Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart also usurped Hutcheson's place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, even though they too are relatively neglected today.¹ Hutcheson is presently regarded as a transitional figure, a writer whose works encompass a wide range of moral theories, while not balancing them judiciously. There is no widespread agreement concerning Hutcheson's legacy. Even when critics agree about the various theories that Hutcheson makes use of, they disagree about their relative importance, and whether such theories are inherently incompatible or not.

One important group of present-day interpretations of Hutcheson considers that he makes use of both a natural law theory and a virtue theory. This view is to be found in the writings of William Scott, Alasdair MacIntyre, James Moore and Knud Haakonssen.² Their agreement is superficial: there is no ready consensus among these critics as to the form of the duty theory and the virtue theory that Hutcheson holds. Scott holds that Hutcheson's theory developed over time, moving from 'the moral sense

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London: Duckworth (1988), p. 280. The list is MacIntyre's, with the addition of Kant.

² MacIntyre, *ibid.* chs. 12-14; Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*; Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson'; and Haakonssen, 'Natural Law and Moral Realism'. See also Thomas Mautner, 'Introduction' in Francis Hutcheson, *Two Texts on Human Nature*, ed. and trans into English by T. Mautner. Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press (forthcoming). Mautner's is another assessment which holds Hutcheson as giving a virtue theory.

theory (the *Inquiries*, 1725), to naturalism (*An essay on the nature and the conduct of the passions and affections*, 1728), to teleology (*A system of moral philosophy*, largely written 1734-37), to stoicism (*Philosophiae moralis institutio compendaria*, 1742).³ MacIntyre writes that Hutcheson tried strenuously but unsuccessfully to synthesize a traditional natural law theory as found in Pufendorf's *Whole Duty of Man*, with a modified Aristotelian virtue theory, supplemented with an epistemology dependent on the moral sense.⁴

Independently of MacIntyre, James Moore remarks that Hutcheson had two philosophical systems, one a 'coherent public philosophy' confined to the first four treatises,⁵ and a 'parallel academic philosophy conceived in accordance with the pedagogic demands of the College of Glasgow'.⁶ According to Moore, the first system included 'an aesthetics, an ethics and a psychology, which postulated the natural abilities or powers to perceive and to act in a manner consistent with a sense of beauty and virtue.'⁷ The second system encompassed an account of natural law, natural rights and obligations.⁸ It was meant, according to Moore, as preparatory material suitable for the instruction of youth, and was not a comprehensive account of Hutcheson's preferred moral philosophy.

³ This is James Moore's résumé of Scott's fourfold system. Moore indicates that his own view of Hutcheson does not endorse a fourfold system, but a twofold system. See Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson', p. 41.

⁴ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*. pp. 269 ff. and p. 279 for MacIntyre's claims that Hutcheson combines a natural law tradition with a modified Aristotelianism. See p. 271 for MacIntyre's assessment that Hutcheson supplemented this amalgam with an epistemology based on the moral sense.

⁵ Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson', p. 41. The treatises that Moore refers to are Hutcheson's *Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*; and the *Essay on the Nature of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 42. Moore refers to Hutcheson's *Logicae Compendium, Synopsis Metaphysicae* and *Philosophiae moralis institutio compendaria*.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 55.

While MacIntyre considers the virtue theory and the natural law theory are inherently incompatible, and exist in tension in Hutcheson's writings, Moore thinks that they are not integrated. He makes no general statement that the two theories are incompatible. Knud Haakonssen argues that the two theories were not considered incompatible in the thought of the period. Rather, Haakonssen suggests that such theories were bound together by the notion of natural religion. The suggestion is that positive laws and God's dictates, as revealed in the natural world, are compatible and mutually supporting. Haakonssen writes that Hutcheson tried to show that people gain the insight through experience that morality is 'in itself a moral good because it flows as a whole from God's moral motivation.'⁹ According to Haakonssen, Hutcheson argues that we can understand by our reason God's teleological prescriptions for humankind. For Hutcheson, we morally approve of these prescriptions and so feel obliged to follow what they guide us to do.¹⁰

Vincent Hope also attributes to Hutcheson a virtue theory with a moral sense epistemology.¹¹ Hope considers that the virtue theories of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith define virtues in terms of *intersubjective* values. This, I claim, is a misreading of the tradition, and that *objective* values are indeed being claimed. These issues I discuss with respect to Hutcheson in the following section. I also disagree with Hope's claim that Hutcheson makes utility as much the criterion of virtue as motive.¹² While Hutcheson acknowledges the two are very close, he does not attribute the same moral worth to a person's motives as to the utility of the consequences they bring about. These areas of disagreement are discussed at the close of the next section, dealing with virtue.

⁹ Haakonssen, 'Natural Law and Moral Realism', p. 78.

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*

¹¹ Vincent Hope, *Virtue by Consensus: The Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1989). For Hutcheson on virtue see pp. 23-38, and Hutcheson on the moral sense see pp. 38-43.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

There is no further discussion of Hutcheson's use of a natural law theory here. Rather, I concentrate on his use of a virtue theory in combination with his moral sense theory. Throughout his works Hutcheson consistently makes use of both theories. The two seem indelibly intertwined; yet there is reason to be cautious. In concluding the previous chapter I intimated that there are problems with reconciling the numerous tasks attributed to the moral sense, so that it begins to look questionable whether a real mental faculty is being identified and described, or whether a philosophical will-o'-the-wisp is being constructed. These concerns can only be raised at this point. They are discussed at more length in chapter 7, where I consider Adam Smith's criticism of Hutcheson's moral sense theory.

5:2 Hutcheson on virtue

Hutcheson proposes that the direct objects of the moral sense are the virtues and vices. In this manner he postulates a necessary connection between virtue and vice and the moral sense. Hutcheson consistently argues for necessary relationships between our *behaving* in a moral manner, whether this be good, bad or indifferent, *apprehending* moral behavior, whether it be our own or others, and *approving* morally good behaviour in its many instantiations. Hutcheson gives a complex account of what virtue and vice are, both in terms of the moral sense and in terms of the values that virtues protect and foster. Primarily these values are of public *and* personal good. Hutcheson also discusses specific virtues and vices, though mainly those virtues that are related to benevolence. This section briefly covers the pertinent points in this material, substantiating my claim that Hutcheson uses a virtue theory in conjunction with his moral sense theory.

Hutcheson gives a range of definitions of virtue and vice. The *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* immediately illustrates Hutcheson's intention to investigate what is meant by moral good and evil. In the first instance he writes they are ideas that people have of some quality apprehended in actions. Disinterested spectators who witness such actions either approve or disapprove of the agent according to the

moral quality of the act.¹³ Hutcheson's admits that this is a tentative definition that he intends to refine further.

Hutcheson's stated purpose is thus to establish the nature of moral good and ill, virtue and vice, both from the perspective of the agent and from the perspective of the disinterested observer. He implies that unless distortions of self-interest or ignorance intrude, then assessments from an agent and observer viewpoint should coincide. Hutcheson thus relates the virtues and vices of agents with the apprehension of such qualities by observers. Hutcheson strongly defends the idea that this moral approbation and disapprobation is of a *sui generis* kind: this is his rationale for attributing to mankind the faculty of the moral sense, and the existence of this sense serves as an methodological tool by which he seeks to defend his thesis that there is widespread agreement among all right-minded people that moral standards are eternal and immutable.

As discussed in chapter 4, Hutcheson argues for a natural ability to discern between natural and moral goods. Assuming agreement on this matter, he postulates a distinct faculty, that of the moral sense, with which we are able to discern the value of specific moral goods. This discernment involves moral approbation or disapprobation. However, at his most explicit, Hutcheson acknowledges that the approbation (or otherwise) is caused in response to objective features which are apprehended by similar observers. The title to the first section of the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* reads '*Of the Moral Sense by which we perceive Virtue and Vice, and approve or disapprove them in others.*'¹⁴ Having established to his satisfaction the existence of this distinct moral sense in our constitution, he considers the motives that are efficacious in virtuous actions.¹⁵ Hutcheson here defines virtue and vice thus:

¹³ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 101.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 107. Hutcheson doesn't raise the issues of self-deception and hypocrisy. He takes it as unproblematic that people's thoughts are transparent, at least to themselves.

¹⁵ Hutcheson demurs that a proper investigation would lead him to consider the passions and affections as the immediate causes of action, but he confines himself to those actions which are called virtuous. He looks, he continues, no further than is necessary to 'settle the general Foundation of the *Moral Sense*.' See *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 125.

EVERY Action, which we apprehend as either *morally good* or *evil*, is always supposed to flow from *some Affection* towards *rational Agents*; and whatever we call *Virtue* and *Vice*, is either some such *Affection*, or some *Action* consequent upon it. Or it may perhaps be enough to make an Action, or Omission, appear *vitious*, if it argues the Want of such *Affection* towards *rational Agents*, as we expect in *Characters* counted *morally good*.¹⁶

In this definition virtue is either an affection towards a person, or the action that follows on such an affection. Hutcheson allows a fair breadth as to what can bear virtue terms. He includes affections, actions, character traits, motives and intentions.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he is on traditional ground when he remarks that virtues and vices are primarily dispositions of a person's character. Virtues are long-term ways of valuing things, and of displaying these valuations in actions, affections and characters. As has been quoted in chapter 4 above, Hutcheson writes of the durable nature of the virtues in the following manner:

THE *Moral Beauty of Characters* arises from their Actions or sincere Intentions of the *publick Good*, according to their Power. We form our Judgment of them according to what appears their fix'd Disposition, and not according to any *particular Sallys* of *unkind Passions*.¹⁸

He remarks that our idea of a person's character can be modified by uncharacteristic actions, but what constitutes a fixed character is not some accidental motion or passion in one direction rather than another.

Every Motion indeed of the *kind Affections* appears in some degree *amiable*; but we dominate the *Character* from the *prevailing Principle*.¹⁹

Thus *character* is the primary locus of moral assessment, rather than the shorter-lived actions, affections, intentions, motives and the like.

Not all character traits warrant moral assessment. Hutcheson makes two points here. The first is his recognition that some actions and ways of behaving are morally

¹⁶ *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ See, for example, Hutcheson's *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 125, 151, and 174-175.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 175.

indifferent: they attract no moral assessment, and neither should they. Following our own real interest to no-one else's detriment is one standard example that Hutcheson appeals to. The second point is that, as Hutcheson makes a distinction between natural and moral goods, so he makes a distinction between intellectual and moral virtues. Natural goods and intellectual virtues are not directly open to moral assessment. Bodily strength and sagacity, like other property that we can possess such as houses, lands, gardens and vineyards are natural goods, rather than moral goods.²⁰ Natural goods do not attract moral assessment in terms of the virtues and vices. Responsibility and intentionality are necessary conditions for any of the virtues, and these conditions are not fulfilled in our having or displaying natural goods. Similarly:

Virtue in the largest acceptation, may denote any power or quality which is subservient to the happiness of any sensitive being. In its stricter acceptation it denotes any habit or disposition which perfects the powers of the soul; and thus virtues are divided into the *intellectual*, which include all improvements of the mind by ingenious arts and sciences; and *moral*, which are chiefly counted virtues, being perfections of the *will* and *affections*; and these are the chief object of Ethicks.²¹

Hutcheson thus points to the ambiguity that goods and virtues may be of larger or more confined categories, and that the narrower category more accurately captures what is meant by either moral goods or moral virtues. People inaccurately use the broad term when they mean the narrower concept. Thus the general term 'virtue' is somewhat misleading, because it covers categories of both intellectual and moral virtues. Both of these are specific sub-categories of what Hutcheson even more vaguely includes under 'natural abilities' in the following: 'a *penetrating Judgement*, a *tenacious Memory*, a *quick Invention*; *Patience of Labour, Pain, Hunger, Watching*; a *Contempt of Wealth, Rumour, Death*. These may be rather call'd *natural Abilitys*, than *moral Quality's Good or Evil*.'²² Such abilities, whether natural or acquired may be used for private or public good, or private or public mischief.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.102.

²¹ Hutcheson, *Short Introduction*, p.63.

²² Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 168.

This leads us to the next point. Virtue and vice, according to Hutcheson, necessarily involve the consideration of the well-being or detriment of others. Whereas natural abilities have no stable link with bringing about good or harm, whether to their bearer or other people around them, this is not the case with virtue and vice. Hutcheson argues that there is a conceptual link between calling some form of behaviour virtuous and it procuring both public and private good. Hutcheson argues that there is a necessary difference in the approbation people feel towards benevolent behaviour and malevolent behaviour. Benevolent behaviour fosters both public and private good; malevolence detracts from both forms of good. Hence:

[A]s soon as any Action is represented to us as flowing from *Love, Humanity, Gratitude, Compassion*, a *Study* of the good of others, and a *Delight* in their Happiness, altho it were in the most distant Part of the World, or in some past Age, we feel Joy within us, admire the lovely Action, and praise its Author. And on the contrary, every Action represented as flowing from *Hatred, Delight* in the Misery of others, or *Ingratitude*, raises Abhorrence and Aversion.²³

Moral approbation in terms of public and private good is Hutcheson's procedural test of what is to count as virtue or vice. In a similar spirit Hutcheson writes that there is genuine agreement among all right-minded people as to what constitutes virtue and vice. Although there may be disagreement as to whether a specific act or affection displays a certain virtue or not, there is no such disagreement as to whether the type of action, affection or motive was virtuous or not. Hutcheson rejects moral relativism: for him, this would be the nonsensical idea that there was diversity among moral practices with no test for settling which were genuinely virtuous and which were not. On the contrary, he remarks that only those swayed by the schools or the pulpit try to argue that apparent moral diversity implies only personal or factional moral values.²⁴ For those who are theoretically inclined to question what would settle disputes about differing practices, Hutcheson makes an appeal to a test of the public good. He writes:

That we may see how *Love, or Benevolence*, is the Foundation of all apprehended *Excellence* in *social Virtues*, let us only observe, That amidst

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 143.

the diversity of Sentiments on this Head among various Sects, this is still allow'd to be the way of deciding the Controversy about any disputed Practice, to enquire whether this Conduct, or the contrary, will most effectually promote the *public Good*. The *Morality* is immediately adjusted, when the natural Tendency, or Influence of the Action upon the *universal natural Good of Mankind* is agreed upon.²⁵

The two quotations above show Hutcheson's point that virtue necessarily involves the good of the public. Hutcheson also makes the negative point that virtue, while it is for its bearers' good, is not performed primarily to support that good. This can be expanded on Hutcheson's behalf to the notion that a person is not kind so that other people will be kind in return, nor are they compassionate so that other people will respond in kind. Further, real self-interest is served by behaving virtuously. Hutcheson concedes such a view in his scheme, but this is the notion of virtue being to everyone's good, not the pessimistic view that to serve their private interests individuals should behave in ways in which long-term dividends are paid. Hutcheson differentiates between virtue proper and either the pursuit of narrow self-interest or pleasure thus:

'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*.'²⁶

Hutcheson makes use of the central tenets of a virtue theory, while giving the impression that such tenets are uncontentious. He defines virtues as moral abilities as distinct from merely natural ones; he makes the point that actions, motives and affections can be virtuous and vicious. Character, rather than affections and motives, is the fundamental locus of those values in terms of which people are virtuous or vicious. Finally, Hutcheson defines virtue in terms of consideration for the public good, and vice either as disrespect for this public good, or as the positive hindrance of this good.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.106. See also p. 103, where Hutcheson demonstrates to his satisfaction that virtue is neither the same as pleasure, nor the same as the direct pursuit of our own interest.

Hope's arguments for the status of virtue

Vincent Hope in his recent book, *Virtue by Consensus*, postulates that Hutcheson's moral theory is built around a virtue theory with a moral sense epistemology. Yet Hope considers that Hutcheson's account of virtue is based on consensual notions of what is virtuous. This is a misreading of Hutcheson. Another misreading involves the psychological factors which can be counted virtuous. Hope thinks that Hutcheson most often claims utility is the criterion of virtue and vice. Hutcheson, I think, is more cautious on this matter than Hope suggests.

Hope argues that the ultimate source of moral value, according to Hume and Smith is consensual: collective approval (and disapproval) amongst a community of like-minded people allows them to stipulate concerning what is virtuous and vicious.²⁷ Hope admits that Hutcheson does not state a consensus theory in this form.²⁸ He acknowledges that Hutcheson appeals to God's constitution of human nature. According to Hope, the most pertinent point that Hutcheson makes is that there is a natural moral consensus, 'just as there is natural agreement about what is sweet or coloured.'²⁹ Hope also uses the term 'intersubjective' to capture what he sees as the strongest epistemological certainty that can be claimed with respect to the virtues and vices.³⁰ The point, for Hope, is that not only is there communal agreement on what is virtuous, but that communal agreement is necessary because of a community of taste:

The consensus theory is that morality necessarily implies that perception of certain kinds of good and bad is shared: to make a moral judgement is necessarily to judge that something does or does not satisfy a collective taste.³¹

²⁷ Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, pp. 7-9.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹ *loc. cit.*

³⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 5-7 for Hope's differentiation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. According to Hope, subjectivity involves purely the observers' personal attitudes, whereas intersubjectivity implies collective attitudes set by the group. Hope writes 'The English words "disgraceful" and "heroic" are examples [of intersubjective terms], for their use commits the speaker to shared standards of honour', p. 7.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

Hope uses the notion of natural agreement amongst a species or community of like-minded people to claim that the virtue theory of Hutcheson, Hume and Smith is naturalistic. This he contrasts to the moral theories of Hobbes and Locke. Hope considers these latter theories *conventionalist*, but of slightly different sorts. Their shared conventionalism attaches to their belief that ‘virtue is only possible because men agree on what to praise and what to condemn.’³² Hope, however, seems to raise the issue of natural or God-given moral values only to leave it aside. This is the effect of his emphasis on the intersubjective nature of moral values, as opposed to the objectivity of such values.³³ Hope considers that the strongest claim regarding moral value made by Hutcheson, Hume and Smith is that such values are intersubjectively agreed upon. According to this view, groups of people do in fact agree about what they call virtuous and vicious, and such agreement constitutes the moral community in which there is conformity of moral taste. Hope does not consider it significant that Hutcheson, inasmuch as he concedes intersubjective moral values, does so on the ground of ontological values. To interpret Hutcheson, these natural values may be both ontological and intersubjective, but their ontological status is the reason for their intersubjectivity.

Had Hope discussed what type of relationship might exist between intersubjective and ontological values, he could have more clearly decided whether Hutcheson, as well as Hume and Smith, favoured one account of virtue over the other. Hope acknowledges that the major authors he deals with, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith, take it that moral communities are founded on the realization of shared values. What Hope does not

³² *ibid.*, p. 19. Hobbes and Locke are discussed separately on pp. 18-19.

³³ One clear statement of what seems to be the current understanding of the difference between intersubjectivity and objectivity is in Kenneth Winkler’s article on ‘Hutcheson’s Alleged Realism’. Winkler is critical of Norton for not seeing the difference between two forms of realism (or objectivism); see pp. 179-180. The weaker form claims that there are objective causes or occasions of our moral sentiments and that these causes or occasions are independently existing features of the world around us. The stronger form claims that the moral sense not merely registers objectively real features, ‘but *represents* objectively real *moral* features, where the word “represents” is taken to mean that the ideas the sense supplies are in some way *images* of the moral features to which they correspond.’ At this point Winkler refers to p. 85 of Norton’s *David Hume*. I take it that Hope’s idea of intersubjectivity is most similar to the weak form of objectivity as described by Winkler. Hutcheson, I take it, actually argues for the stronger form of objectivism. In this I disagree with Hope’s and Winkler’s assessment of Hutcheson’s views. Ontological realism underwrites Hutcheson’s endorsement of the strong form of objectivism.

acknowledge is that with Hutcheson at least,³⁴ his providential teleology underwrites his belief in ontological realism. According to Hutcheson's teleological account, a benevolent God has furnished us with the wherewithal to apprehend the stable and real links between virtue and the pleasure in the fulfillment of self-interest, and the realization that some of our pleasures genuinely involve the good of other people for their own sake. For Hutcheson, it is God's design which establishes the necessary links between these things. It is not any kind of agreement between men, even agreement about God's attributes, which *forms* the basis of shared values, because nothing, according to Hutcheson, can usurp God's role as the source of harmony between these values. Hope is thus right to point to Hutcheson's notion of a universal community in which people experience pleasure in virtue and pain in vice. The inadequacy of Hope's account is that he does not recognize that Hutcheson argues for ontological realism, rather than basing moral values on a community of taste. This community of taste exists in Hutcheson's schema, as Hope correctly points out. However, according to Hutcheson the community does not stipulate mortal taste, so much as apprehend and work within the boundaries that God sets.

My second criticism of Hope's account concerns whether virtue can be measured in terms of utility. Hope says that Hutcheson shifts between stressing that virtue depends on the motive of goodwill and stressing that it depends on utility.³⁵ Hope uses this ambivalence as the rationale for considering motive and utility both measures of virtue. According to Hope, Hutcheson sometimes believes that to act virtuously a person behaves to maximize good effects.³⁶ Hope emphasizes the utilitarian and rights-based

³⁴ I do not include Hume and Smith at this specific point.

³⁵ Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, p. 29.

³⁶ 'Utility' in Hope's view appears to be the *projected* effect of acting in a certain matter. See *Virtue by Consensus*, pp. 29-30. Hutcheson does not use the term, but rather speaks of 'advantages' and 'consequences' in that section of the first edition of *Concerning Moral Good* where he discusses 'The Manner of computing the Morality of Actions.' (*ibid.*, p. 150.) More importantly than the lack of the term, I think Hutcheson does not show that such a computation should always be considered. He places highest worth on universal calm benevolence and the humane virtues more generally.

language in Hutcheson's work, claiming in effect that Hutcheson was an early utilitarian.³⁷

Admittedly Hutcheson used mathematical analogies to imply that moral good could be computed with respect to the number of people involved.³⁸ This occurs especially in the first three editions of the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*. Hutcheson also gives an explicit formula concerning the computation of public good,³⁹ and acknowledges that when disagreement occurs about what is the morally best thing to do in any specific case, consideration of the public good should settle the matter. As I have argued above, Hutcheson acknowledges that when disputes occur about the moral status of certain conduct, they should be settled by considering whether such conduct advances the public good or not.

Hope looks to points such as these to argue that Hutcheson was utilitarian. I disagree with this for the following reasons: Hutcheson primarily states that the moral sense delivers verdicts on what is the morally-best thing to do in terms of the specific situation. If the moral sense is indecisive, *then* Hutcheson suggests that a person should consider what is best in terms of public good, and act accordingly.⁴⁰ Hutcheson never suggests that people should on all occasions perform a calculation of public good. This would render the moral sense either superfluous, or if over-ridden by considerations of the public good, then seemingly incorrect. Hope neglects these considerations, and misreads Hutcheson on the closeness of utility and virtue. I thus consider it anachronistic

³⁷ Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, pp. 29-38.

³⁸ For example, Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 168-174. See also the title page to the first edition, as reproduced in the facsimile ed. The last subtitle reads 'With an Attempt to introduce a *Mathematical Calculation* in Subjects of *Morality*.' Later editions modified and eventually reduced this allusion to a mathematical calculus. Information is given in the 'Bibliographical Note' at the beginning of Hutcheson, *Collected Works*, vol. 1. A reduction in Hutcheson's insistence on this mathematical calculus appeared as early as the second edition of 1726.

³⁹ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 163.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 163 ff.

for Hope to interpret Hutcheson as a utilitarian, as Hope too easily runs together arguments that Hutcheson keeps apart.

5:3 Hutcheson on virtue and the moral sense

Hutcheson conceives of a necessary link between the moral sense and virtue and vice. As mentioned above, the title to the first section of the the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* immediately conveys this information: it reads ‘*Of the Moral Sense by which we perceive Virtue and Vice, and approve or disapprove them in others.*’⁴¹ The section contains Hutcheson’s arguments for the unmistakable difference between natural and moral goods that people discern with the moral sense. Moral goods, in Hutcheson’s scheme, are primarily the virtues and vices. They are the stuff which the moral sense apprehends and assesses. And, as argued in the previous chapter, the apprehensions and assessments made by the moral sense involve both cognitive recognition and pleasure.⁴²

Hutcheson is not troubled by the same doubts as later critics concerning the ontological status of the ideas or direct objects of the moral sense.⁴³ Recent critics such as David Norton and Elizabeth Radcliffe have noted that Hutcheson appeals to concomitant ideas in explaining the process by which the moral sense works.⁴⁴ Yet there is no ready agreement about the significance of this detail, nor the subject matter of these

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴² Hutcheson does not make these aspects mutually exclusive. Occasionally one rather than the other is emphasized, though Hutcheson does not prefer one manner of describing the operation of moral sense to another.

⁴³ Hutcheson’s most detailed comments regarding the status of the perceptions of the internal senses is contained in his *Nature of Passions*, pp. 2-11.

⁴⁴ Norton, ‘Hutcheson’s Moral Realism’, pp. 406-411 and p. 414; Radcliffe, ‘Hutcheson’s Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism’, pp. 415-417. Radcliffe specifically disagrees with Norton’s interpretation of Hutcheson on what is meant by saying that virtue and vice are concomitant ideas.

concomitant ideas. In the *Inquiry* Hutcheson also refers to concomitant pleasures:⁴⁵ this point has not received the same attention, and makes the issue more problematic than such critics have suggested. Other critics who emphasize Hutcheson's references to subjective or pleasurable responses as made by the moral sense do not recognize that Hutcheson consistently emphasizes that moral pleasure or moral approbation is occasioned by virtue, and disapprobation is occasioned by vice. As can be seen, there is no consensus as to Hutcheson's account of the process by which the moral sense works, or the relationship between the moral sense and the virtues and vices. That Hutcheson does not deal thoroughly or consistently with how the moral sense apprehends the ideas or objects of virtue does not detract from his insistence that such apprehension is the task of the moral sense.

Hutcheson is aware of the difficulty of *defining* virtue by recourse to what is approved by the moral sense:

TO define *Virtue* by *agreeableness to this moral Sense*, or describing it to be *kind Affection*, may appear perhaps too uncertain; considering the Sense of particular Persons is often depraved by *Custom, Habits*, false Opinions, Company: and that some *particular kind Passions* towards some Persons are really pernicious, and attended with very unkind Affections towards others, or at least with a Neglect of their Interests.⁴⁶

However, Hutcheson minimizes this apparent concession to subjectivity by regarding virtue as that which is approved by the moral sense, if partiality and narrow self-interest are not part of the case.⁴⁷ This is the burden of much of the *Nature and Conduct of the Passions* and the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*. In the first of these works he describes at length the difference between specific passions and the moral sense, thus securing a difference between the selfish, and often destructive passions, particular kind

⁴⁵ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 140, where Hutcheson writes "The last, and only remaining Objection against what has been said, is this, "That perhaps *Virtue* is pursu'd because of the *concomitant Pleasure*."

⁴⁶ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, pp. xv-xvi.

⁴⁷ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, pp. 234-235. The corresponding passage is in Peach's ed., *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, p. 133.

passions, and universal calm benevolence.⁴⁸ In the second, the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Hutcheson distances himself from Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston who propose that moral judgements are intellectual, not a matter of sensation or sensibility.⁴⁹ Their error, according to Hutcheson, is their failure to see that the moral sense involves sense more centrally than it involves reason. Hutcheson concedes that to act morally is to act in conformity with reason and truth, but he denies that to act in conformity with reason exhausts what is meant by acting in a moral way. In the joint Preface to these works he acknowledges that reason is indeed one of our natural powers, but he insists that the moral sense is at the centre of our moral constitution.⁵⁰ Reason can correct the erroneous judgements of our senses, including the moral sense, but the original ideas of the senses are not ones of reason. Hutcheson remarks that an overly compassionate person may rashly imagine that to execute a criminal is cruel, yet when they apprehend the superior public good that this execution brings about, then they review their original and distorted assessment.⁵¹ Hutcheson is against theories which take the reasoning of morality to be a matter of mere prudence, or which take such reasoning to be of direct insight.

Hutcheson also makes the stronger claim that not only is the moral sense theory able to be supplemented by a virtue theory, but that any worthwhile moral theory has to acknowledge the existence of the moral sense. Hutcheson insists that the moral sense is a psychological power that has to be given an explanatory role in any kind of moral theory that writers care to devise. Hence he admonishes writers such as Samuel Clarke, William

⁴⁸ See, for example, Hutcheson's *Illustrations*, pp. 27-32.

⁴⁹ For Hutcheson's disagreement with Clarke, see *Illustrations*, pp. 245 ff.; and for his disagreement with Wollaston, *ibid.*, p. 253 ff.

⁵⁰ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, p. xvii. Scott considers that it is in the *Treatise on the Passions* that Hutcheson gives to benevolence tasks that he has previously attributed to the moral sense. Scott remarks that benevolence, or the moral sense, 'requires reason, reflection, suspense of judgement and command over the particular affections.' *Francis Hutcheson*, p. 206. I am less sure that Hutcheson did give such a prominent place to reason. See chapter 7, where I discuss Hume on the relative roles of reason and sentiment in moral assessment.

⁵¹ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 237.

Wollaston and Gilbert Burnet for misdescribing the nature of the moral sense. Hutcheson makes a similar response to an early critic of the *Nature of the Passions*.⁵² Here Hutcheson writes:

If this [moral] Sense be supposed to consist in a mere Instinct, or in a Determination of the Mind, not proceeding from Reason, nor to be accounted for otherwise than by a blind Impulse, it seems justly suspected to be an uncertain and insufficient Foundation of Virtue. If, on the contrary, it be immediately seated in the Understanding, so as to result necessarily from thence, and to be an inseparable Attendant of our Knowledge or Perception of Moral Ideas, it may perhaps be safely admitted by Moralists, on whatever Principles they found their Systems of Morality.⁵³

If some opponents misunderstand the nature of the moral sense, then other writers do not even attribute such a faculty to human nature. They too, according to Hutcheson, fail to provide an accurate account of how it is that people are sensitive to moral distinctions, and inclined towards benevolence. Bernard Mandeville, and Hobbes appear to be Hutcheson's major opponents in this vein. His prefaces, however, to the *Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, and the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* suggest a more contemporary and more amorphous group of egoists.⁵⁴ Hutcheson does not consistently name them, though he denounces what he sees as their inaccurate attribution to mankind of motives of narrow self-interest and pleasure. In reply he insists on the genuineness of the moral sense and benevolence. It is Hutcheson's emphasis on the place of benevolence in human nature that I now turn to.

5:4 Hutcheson on the genuineness of benevolence

⁵² This anonymous correspondence is thought to be between Hutcheson and perhaps Burnet. See Bernhard Fabian's 'Bibliographical Note' at the beginning of Hutcheson, *Collected Works*, vol. 2. The four letters comprising this correspondence are contained in this volume as an appendix entitled 'Letters from the *London Journal* (1728)'.

⁵³ Hutcheson, appendix to *Collected Works*, vol. 2, pp. 351-352.

⁵⁴ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. vi-vii, and *Nature of Passions*, pp. xvii-xviii.

According to Hutcheson, human nature is genuinely benevolent.⁵⁵ By this he means that people are concerned for the well-being of others for their own sake and not for any incidental good that might accrue to them as a result of promoting other people's interests.⁵⁶ Hutcheson speaks of benevolence in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*:

IF we examine all the Actions which are counted *amiable* anywhere, and enquire into the Grounds upon which they are *approv'd*, we shall find, that in the Opinion of the Person who approves them, they always appear as BENEVOLENT, or flowing from the *Love of others*, and Study of their Happiness, whether the *Approver* be one of the persons belov'd, or profited or not; so that all these *kind Affections* which incline us to make others happy, and all the Actions suppos'd to flow from *such* Affections, appear *morally Good*, if while they are *benevolent* toward some Persons, they be not *pernicious* to others.⁵⁷

In terms of this wide-ranging definition, benevolence is that quality in motivation or action that renders such motivation or action morally worthy. Benevolence is that which indicates our concern for other people, and it is partly constituted by our pleasure or approbation at their well-being. Peoples' pleasure is original, in the sense that they feel it immediately upon recognizing its cognitive expression in either themselves or others. The pleasure of benevolence is caused or occasioned by the instances of benevolence that people encounter, and it is not to be confused with the pleasure that derives from the self-interested assistance rendered by others. For Hutcheson, this would be to confuse the natural good brought about by a person narrowly concerned with their own good, and the moral good of benevolence. This is his point that, whether we are profited by beneficence or not, we recognize and approve its merit.

⁵⁵ Hutcheson appeals to introspection to secure this point. He especially castigates those who trace all motives to self-interested pleasure: this is absurdity in his view. See, for example, *Nature of Passions*, pp. 13-15.

⁵⁶ Scott remarks that Hutcheson was prosecuted by the Presbytery of Glasgow for contravening the Westminster Confession on two counts: 'first [by teaching] that the standard of moral goodness was the promotion of the happiness of others; and second that we could have a knowledge of moral good and evil, without, and prior to a knowledge of God'. See *Francis Hutcheson*, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁷ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 150.

Hutcheson takes it that the kind affections that make up benevolence are a genuine part of our constitution that frequently motivate us. He includes both calm and passionate affections, including love, congratulation, compassion, natural affection and universal calm benevolence.⁵⁸ The important similarity is that they are desires which consider and foster the good of others for their own sake.

Consistent with this is Hutcheson's denial that settled malice is a genuine part of human nature. This can be seen in the following, where Hutcheson writes:

Human Nature seems scarce capable of *malicious disinterested Hatred*, or a sedate Delight in the Misery of others, when we imagine them no way pernicious to us, or opposite to our *Interests*: And for that Hatred which makes us oppose *those* whose Interests are opposite to *ours*, it is only the Effect of *Self-Love*, and not of *disinterested Malice*. A sudden Passion may give us wrong Representations of our Fellow-Creatures, and for a little time represent them as *absolutely Evil*; and during this Imagination perhaps we may give some Evidences of *disinterested Malice*; but as soon as we reflect upon *human Nature*, and form just Conceptions, this *unnatural* Passion is allay'd, and only *Self-Love* remains, which may make us, from *Self-Interest*, oppose our Adversaries.⁵⁹

In this way he allows that we do act against the interest of others, and even that this is relatively frequent, but he holds that we usually do this only because our interests are threatened, and not out of disinterested malice. In explaining the apparent phenomenon of settled malice, Hutcheson remarks that either self-interest distorts the case, or habits of undervaluing people have been fostered over time, yet there is still no original, in the sense of 'connatural', malice. Hutcheson is confident that his optimistic assessment of human nature is justified.

Like Benjamin Whichcote, Hutcheson thinks that benevolence is an indelible bias that God has constituted human nature with. Hutcheson writes to that effect in the *Nature and Conduct of the Passions*. The order of nature is vindicated if we would but notice that God in his goodness has formed us in a certain way. Virtue is not a matter of narrow

⁵⁸ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, pp. 29-31. Hope gives a slightly different interpretation of Hutcheson's thought that, the highest peak of benevolence is not universal calm benevolence, but that it is the best match between a person's capacity (of whatever degree), and how they fulfill that capacity. See Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 132.

pleasure or the pursuit of private interest, but God has created a splendid cohesiveness in the fabric of nature, such that when we pursue virtue and benevolence, we necessarily derive a higher and more satisfying form of pleasure than we could by pursuing any form of pleasure directly. He writes:

[I]t may be difficult to persuade many, even of those who are not Enemies to Virtue from *Inclination*, of the Wisdom of the Deity, in making the *Biass* of our Nature opposite to the Laws he would give us; and making all *Pleasure*, the most natural Character of Good, attend the *prohibited Actions*, or the *indifferent* ones; while *Obedience* to the Law must be a *constrained* Course of Action, inforced only by *Penalties* contrary to our *natural Affections* and *Senses*. *Nature* and *Grace* are by this scheme made very opposite: Some would question whether they could have the same Author. Whereas if the preceding Account be just, we see no such Inconsistency.⁶⁰

Hutcheson thus works with a notion of benevolence that places it at the very centre of mankind's constitution. This is part of his insistence against both the egoists and the rationalists that we are as genuinely concerned about other people, and the promotion of their (moral and non-conflicting natural) interests, as we are about ourselves and our own interests. Actions are thus counted approvable according to their benevolence, or the disinterested '*Love of others, and Study of their Happiness*'.⁶¹

Hutcheson's commitment to such a broad definition of benevolence raises a specific problem that he does not consider. He is apt to confuse benevolence with the moral sense. In the final section of this chapter I deal with the most problematic issues raised by this confusion.

Benevolence and the moral sense

Hutcheson closely relates benevolence and the moral sense, and yet he wavers both in how he conceives benevolence, and in the relations he draws between benevolence and the moral sense. In its basic form benevolence is the consideration or promotion of other

⁶⁰ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, p. 86.

⁶¹ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 150.

people's good as an end in itself.⁶² Hutcheson consistently denies that actions are virtuous if they are performed for either the pleasure or the utility of their consequences,⁶³ even if these are the rewards of a Deity.⁶⁴ He proposes that the true spring of virtue is benevolence, or:

... some Determination of our Nature to study the Good of others; or some Instinct, antecedent to all Reason from Interest, which influences us to the Love of others, even as the moral Sense... determines us to approve the Actions which flow from *this Love* in our selves or others.⁶⁵

This definition of benevolence compares it to the moral sense; both are original determinations to be affected in specific ways. However, Hutcheson occasionally insists upon a more substantial similarity. Not only are both the moral sense and benevolence determinations; Hutcheson occasionally writes as though they were co-extensive or even identical. In the above quotation Hutcheson offers a more substantial similarity between the moral sense and benevolence than mere psychological status. He puts forward the much stronger claim that both the moral sense and benevolence regard the good of others. The quotation does not suppose strict identity, as Hutcheson here considers the role of benevolence to be one of motivation, and the role of the moral sense to be one of approbation. Nevertheless, the same standards of concern for ourselves and others can inform both benevolence and the use of the moral sense generally, and in this manner they may be considered co-extensive. An occasion on which Hutcheson appears to claim strict identity between the moral sense and benevolence occurs in the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*. Alluding to benevolence as the yard stick by which public good is measured, Hutcheson begins that:

TO see how far Mankind agree in that, which we have made the *universal Foundation* of this *moral Sense*, viz. BENEVOLENCE, we have observ'd already, that when we are ask'd the Reason of our Approbation of any

⁶² Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 211.

⁶³ See, for example, Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 105-106.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 143. Compare the same volume, p. 153 for Hutcheson's remark that love or benevolence is the foundation of all excellence in the social virtues.

Action, we perpetually alledge its *Usefulness* to the *Publick*, and not to the *Actor* himself.⁶⁶

As an aside, Hutcheson recognizes that by 'benevolence' he includes a list of affections and ways of valuing others. This is most clear in the *Nature and Conduct of the Passions*. There he is at his most careful to recognize that by benevolence he intends a generic class of behaving well towards others. Hutcheson discerns several types of motivation for behaving in a benevolent manner. Occasional and particular benevolent affections are contrasted with calm and persistent desires for the good of others.⁶⁷ Another cross-categorical distinction concerns itself not with the durability of benevolence, but the breadth of its object. Selfish desires for personal good are indifferent to the concerns of others. Hutcheson appears to contrast selfishness with desire for the public good, and at its widest, universal good. Hence the peak of benevolence is captured by what he calls universal calm benevolence. He cautions that this is only available to people of reflection, or those of a superior nature who have no intercourse with mankind.⁶⁸ The seeming rarity of this form of benevolence does not detract from his use of it as an ideal. He writes:

OUR *moral Sense*, tho it approves all particular *kind Affection* or *Passion*, as well as *calm particular Benevolence* abstractly considered; yet it also approves the *Restraint* or *Limitation* of all particular *Affections* or *Passions*, by the *calm universal Benevolence*. To make this *Desire* prevalent above all *particular Affections*, is the only sure way to obtain constant *Self-Approbation*.⁶⁹

As with the view in the quotation above from the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, Hutcheson considers that the moral sense approves of benevolence in its variety of forms, and this approval is a necessary part of a person's motivation if their behaviour is

⁶⁶ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 179.

⁶⁷ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, pp. 29-31.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* , pp. 30-31.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* , p. 31.

to be considered genuinely benevolent.⁷⁰ Hutcheson insisted against a range of opponents that benevolence is a genuine part of our constitution, that this is known by introspection and any fair consideration of the behaviour of others, and that extreme forms of absurdity have to be postulated to suggest benevolence is not a real feature of our nature.⁷¹

To return to the major issue in this section, Hutcheson appears to propose three types of relationship between benevolence and the moral sense. At its weakest, both are merely the same in that they are psychological faculties. Co-extensiveness in terms of the values they pursue and promote is a much stronger relationship: identity is the strongest. Hutcheson does not decide between the three, though he emphasizes the stronger two. His reason for avoiding claims of strict identity is that at the same time he consistently argues for the *sui generis* nature of the senses.

Structurally, the ambivalence between co-extensiveness and identity is similar to Hutcheson's comparison of the sense of beauty and the moral sense. Nominally the same problem exists with respect to Shaftesbury. In chapter three I suggested that Shaftesbury uses the notion of moral beauty in either a narrow or wider acceptance. In its wider use emphasis is placed on beauty *simpliciter*, allowing that beauty can be of different forms. In its narrow use the emphasis is on moral beauty, or the moral beauty of actions.

Hutcheson argues for the distinctness of the internal senses, and allows that they can be nominally distinguished into classes. In the *Nature of the Passions* Hutcheson

⁷⁰ To trace out whether Hutcheson distinguishes between necessary and sufficient motivation is beyond my present task. Nor have I discussed Hutcheson's distinction between exciting and justifying reasons.

⁷¹ See Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, p. 14, where Hutcheson writes against those who consider all motives selfish: 'IT requires a good deal of Subtilty to defend this Scheme, so seemingly opposite to *Natural Affection, Friendship, Love of a Country, or Community*, which many find very strong in their Breasts. The Defenses and Schemes commonly offered, can scarce free the Sustainers of this Cause from manifest Absurdity and *Affectation*.' A recent essay by Robert Stewart deals with the disagreement between John Clarke and Hutcheson on the issue of egoism. 'John Clarke and Francis Hutcheson on Self-love and Moral Motivation', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 20 (1982), 261-277.

defines a sense as ‘*every Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain.*’⁷² On this definition a range of internal and external, senses or ‘natural Powers’ are secured. Hutcheson allows that other people may classify them differently. Significantly, he himself places the public sense (or the *Sensus Communis*, related to the public affections and benevolence) and the moral sense into different classes.⁷³ The public sense, according to Hutcheson, is our determination to be pleased with the happiness of others and uneasy at their misery. The moral sense, by contrast, perceives virtue and vice in ourselves or others. He justifies his categorization by remarking that the moral sense:

... is plainly distinct from the former Class of Perceptions, since many are strongly affected with the Fortunes of others, who seldom reflect upon *Virtue, or Vice* in themselves, or others, as an Object: as we may find in *Natural Affection, Compassion, Friendship*, or even *general Benevolence* to Mankind, which connect our Happiness or Pleasure with that of others, even when we are not reflecting upon our own Temper, nor delighted with the Perception of our own Virtue.⁷⁴

In this quotation Hutcheson wavers in another manner in his assessment of the moral sense. The moral value remains constant; the ambivalence concerns the psychological status of benevolence and the moral sense. The moral sense is generally approbative, but in the above quotation Hutcheson emphasizes that it can also be reflective or conscious. Even if Hutcheson occasionally emphasizes the approbative aspects of the moral sense, he never suggests that a person’s recognition of their inner feeling of pleasure or approbation exhausts what is involved in moral apprehension. As discussed in the chapter 4, subjectivity is a central part of what Hutcheson sees as involved in moral assessment and response, but moral assessment involves more than mere subjectivity.

Even in his later works Hutcheson does not question whether the senses are as distinct as he claims them to be. In the *System* of 1755, a work which was largely

⁷² Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, p. 4.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *loc. cit.*

composed between 1733 and 1737⁷⁵, Hutcheson still speaks of a range of internal senses. Chapter 2 discusses the '*finer Powers of Perception*'⁷⁶, a diverse group which includes as well as the moral sense the sense of honour, the sense of decency and dignity, compassion, the imagination, and the relish for grandeur and novelty.⁷⁷ Hutcheson conceives of these as distinct senses with their own direct objects. As with his rationale for claiming a distinct moral sense, his argument is that people display and discern in others honour and compassion, for example. Hutcheson's crucial claim is that people do not mistake honour for virtue or dignity or the like. Hence, in his own view Hutcheson is justified in claiming the *sui generis* status of these various senses. The field is thus clear for the moral sense to have virtue and vice exclusively as its direct objects. If people confuse which sense they are presently using or what specific feeling they are experiencing, then they are in error. Hutcheson cautions his reader in the *System* to a careful use of language:

We often use words too promiscuously, and do not express distinctly the different feelings or sensations of the soul. Let us keep *moral approbation* for our sentiments of such dispositions, affections and consequent actions, as we repute virtuous. We find this warm approbation a very different perception from the admiration or liking which we have for several other powers and dispositions; which are also relished by a sense of *decency* or *dignity*. This sense is also natural to us, but the perceptions [are] very different from moral approbation.⁷⁸

Throughout his whole written output Hutcheson argues that people have a range of natural senses and original desires related to those senses.⁷⁹ As Shaftesbury argued for a range of moral taste, amongst which not all are equal, so too does Hutcheson. Hutcheson makes the point that not all pleasures are equally good. He argues for a

⁷⁵ Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, p. 210.

⁷⁶ Hutcheson, *System*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 15-37.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Hutcheson, *Short Introduction*, 'Table of Contents'. The entry for book I, ch. 1 mentions the internal and external senses; the 'sublimar senses' of the will; the reflex senses [such as what is elsewhere called the sense of beauty]; sympathy; and the sense of moral good or evil, otherwise known as conscience.

distinction between higher and lower pleasures, allowing that all people can enjoy the lower sensual pleasures, while only those of reflection and a noble sensibility enjoy both the higher and lower pleasures in a balanced mixture.⁸⁰ Above the pleasures of the bodily appetites are the social pleasures; and if these are directed towards impartial views of what counts as virtue and justice, this is the highest virtue that people can aspire to. Hutcheson acknowledges that inconsistencies occur both among the pleasures that people pursue and the means necessary to pursue those pleasures. Nevertheless, providence reconciles these seeming disparities, so that the highest and most complete form of happiness, in Hutcheson's eyes, is the pursuit of our highest nature:

In this [the success of virtuous designs], as in all other things, we depend on providence, which, as it gave us at first all our perceptive powers, and their objects, so it disposes of them, and particularly of the happiness or misery of others, the object on which the virtuous affections terminate. This sufficiently shews that the Deity must, for this reason, as well as many others, be the supreme object of our highest happiness: since we can never be secure, nor can we enjoy true serenity and tranquility of mind, without a firm persuasion that his goodness, wisdom and omnipotence are continually employed in securing the felicity of the objects of our noblest affections.⁸¹

Hutcheson's argument here is for a hierarchy of pleasures, judiciously balanced and pursued. A person of moral taste demonstrates the higher reaches of a sensibility, whereas those who mistake the worth of pleasures, including the pleasures of virtue are, in Hutcheson's view, using their moral sense in a way which is less than they are able.

Hutcheson is more confident and outspoken than Shaftesbury in that he identifies distinct psychological faculties. His argument for *sui generis* senses is partly defended by appeal to introspection. This is meant to show that all people have a moral sense and benevolence, or at least, the ability to notice moral distinctions, and genuine concern for other people. However, Hutcheson confuses the idea that people have these abilities with the idea that these abilities belong to distinct faculties or determinations. His analogy between the external senses and the internal senses has misled him into the apparent need to argue for distinct internal senses.

⁸⁰ Hutcheson, *System*, pp. 108-116.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 114.

The issue is this: the usual contemporary criticism against Hutcheson was that there is no organ of internal sensation as there is with the external senses. The criticism does not directly face the issue, or engage Hutcheson in the most telling manner. The assumption that the objection makes is either that the organs of sensation actually perform the whole psychological task of perceiving, or that such organs collect the sensory material which is then 'perceived' in a more sophisticated manner by some composite psychological task. Hutcheson's insistence on a number of internal senses allows the question, which sense, if not which organ, does the sensing? He answers such critics by insisting not on a distinct moral organ, but on a distinct moral sense. His confidence that people are sensitive to moral differences, and genuinely concerned with the well-being of other people obscures from him the possibility that he describes genuine and common abilities and ways of valuing, rather than genuine and common *senses*.

Thus, the zeal with which Hutcheson believed in the distinctness of the internal senses led him to believe in the existence of the senses in question. As Adam Smith was to damagingly point out, Hutcheson can bring no effective evidence to bear that he has correctly identified and categorized the internal senses.⁸² Hutcheson himself acknowledges that different categorizations can be given.⁸³ Beyond this qualification, Hutcheson does not consider that the senses as such are in question. To reiterate, it appears that Hutcheson can bring no effective argument to bear to prevent a proliferation of internal senses or the incorrect categorization of senses that are more accurately to be considered merely abilities. This is because he confuses his arguments to defend the existence of such abilities and sensitivities (benevolence, concern for the good of others, sociableness), with arguments for their being distinct senses. These criticisms did not emerge until Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759. Once considered, they

⁸² This is discussed at more length in chapter 8 below.

⁸³ Hutcheson, *Nature of Passions*, p. 4. Hutcheson writes here 'Tho it is not easy to assign accurate Divisions on such Subjects, yet we may reduce [the senses] to the following Classes, leaving it to others to arrange them as they think convenient.'

severely undermined the status of the moral sense theory. I take up these issues in chapter 8.

5:5 Conclusion

The basic task of this chapter has been to consider whether Hutcheson uses a virtue theory as well as a moral sense theory. The previous chapter demonstrated how Hutcheson uses his moral sense theory to answer epistemological questions. The present chapter supports the view that Hutcheson's moral sense theory is contained within a broader virtue theory. Hutcheson claims that the direct objects of the moral sense are the virtues and vices. At times Hutcheson confuses this with the idea that to behave in a virtuous way is to have a cultivated moral sensibility. There is also his emphasis on the virtue of benevolence; very often Hutcheson writes as though it were the most important or most encompassing virtue, and he appears to confuse the moral sense with benevolence. These are obscurities in Hutcheson's thought. Their presence does not detract from Hutcheson's continued insistence on the morally good and benevolent aspects of human nature.

In the course of the present chapter, and especially the last section, I raised the notion that Hutcheson's moral sense theory is inadequate in a number of ways. These doubts were not voiced till Adam Smith wrote at the end of the 1750s. Till then, the moral sense theory had a strong and diverse group of adherents. The following chapter will consider the use of the moral sense theory by other eighteenth century writers, predominantly Joseph Butler.

CHAPTER SIX

OTHER MORAL SENSE WRITERS

6:1 Introduction

The moral sense theory was not confined to a narrow group of writers in the eighteenth century. Francis Hutcheson may have given the theory its most detailed form, but many others wrote of the moral sense with various degrees of philosophical sophistication.

Joseph Butler is the major figure of this chapter. He was a contemporary of Hutcheson, though he does not acknowledge an indebtedness to him. He does, however, concede the influence of Shaftesbury. Despite an absence of direct influence, Butler's account of conscience is very similar to Francis Hutcheson's theory of the moral sense. There seems to have been a mutual respect and implicit recognition of each others' written output, but there was no direct communication between the two men. Butler, however, concerns himself much less with epistemological detail than does Hutcheson. Indeed, Butler seems specifically to confound Hutcheson's understanding of the moral sense as either a perceptual faculty or a sensibility. Butler disclaims that the difference is important:

It is manifest great part of common language, and of common behaviour over the world, is formed upon supposition of such a moral faculty; whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or Divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart; or, which seems the truth, as including both.¹

The issue of epistemological detail is thus not a profitable one to pursue with respect to Butler. His moral works always have a primarily didactic purpose, and he never deals with epistemological questions for their own sake. Two issues in Butler's moral account

¹ Joseph Butler, 'Of the Nature of Virtue' in *The Works*, edited by Samuel Halifax, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press (1874), vol. 1, p. 329. (Unless otherwise indicated I use this two volume edition. The first volume contains Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Human Nature. To which are added Two Brief Dissertations. I. Of Personal Identity. II. Of the Nature of Virtue.* The second volume contains the series of sermons usually known as *Fifteen Sermons from Rolls Chapel*, as well as *Six Sermons Preached upon Public Occasions, A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham, 1751*, and the *Correspondence Between Dr. Butler and Dr. Clarke*. For our purposes, the most important works are Butler's dissertation 'Of the nature of Virtue', and the *Fifteen Sermons from Rolls Chapel*, which I will hereafter abbreviate to *Sermons*.)

do stand out: one concerns the authoritativeness of the moral sense, the other concerns Butler's preference to discuss emotional distortions impinging on conscience, rather than moral error *simpliciter*.

Many other writers of the period gave an account of the moral sense. This chapter looks briefly at a few figures other than Butler. George Turnbull's place in moral philosophy was short lived. His *Principles of Moral Philosophy* was published in 1739, but it offered a moral sense theory unchanged from that of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.² David Hartley gives a stark materialist account of the workings of the moral sense. More than the other moral sense writers he confines his explanation of our moral life to causes which are physically determinist. His major works are the *Enquiry into the Origin of Human Appetites and Affections* of 1747, and the *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* of 1749. Henry Home, Lord Kames, is the final figure in this chapter. His account in the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) was a major statement of a moral theory already under heavy criticism by David Hume, as will be seen in the next chapter. This chapter does not provide a complete account of the full range of moral sense theories of the period, though it does indicate the breadth that such theories displayed.

6:2 Joseph Butler

Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, lived from 1692 to 1752. His philosophical reputation rests on two works. These are the *Fifteen Sermons from Rolls Chapel*, first published in 1726, and the *Analogy of Religion* of 1736. Butler's account of conscience is particularly contained in the first three sermons 'Upon Human Nature' and the second appendix to the *Analogy*. This is the dissertation 'Of the Nature of Virtue'.

² References to these works are given later in the chapter.

Butler explicitly mentions Lord Shaftesbury in his preface to the *Sermons*, first added in 1729. He does not cite Hutcheson directly. Butler shares the earlier moral sense writers' concern to refute the egoists and moral sceptics, with an appeal to a natural moral faculty to achieve this task. Like the earlier writers so far discussed, Butler gives a description of human nature which differentiates between real human nature and base human nature. The difference is sometimes discussed in terms of self-interest, with its distinction between genuine self-interests and selfish interests (or what I call 'spurious' or 'narrow' self-interests).³ And, like these earlier writers, Butler's assessment of human nature is that it fulfills God's teleological purposes.

What makes people uniquely human is their moral faculty: it is this which distinguishes them from the animals. Butler most often calls this conscience, and the argument in the present chapter is that his notion of conscience performs many of the tasks allotted to the moral sense by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.

Central among these tasks is that of motivation. This raises the question of what Butler intends by the authority of the moral sense. Commentators such as T.A. Roberts and Terence Penelhum say that Butler states that conscience is authoritative, and the implication is that he was the first of the moral sense tradition to do so clearly.⁴ The originality of the claim less clearly belongs to Butler than is usually thought. Shaftesbury makes, though doesn't use, a distinction between cognitive and normative errors. Shaftesbury's discussion of normative correctness carries the same implications as Butler's insistence on the natural authority of conscience.

³ One clear occurrence of the distinction between selfish interests and real self-interests is in Sermon XI, 'Upon the Love of our Neighbour'. Butler likens the caution not to be over-fond of a child, to its detriment, with the need to understand and follow a correct perception of our self-interest. He writes 'Immoderate self-love does very ill consult its own interest: and how much soever a paradox it may appear, it is certainly true, that even from self-love we should endeavour to get over all inordinate regard to, and consideration of ourselves'. See Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 139-140.

⁴ On Butler's thesis of the authority of conscience, compare T.A. Roberts, *The Concept of Benevolence: Aspects of Eighteenth Century Moral Philosophy*, London, etc.: MacMillan (1973), pp. 31-34; and Terence Penelhum, *Butler*, London, etc.: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1985), pp. 59-61. Penelhum discusses at length his disagreement with Nicholas Sturgeon's claim that Butler commits a full naturalistic fallacy with his notion of the naturalness of virtue, according to which the judgements of conscience that particular things are natural or unnatural are uninformative. See Penelhum, *Butler*, ch. 3, 'The Case for Virtue', especially p. 65.

Another among these tasks for conscience is the correction of selfish and prejudicial forms of moral error. The moral sense writers are aware that they have to account for disagreement among different people's moral apprehensions, without conceding extreme forms of moral relativism. Hutcheson, as we have seen in the chapters above, combines both these tasks in the role of the normal or competent moral spectator.

Butler makes fair use of a variety of moral spectators, but rather than using them to answer questions concerning moral error, he describes how the particular emotions of compassion and resentment affect both the spectator's behaviour and moral point of view.

Real human nature

Butler, in common with his fellow moral sense writers, describes conscience within the larger context of human nature. Butler's position is that human nature is a constitution of various instincts and abilities, related not as mere parts, but as a judicious assemblage of items that work in balanced and effective ways together. He prefaces his *Sermons* by saying that he will argue for this view of human nature:

Mankind has various instincts and principles of action, as brute creatures have; some leading most directly and immediately to the good of the community, and some most directly to private good.

Man has several which brutes have not; particularly reflection or conscience, an approbation of some principles or actions, and disapprobation of others.⁵

Butler goes on to say that animals always conform to the whole of their nature, and that this means that they always follow that instinct or passion which is presently uppermost

⁵ Butler, 'Preface' in *Sermons*, p. xiv. (Butler's *Sermons* were first published in 1726, though his 'Preface' was not written until 1729, from whence it was appended to the second and later editions of this work. See Penelhum, *Butler*, p. 2.)

in their constitution.⁶ Man, according to Butler, is different in two respects. He follows not only self-love (or consistent, but narrow self-gratification⁷) and sensual appetites, but he is also motivated by 'friendship, compassion, gratitude; and even a general abhorrence of what is base, and liking of what is fair and just.'⁸ In this way man has a larger repertoire of influences which affect his action than those of the animals. The second point is that conscience has a natural authority over the other, unstable motivations to action. He states his argument in these terms:

[O]ne of those principles of action, conscience or reflection, compared with the rest as they stand all together in the nature of man, plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims the absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification: a disapprobation of reflection being in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere propension. And the conclusion is, that to allow no more to this superior principle or part of our nature, than to other parts; to let it govern and guide only occasionally in common with the rest, as its turn happens to come, from the temper and circumstances one happens to be in; this is not to act conformably to the constitution of man: neither can any human creature be said to act conformably to his constitution of nature, unless he allows to that superior principle the absolute authority which is due to it.⁹

In common with the moral sense writers, he has distinguished man apart from the animals by this 'superior principle'. Much the same task is advanced by recognizing that 'nature' has a wide range of meanings, specifically to do with the term 'human nature'. Butler insists that if we follow these occasional impulses we conform to only a part of our nature. By following the lower part of our nature and satisfying the occurrent passions, we effectively conform to only the base part of our nature. Only by actively following our superior moral faculty do we conform to the whole of our nature.¹⁰

⁶ Penelhum makes the point in reading Butler that an animal led into a trap follows its nature, whereas persons following their present passion may follow only a part of their nature, if the passion leads to harm for the agent. See Penelhum, *Butler*, pp. 18-19.

⁷ See Butler, 'Upon the Love of Our Neighbour' in *Sermons*, especially pp. 142-143, where Butler argues that there is no particular contrariety between self-love and benevolence.

⁸ Butler, *Sermons*, p. xiv.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. xv.

¹⁰ See the opening paragraphs of Sermon III for another quotation to the effect that human nature is a collection of principles led by conscience. Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 30-31.

Butler follows a middle course in his assessment of human nature between the pessimistic assessment of the Calvinists and the optimistic assessment of the Cambridge Platonists. Both in the dissertation 'Of the Nature of Virtue' and Sermon XV 'Upon the Ignorance of Man' Butler remarks that mankind is limited in its knowledge¹¹, and not as perfectly benevolent as God.¹² Accordingly, Butler finds that people should be modest with regard to their claims of knowledge, and their endeavours to bring about public good. Our limited tasks are to cultivate virtue and observe religion.¹³

Providential teleology

A common feature of the moral sense writers is their endorsement of a providential teleology. Butler is alike in this regard: his account of nature and human nature is teleological. Butler's account of human nature is inseparable from the theological assumptions that mankind has suffered from the fall in the Garden of Eden, and yet individuals are able to recover from this fall according to the goodness of their moral and religious behaviour. Butler finds no disparity between the essentials of virtue, and natural and revealed religion.

Penelhum gives a useful account of Butler's providential teleology. Here I briefly consider two points that Penelhum makes. First, he remarks that, in the *Sermons*, Butler is concerned to exhort everyone to morally good behaviour, whether or not they accept

¹¹ See especially Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 201- 202 and 207-208.

¹² Butler, 'Of the Nature of Virtue', p. 338. Here Butler writes concerning the benevolence of God, 'The happiness of the world is the concern of him, who is the Lord and the Proprietor of it: nor do we know what we are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways, but those which he has directed; that is indeed in all ways not contrary to veracity and justice.'

¹³ Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 202-205. On p. 205 Butler describes the limitations of journeying by a faint light, rather than the light of the sun. If our constitution is limited by God to this comparative dusk, then we would be foolish to ignore our conscience, the luminescence of half light, and complain that we cannot see.

the theological premisses which are the foundation of his account. Butler appeals to what he considers empirical and indisputable facts concerning human nature that he feels everyone must accept. He considers that this empirical account is compatible with an *a priori* account of human nature that can be derived from close consideration of theoretical matters, but he is not concerned to defend this *a priori* account.¹⁴

Second, in the *Analogy*, where Butler gives an account of the similarity between natural and revealed religion and the moral aspects of Christianity, he concedes that people may have difficulties in understanding the nature of God. Despite this, there is no real possibility of uncertainty concerning their obligation to morally good behaviour in their present life. According to Butler, religion teaches us that we live under the auspices of a perfect moral government, and that our personal responsibility is to take those opportunities presented to us in our mortal life to foster virtue and piety. This will qualify us for a future state of security and happiness. We do not foster virtue to achieve this end, though this end, as well as present-day happiness, are secured by cultivating virtue.

Conscience

Conscience is, for Butler, the superior principle among the instincts and principles which form a person's constitution. Conscience is a natural sense of moral good and evil:

There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions. We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take view of what passes within itself, its propensions, aversions, passions, affections, as respecting such objects, and in such degrees; and of the several actions consequent thereupon... This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions is conscience; for this is the strict sense of the word, though sometimes it is used so as to take in more. And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each

¹⁴ Though he does think it defensible. See Penelhum, *Butler*, pp. 11, and 15-16. Penelhum reports that Butler corresponded with Samuel Clarke, and changed his earlier exclusive preference for empirical investigation to a recognition that *a priori* investigations, such as those of Samuel Clarke, showed the same view of human nature. Penelhum speaks of Butler's correspondence with Clarke in *Butler*, p. 1.

other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon.¹⁵

Butler is similar to Henry More, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in taking this moral faculty to reflect upon our motives, affections and actions, discerning between the morally good and morally bad, and approving or disapproving accordingly. According to Butler, this moral power not only distinguishes the morally good from the bad or indifferent, but it also motivates us to do good, and restrains us from committing morally bad acts. Hence, the notion of conscience in Butler's writings spans the whole range of tasks that earlier writers attribute to the moral sense, including cognition, an affective response, and in many cases a motivational response. The last, a motivational response, depends on whether spectators are suitably placed, in terms of either their role or their set of beliefs and attitudes, to respond with a specific action.¹⁶

Conscience measures people's behaviour with the categories of virtue and vice. As well as the definition we have seen immediately above, Butler gives an account of conscience at the beginning of his dissertation 'Of the Nature of Virtue'. He appeals to a form of argument based on the common usage of language. This is supplemented by Butler's argument, close to what Hutcheson uses, of an intrinsic difference between natural and moral goods. Butler writes:

That we have this moral approving and disapproving faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourselves, and recognizing it in each other. It appears from our exercising it unavoidably, in the approbation and disapprobation even of feigned characters: from the words *right* and *wrong*, *odious* and *amiable*, *base* and *worthy*, with many others of like signification in all languages, applied to actions and characters: from the many written systems of morals which suppose it; since it cannot be imagined, that all these authors, throughout all these treatises, had absolutely no meaning at all to their words, or a meaning merely chimerical.¹⁷

¹⁵ Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ These notions of moral roles, and roles specified by beliefs and attitudes have been discussed with respect to Hutcheson, above. See also ch 8, on Adam Smith's notion of situational propriety.

¹⁷ Butler, 'Of the Nature of Virtue', pp. 328-329.

Butler gives much less detail concerning the epistemology of the moral faculty than does Hutcheson. Such detail would be incongruous in a series of sermons originally delivered over a number of years. Nor, however, does Butler give substantial epistemological detail in the *Analogy* of 1736. Nevertheless, Butler attributes many of the same tasks to conscience as Hutcheson does to the moral sense. Both describe a cognitive faculty, whose major role is to discern the moral qualities of our own and other people's actions and characters. According to Butler, sentiments or affections occur in conjunction with this moral cognition, and may either cause or be the result of our recognizing the moral worth of what it is we are apprehending. Butler gives too little detail to tell whether he takes the affections to cause or merely accompany the moral apprehension. Depending on our role in the complex moral situation we approve and are motivated to act in certain determinate ways. As discussed with reference to Hutcheson, all moral situations are minimally complex in that they can be understood as a triadic unity of a moral object or situation; conditions of observation; and the moral spectator observing the specific situation.¹⁸ Given that God has designed us with a determinate set of instincts and principles, especially the moral faculty, we have reason to be confident that our moral faculty is generally correct, and that to act in accordance with it secures both our own and others' genuine interests.

The authority of conscience

Butler places great emphasis on the authority of conscience. In his own estimation, he indicates that it is here that he diverges most widely from Shaftesbury's account of the moral sense.¹⁹ Shaftesbury, Butler feels, has insufficiently refuted the moral sceptics, who are able to retreat to the position that, if as sceptics they sincerely believe that to follow their (narrow) interests will procure their happiness, then they are under an

¹⁸ This is discussed at length in the last major section of chapter 4.

¹⁹ Butler, *Sermons*, pp. xvi-xvii.

obligation to follow such interests. Butler at this point insists on the authority of the moral sense:

The not taking into consideration this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation, seems a material deficiency or omission in lord Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue. He has shown beyond all contradiction, that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness, and vice the misery, of such a creature as man, placed in the circumstances which we are in this world. But suppose there are particular exceptions; a case which this author is unwilling to put, and yet surely it is to be put: or suppose a case which he has put and determined, that of a sceptic not convinced of this happy tendency of virtue, or being of a contrary opinion. His determination is, that it would be *without remedy*.²⁰

In chapter 2 we saw that Shaftesbury makes a distinction between the cognitive and normative correctness of the moral sense.²¹ But this is an isolated clarification that is not given a large role in Shaftesbury's writings. And while Shaftesbury offers this clarification about forms of correctness, he certainly concedes that there is error and disagreement in people's moral sense judgements.

Given these considerations, Butler is correct to have misgivings about how strongly Shaftesbury considers that every person's moral sense should be the same. Shaftesbury, however, has an answer that would have enabled him to rebut Butler's remark. In retrospect, we can see that Shaftesbury describes, without classifying, moral sense variation and moral sense error, without conceding that this variation necessarily implies error. This is implicit in his discussion of surface variation in moral sense judgements. For example, Shaftesbury criticizes Locke for naively thinking that moral differences between cultures implies overt moral relativism.²² The need to allow both surface variation and outright moral error, and the means to distinguish between them, is crucial if the moral sense theories are to make good their claims of explanatory worth. Of course, the test to distinguish these phenomena is itself under a shadow. The moral sense

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. xvi.

²¹ See ch. 3, in the section on the correctness of the moral sense.

²² Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, p. 403, where Shaftesbury writes that ' 'Twas Mr. Locke that struck at all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world, and made the very idea of these (which are the same as those of God) *unnatural*, and without foundation in our minds. ... Then comes the credulous Mr. Locke, with his Indian, barbarian stories of wild nations...'

writers concede that disagreement of some sort occurs: the question is whether specific disagreements are trivial variations, or actual errors.²³

On the possibility of surface variation, Shaftesbury allows that people's roles are different in various situations, and that there is the possibility of moral cultivation. Such cultivation means that there are grades of refinement of the moral sense. Actual *errors* of the moral sense are occasioned by prejudice, narrow forms of self-interest, false education and the incorrect association of ideas.²⁴

Shaftesbury does not make these points systematically, but he does make the implicit claim that he is able to differentiate between variety of moral sense apprehensions (or judgements) without there being actual error, cognitive or normative. Variety in moral judgements with respect to the same case may be due to the perspective of a person's role, or their level of moral cultivation. For example, a scene of extreme unhappiness may cause my neighbour to be discreet, but my family members to be more concerned. And just as importantly, Shaftesbury allows errors of cognitive and normative kinds. It is not possible to generalize about responsibility for moral error on Shaftesbury's scheme. A person is seemingly responsible for culpable ignorance, a cognitive error; and yet diminished responsibility in the case of ingrained bad habits is possible, even though the basic error is of a normative kind.

In contrast to what Butler thinks, I think that Shaftesbury does answer the sceptics. Shaftesbury is able to respond that even though people may not do the morally best thing, there is a morally best thing to be done. Even though a person may not notice that he performs something morally deficient, other people do recognize this discrepancy from what is normatively the best thing that could be done. This notion of someone

²³ Compare Colman, *John Locke*, p. 59. In contrast to Shaftesbury's estimation of Locke, Colman argues that Locke was aware of the diversity of moral beliefs, yet was demanding a decision procedure to evaluate the truth of such beliefs.

²⁴ Both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson refer to such errors of the moral sense. On Shaftesbury, see for example, see *Concerning Virtue*, pp. 72-84 .; and with Hutcheson, for example, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 251.

knowing what is morally correct or best is the core of the authority of conscience or the moral sense. Butler's comment in the Preface to the *Sermons* suggests that Shaftesbury made no use of the notion of authority, or the warranted normative correctness of the moral sense.

Penelhum sees the issue somewhat differently from this. In his book on Butler, Penelhum writes that the question of the authority of the moral sense comes down to this: the issue is not addressed by the question 'Has my conscience made an error about what it is I ought to do?' but rather 'Even if my conscience has correctly judged an action to be morally obligatory, should I do it?'²⁵ Penelhum continues, Butler 'is telling us that we cannot use the word "should", or its equivalents, here, in any way that permits a negative answer'.²⁶ Ultimately, Penelhum finds that Butler's arguments depend on the design of a providential teleology. While it may be possible to do other than what nature obliges us to do, there is no real sense in which we are free to do as we will, without respect for, or consideration of our nature.

The distinction Penelhum indicates is between the correct judgement of conscience, and our willingness to comply with it. The most important points Penelhum refers to are these: if we fail to comply with what our conscience judges best we feel unease because we fail to conform to what we know we should do. We approve whatever prospective acts our conscience judges best, and we know that we ought to follow our conscience. This is close to common usage of the term 'conscience'.²⁷

If this is a fair reading of Penelhum's Butler, then the interesting point is that it differs markedly from the moral sense writers view that there is little room for divergence between what our moral sense apprehends (as normatively correct or sufficient), and what we do. It has been a feature of moral sense theories considered so far that there is a

²⁵ Penelhum, *Butler*, p. 72.

²⁶ *loc. cit.*

²⁷ See OED and Selwyn Grave, *Conscience in Newman's Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1989) ch. 1 'The ordinary conception of conscience'.

sufficient, connection between seeing that our role and possible actions in a determinate situation are of a certain sort, and performing the best possible action.²⁸ Shaftesbury and Hutcheson take it as unproblematic that the moral sense has a strong role in motivating people to do the morally best, as well as a cognitive and normative role in judging what is morally best. If Penelhum is correct in his reading of Butler, then the authority of the moral sense does not depend on whether it has a motivating role or not, only whether it is normatively correct. Normative correctness is the minimal condition that Butler requires of conscience, and this is much more cautious than what earlier moral sense writers have claimed on behalf of the moral sense.

Hence Butler strengthens the normative and authoritative role of the moral sense, but denies that we are necessarily motivated to act according to the normative judgements of our moral sense. In allowing the moral sense a central place in cognition and motivation, Shaftesbury has left little place for the idea that we fail to perform the morally best action.

This is different from Butler's assessment of the difficulty of Shaftesbury's account, which is that Shaftesbury allows no notion of normative correctness to the moral sense. Butler's criticism is that individuals' conscience gives them a normative standard, even though they may fail to be adequately motivated to attain such a standard. Butler's failure, I suggest, is that he attributes to Shaftesbury an undifferentiated account of moral sense error, on which Shaftesbury is able to make no distinction between the variety of moral sense judgements, and moral error proper. In Butler's more cautious use of the notion of a moral power, he correctly understands that Shaftesbury claims much more for this power than he is willing to do himself. Butler's error is that he fails to see that Shaftesbury also claims the normative correctness of this moral power, even if Shaftesbury is unconcerned by the difficulties this raises for reconciling the motivating

²⁸ What confuses the issue is that it is only in considering Butler's work, that Shaftesbury and Hutcheson stand out as not making a clear distinction between sufficient and necessary motivating conditions.

role of the moral sense with the normatively-judging role of the same power. This brings us to the need to consider what Butler makes of moral error.

Moral error

Butler, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, does not argue that the moral sense is infallible. Consistent with the strategy of discerning a gap between a real human nature and a base human nature, Butler acknowledges that he has to give some account of what it is for us to be morally wrong. However, given his insistence on the authority of the moral sense, he has to be more circumspect about how he characterizes moral error.

The first point Butler makes is that the moral faculty is usually correct:

In all common ordinary cases we see intuitively at first view what is our duty, what is the honest part. This is the ground of the observation that the first thought is often the best. In these cases doubt and deliberation is itself dishonesty. ... That which is called considering what is our duty in a particular case, is very often nothing but endeavouring to explain it away.²⁹

The major point is that there is a *prima facie* correctness about our first (original) and non-willed apprehension of the moral situations in which we find ourselves, including any motivation to action we feel, as this motivation is tailored by the moral situation and our place in it. While Butler does not labour the point, it can be said in support of this correctness that most moral situations are replicable and ordinary. They rarely have unusual or radically new elements in them which make them incomprehensible. In such unusual situations it would be appropriate for the moral sense to wait in abeyance, not judging in the lack of pertinent information.³⁰

²⁹ Butler, *Sermons*, p. 88.

³⁰ These points about the normality or repetitiousness of most moral situations, and the proper hesitation of the moral sense only in unusual circumstances have been suggested by Alan Tapper. They are to be found explicitly in Hume's first appendix to the *Enquiry Concerning Morals*, which is discussed in the following chapter. I am undecided whether Butler actually succeeds in making the point that in unusual situations the moral sense could or should withhold its approbation.

The subsidiary point Butler makes is that while our first thought is often the best, it need not be so. In the present case Butler is describing the process of self-deception, the laying down of bad habits. This is a special case of ingrained moral error. But moral error can be more short-lived. Butler, like our other writers, particularly focuses on narrow forms of self-interest, claiming that they damage our ability to see in a morally good way. He writes:

We are in such a peculiar situation, with respect to injuries done to ourselves, that we can scarce any more see them as they really are, than our eye can see itself. If we could place ourselves at a due distance, i.e. be really unprejudiced, we should frequently discern that to be in reality inadvertence and mistake in our enemy, which we now fancy we see to be malice or scorn... Self-love is a medium of a peculiar kind: in these cases it magnifies every thing which is amiss in others, at the same time that it lessens every thing amiss in ourselves.³¹

Interpreting Butler a fair deal, we can say that he distinguishes between two families of moral error, each with their own subdivisions. The first has to do with errors in our 'first thought', or what we might expect to be our properly working moral faculty. Errors of this sort can either be due to lack of relevant information, or the occurrence of strong and overwhelming passions. These two might combine together: the rearing of passions because of a lack of information of the right sort. Speaking of the first family of error, it seems that Butler describes occasional and short-lived errors, not necessarily implicating self-interest.³²

Butler gives examples that we can categorize on his behalf. An error due to lack of information is exemplified by the compassion we feel for those brought to low circumstances by poverty. But, if we are told that their poverty was due to sustained

³¹ Butler, *Sermons*, p. 113.

³² Whether Butler intended to imply such a categorization of errors of conscience is not clear. The first family of errors may only ambiguously involve *errors* of conscience, consisting more in things which go against conscience. Behaviour affected by a lack of information, or behaviour motivated by passions comprise the first category. Errors of self-interest comprise the second group; these may be occasional, recurrent or long-term. See Butler, *Sermons* VII, VIII and IX, especially *Sermons*, pp. 85-86, 90, 92-93, 109.

profligacy, we greatly modify our original assessment, no longer feeling compassion.³³ This is very similar to the case of feeling compassionate towards a person whom we see suffering; we feel a compassionate affection. But, continues Butler, if we are told that we witness a criminal being punished for his crimes, our compassion is much reduced.³⁴ Error due to the rearing of passions is spoken of in a general way in the *Analogy*. Butler there argues for the improvement of virtue as a defence against particular wayward passions which would sway us to wrongdoing.³⁵

The second family of moral errors, as I understand Butler, are occasioned by self-interest. They may be long-term or recurrent errors, but this is not a necessary feature of their categorization. It is merely that, being due to self-interest, it is possible or likely that they will occur on more than one occasion. In briefly setting out these cases, we need to notice that Butler makes a general statement that a plain honest man will be accurate in his moral assessment of situations. In the sermons 'Upon human nature' Butler remarks that his inquiries concerning conscience do indeed result in general rules for conduct. Nevertheless, the honest man deliberating on each moral act is at no disadvantage, but knows the difference between moral good and ill with the same certainty. Butler writes:

Yet let any plain honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself, Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong? Is it good, or is it evil? I do not in the least doubt, but that this question would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstance. Neither do there appear any cases which look like exceptions to this; but those of superstition, and of partiality to ourselves. Superstition may perhaps be somewhat of an exception: but partiality to ourselves is not; this being itself dishonesty ... [and] plain vice.³⁶

From this, it can generally be said that Butler recognizes a class of moral error involving partiality, or narrow forms of self-interest. We have already seen a long-term form of

³³ Butler, 'Of the Nature of Virtue', p. 335.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 331.

³⁵ Butler, *Analogy*, p. 98.

³⁶ Butler, *Sermons*, pp. 32-33.

this error to do with moral self-deception. Butler describes the Old Testament figure of Balaam, a person sliding into moral turpitude. Balaam is sufficiently self-aware to want to conform to the show of virtue, without fulfilling the reality of virtue. It is such persons, Butler remarks, who look twice at the moral situation in which they find themselves. They hope to find a way of satisfying the moral requirements placed upon them by their role in the situation, but by reducing these requirements to a minimum.³⁷

Butler recognizes that he is not describing a person who is careless in an unthinking way, and hence morally dubious. He is describing a person, who, with 'cool motives of interest and advantage' voluntarily chooses the morally worse course.³⁸ The reasonable choice is seen and acknowledged, even in a reduced way, but the unreasonable choice is made.

Butler finds that the only reason why people could begin upon this route of self-deception is that they have incorrect notions of the good of virtue. Not only do they forget that virtue is its own highest reward in the present life, both to the agent and her wider community, but this is even more assuredly the case if the balancing of good with desert in the afterlife is taken into account.³⁹ Butler's point, however, does not depend on an afterlife in which a moral ledger is balanced. Proper self-interest is, by definition, a matter of concern for us in our present life. Butler's theology commits him to the view that God judges after death, and in a generous rather than a vengeful way. Nevertheless, Butler's moral system is secular, in that self-interest, virtue and duty are matters of concern to us as we live our earthly life: a morally good life brings its own rewards in terms of happiness, peace of mind, and the ability to enjoy a wide range of pleasures, including the most satisfying ones of benevolence and community.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 86 for Butler's description of Balaam's half-deceits about what constitutes his moral requirements, and p. 88 for the idea that such a person half-resolves to reform in the future.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 87.

It is interesting that in the sermon 'Upon the character of Balaam' Butler allows that a person may not realize she is committing a moral error, whereas an astute observer may recognize that she is indeed doing so. The context is one where Butler remains uncommitted about the categorization of moral thought and its degree of sophistication.

He writes that:

[A]n unfair mind [has the scope] to explain away every moral obligation to itself. Whether men reflect again upon this internal management and artifice, and how explicit they are with themselves, is another question. There are many operations of the mind, many things pass within, which we never reflect upon again; which a by-stander, from having frequent opportunities of observing us and our conduct, may make shrewd guesses at.⁴⁰

To summarize, in his account of conscience, Butler allows that errors occur. While he does not categorize these errors, it is possible to categorize errors as either involving no reflection, or an incorrect understanding of our real self-interest. The first group involves either a lack of information, or the distortion of strong but occasional passions. Errors of the second group involve either a short-term or long-term misunderstanding of our proper self-interest. They may be occasional, recurrent or long-term, but this is subsidiary to the distorted self-interest that they involve. Two other ideas were discussed in this section. Butler remarks on the process of moral self-deception; and he allows that people may be unaware of their own thoughts and feelings, so that they misunderstand the moral tenor of their own behaviour. In these cases, Butler leaves open the possibility that astute observers can accurately understand other people. It is to this issue that we now turn.

The moral spectator

Like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Butler appeals to the moral spectator at certain junctures in his writing. Unlike Hutcheson, who can be attributed with a degree of systematics in describing both normal spectators, and spectators with cultivated

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 89.

sensibilities, Butler's observations and remarks remain an unconnected set of insights. A difference of emphasis between Hutcheson and Butler is that Hutcheson provides a fair amount of detail regarding the moral spectator. People, however, are both moral spectators and moral agents. Arguably Butler reflects this obvious point more than Hutcheson by focussing on the ways in which moral *agency* is influenced, say, by the emotions, rather than how moral *spectatorship* is influenced by the emotions. Nevertheless, Butler also speaks of moral spectatorship, and this is the rubric under which his thoughts on the correction of moral error can be considered.

Butler, then, makes use of the notion of the moral spectator to personify moral viewing conditions. Typically he appeals to the moral spectator to describe how a particular passion or instinct affects our moral apprehension, and our moral action. Compassion and resentment are described at some length in terms of how they affect moral spectators. And, more succinctly than Hutcheson, Butler describes how acutely aware we are of other people's emotions, behaviour and moral intentions. Most interesting is the idea that we are more aware of other people's misfortune and despair than of their happiness. Somewhat at odds with his notion that we are aware of others' moral and emotional status, is his recognition that we often fail to be competent judges in our own case. We look at the general points first, and then briefly consider Butler's account of the moral spectator with respect to specific passions.

In the first of his sermons 'Upon human nature' Butler, like other moral sense writers, insists upon the genuine concern we have for other people. He too finds that benevolence and proper self-love are not at odds:

[W]e were made for society, and to promote the happiness of it; as [much as] we were intended to take care of our own life, and health, and private good.⁴¹

Butler describes our nature as indelibly social, so that we are naturally aware of other people and take their concerns as seriously as our own. With this he is not describing

⁴¹Butler, *Sermons*, p. 11.

moral spectators as such, but the necessary background conditions to there being such spectators. Butler speaks of ‘correspondence between the inward sensations’ of one person and another, as for example the fear of disgrace and the desire for esteem.⁴² He remarks that we form community ties for seemingly trivial reasons. No matter what causes are alluded to, Butler remarks that we have an indelible preference for stable communities. In an argument that could be directed against Mandeville, Butler writes:

Thus relations merely nominal are sought and invented, not by governors, but by the lowest of the people; which are found sufficient to hold mankind together in little fraternities and copartnerships.⁴³

So far Butler has merely spoken about man’s social nature. He goes on to suggest that we particularly communicate to one another (or even share) emotions, and that this communication is important because of our mutual dependence.

Men are so much one body, that in a peculiar manner they feel for each other, shame, sudden danger, resentment, honour, prosperity, distress; one or another, or all of these, from the social nature in general, from benevolence, upon the occasion of natural relation, acquaintance, protection, dependence: each of these being distinct cements of society.⁴⁴

Butler gives no detail about how this communication of emotions is achieved. He considers it an unquestionable fact of human nature, known both by experience and calm reflection, that we are immediately, and most often correctly, aware of other people’s emotions.

It is interesting to note that Butler claims, as did Hume and Adam Smith, that not all of the emotions are similarly communicative.⁴⁵ The relevant material occurs in Sermon V, ‘Upon compassion’. Butler is contrasting our rejoicing in the prosperity of others, and our compassion at their distress. The first point he makes is that with both types of affectionate response we substitute ourselves for others, and so share their

⁴² *loc. cit.*

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ See chs. 7 and 8 below.

interests, pleasures and sorrows.⁴⁶ This substitution is not self-love, because, Butler maintains, we genuinely feel for the distress of others; we relieve it when we can, and feel pity towards others. This pity we do not confuse with fear that we might find ourselves in similar circumstances.⁴⁷

Butler then goes on to say that we feel compassion more acutely than happiness at the felicity of others. The difference, he finds, is so marked that compassion must be an original and particular affection in human nature, whereas rejoicing with others is 'only a consequence of the general affection of love and good-will' towards others.⁴⁸ Butler writes that the difference answers to a distinct purpose:

The reason and account of which matter is this: when a man has obtained any particular advantage or felicity, his end is gained; and he does not in that particular want the assistance of another: there was therefore no need of a distinct affection towards that felicity of another already obtained; neither would such affection directly carry him on to do good to that person: whereas men in distress want assistance; and compassion leads us directly to assist them.⁴⁹

Butler rounds out his argument by reminding his reader that we are imperfect creatures who need the assistance of others for our well-being. Reason itself is an insufficient motive to virtue.⁵⁰ God has placed in us senses and passions to supply the defects of our nature, so that our highest nature proceeds upon the proper exercise of our senses and passions, as well as our reason.⁵¹

As with the earlier moral sense writers, Butler seems to use this fact about the communicativeness of the emotions as a basis for insisting that there is a like

⁴⁶ Butler, *Sermons*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 54, fn a. Butler here directly argues against Hobbes's assessment of fear as a pervasive passion. In Hobbes's eyes we help other people in distress because of the fear we feel at finding ourselves in a similar situation. This, Butler argues, completely ignores the phenomenon of genuine benevolence.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ *loc. cit.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 58. Butler writes 'Reason alone, whatever any one may wish, is not in reality a sufficient motive of virtue in such a creature as man...'

⁵¹ *loc. cit.*

communicativeness of moral states between people. If sociability, benevolence and mutual dependence are built upon the awareness of other people's emotions, then the moral sense or conscience is built upon the awareness of other people's moral behaviour. Butler gives no separate argument for the way in which we become aware of other people's moral intentions and their virtues and vices. Butler intertwines, or even confuses this awareness of others' emotional states, with their moral states. To an extent this is warranted by the role that the emotions have as being a component of, or a motivation towards moral behaviour. Compassion is an important example in Butler's account. It is a distinct emotion in its own right; it motivates us to try and assist others in need, and insofar as it does, it motivates us to the virtue of benevolence.

Somewhat at odds with these notions of communicativeness is Butler's recognition that we fail to be astute moral observers in our own case. Already quoted above is a passage dealing with the distortions introduced by narrow self-interest.⁵² This distortion includes underestimating our responsibility for our disagreement with others we have harmed, and taking offence at the unintentional harm of others. Butler here diverges from the general pattern so far seen among the moral sense writers, that of attributing to narrow forms of self-interest all errors of the moral sense. This can be seen in Butler's concession that perspectival distortions of the moral sense can occur, without these necessarily being the same as, or accompanied by, vice.

According to Butler, mankind is without destructive principles, even though people occasionally, or even frequently, are unmindful of others. Butler confidently remarks that there is no such thing as self-hatred, and by a parity of reasoning there is no settled ill-will towards others.⁵³ Inordinate passions may sway us, insisting on their gratification, to the neglect of other people. But:

⁵² See Butler, *Sermons*, p. 113.

⁵³ We may question this, but Butler does not. Compare Paul Seabright, 'The Pursuit of Unhappiness: Paradoxical Motivation and the Subversion of Character in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*', *Ethics*, 98 (1988) 313-331.

... whereas there is plainly benevolence or good-will: there is no such thing as love of injustice, oppression, treachery, ingratitude; but only eager desires after such and such external goods.⁵⁴

In effect, this amounts to the denial of original malice that has previously been discussed in Hutcheson's writings.

The emotions of compassion and resentment cause perspectival distortions according to Butler, but these distortions are not the same, nor do they necessarily imply moral error. Butler discusses both compassion and resentment at length, as they are for him the archetypes of a positive bias towards others, and a potentially destructive bias towards others. Unlike Hume, Butler has no general notion of sympathy, by which we are aware of the inclinations and sentiments of others, however different from, or even contrary to, our own.⁵⁵ Rather, Butler has need of two emotions to inform us of how we stand in our dealings with others. If they are in distress, and we do not identify them as ourselves, then compassion is the most likely emotion that will occur, spurring us on to assist others as we are able to. Like the earlier moral sense writers, Butler is ambivalent about whether benevolence and compassion are biases in human nature. As mankind is constituted by a benevolent God, benevolence and compassion give a positive bias to human nature. Alternatively, human nature is as capable of evil as it is of good. For Butler, and the moral sense tradition generally, failure to feel compassion when it is due is to err in an unnatural way.

In a passage that is mildly reminiscent of Shaftesbury, Butler remarks that by visiting a house of mourning, becoming used to scenes of grief and death, we would become wiser and more compassionate through our exposure to the misfortunes of others.⁵⁶ In this, it may be thought that Butler inclines to a naive or perceptual account of

⁵⁴ Butler, *Sermons*, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Compare, for example, David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 316. Hume's notion of sympathy is discussed below, ch. 7. (This is hereafter abbreviated as *T*.)

⁵⁶ Compare Shaftesbury, *Concerning Virtue*, p. 216.

conscience. This would be a mistaken view however. It is not that the corpses *simpliciter* cause us to feel compassion, and that with greater exposure we would become more compassionate. Turning our thoughts to grief and death, vividly instantiated, allows us to become compassionate without the hardship necessarily involving our own family.

Butler has a special difficulty accommodating the notion of resentment. Like the moral sense writers, he denies that people are disinterestedly malicious, yet he gives an extended account of what it is to feel harmed by others. Usually resentment can be taken to be the opposite of compassion, or the willingness to do good for others *simpliciter*. In his need to deny a disinterested dislike for others, yet acknowledge that we have to protect our own interests if we are to support ourselves, Butler sanitizes the notion of resentment.⁵⁷ In his hands it becomes the protective, and very often prospective behaviour that we engage in to secure our genuine, non-distorted interests. He admits that we can err in our apprehension of other's harm, and then by degrees we fall into the vice of responding with malice and revenge.⁵⁸ And whereas there is always the risk of misjudging the harm wrought by others, our own hurtful response, and an escalation of strife,⁵⁹ Butler insists that there is nothing intrinsically vicious or morally wrong in acting upon resentment. In his view, this often has a legitimate role in the protection of our proper interests.

6:3 George Turnbull

⁵⁷ A third reason, not to be overlooked, is that for Butler God has implanted us with this passion, and hence it cannot be evil in itself. Only extreme passions are morally ambivalent. See Butler, *Sermons*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

George Turnbull lived from 1698 to 1742. He is little known today, though he left a considerable philosophical output.⁶⁰ His most important moral work is the two volume *Principles of Moral Philosophy*, which was first published in 1739. The first volume deals both with a philosophy of mind and questions of moral philosophy; the second deals with the principles of Christianity as they concern God, providence, virtue, and a future state.

In the preface to the first volume Turnbull advertises that he addresses the issue of human nature. As Newton has been successful in comprehending general laws governing the material universe, so Turnbull hopes to discover by experience and investigation the laws governing human nature, including our moral nature. God is the ultimate source of these natural laws, whether they concern the physical universe or the fabric of the human mind. The same principles constrain both types of laws. Universality, systematics, predictability, harmony, beauty and cohesiveness are seen to be the important attributes of such principles.⁶¹ The term 'moral' appears in both a wide and a narrow sense in Turnbull's writings. In the wide sense, moral philosophy is a branch of natural philosophy: the study of moral philosophy encompasses intellectual and rational laws and their subject matter.⁶² Turnbull writes in this vein:

[Moral philosophy] is distinguished from phisiology, (as has been observed) because it enquires chiefly about objects not perceivable by our outward organs of sense, but by internal feeling or experience; such as all our moral powers and faculties, dispositions and affections, the power of comparing ideas, of reasoning or inferring consequences, the power of contracting habits, our sense of beauty and harmony, natural or moral, the desire of society, &c.⁶³

⁶⁰ For biographical details and a list of George Turnbull's work see Norton, *From Moral Sense*, pp. 148-149.

⁶¹ Turnbull emphasizes the continuity and the similarity between natural and moral systems. He writes 'In reality, when natural philosophy is carried so far as to reduce phenomena to good general laws, it becomes moral philosophy.' This reference is to his *Principles of Moral Philosophy. An Enquiry into the Wise and Good Government of the Moral World*, 2 vols, London (1740). Facsimile edition, Ann Arbor, Michigan and London: University Microfilms International (1977), vol. 1, p. 8. (I hereafter abbreviate the two-volume work as *Moral Philosophy*.)

⁶² See, for example, Turnbull, *Moral Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

As can be seen, Turnbull gives a comprehensive list of our mental powers, including a sense of moral beauty. It is this power which is given the narrow meaning of the term 'moral'. In this narrower sense 'moral' pertains to the manner of our conduct with respect to ourselves and others, justly estimating our genuine interests, and behaving in a way which is appropriate to our 'natural rank and dignity'.⁶⁴

Turnbull acknowledges the inspiration of Newton in setting out on his task of describing the general laws of the human mind, but in the content of his (narrow) moral findings he indicates his indebtedness to a range of written sources.⁶⁵ Among the ancients he particularly picks out Plato, and among his contemporaries he names John Clark, Bishop Berkeley, and John Pope. Of the moral sense writers we have already dealt with, Turnbull acknowledges Shaftesbury, Butler, and especially Hutcheson. It is thus unsurprising that he too adheres to a form of moral sense theory. There is insufficient space to mark the differences between Turnbull's theory and those already considered. The following paragraphs are confined to showing that Turnbull does indeed make use of such a theory.

After establishing our mixed nature as thinking and bodily creatures,⁶⁶ with reason as our highest power,⁶⁷ Turnbull turns to those two senses or powers which allow us to regulate our conduct with respect to 'all appetites, fancies, affections and pursuits'.⁶⁸ There is the moral sense and the sense of interest or happiness.⁶⁹ Turnbull's purpose is to show that these two senses are coincident: they on all occasions motivate us to do that which is morally best. His subsequent discussion is conducted largely in terms

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. iii and viii-x.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 108-110.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 110.

of the moral sense, also called the sense of right and wrong.⁷⁰ The reference to a 'sense' of interest seems primarily a way to begin arguing that virtue is both to our own best interest, and to the good of those around us.

Turnbull finds that we are constituted to feel approbation, a form of pleasure, in contemplating or reflecting upon our own and others' voluntary actions of a certain sort. Experience teaches us that benevolence, truth, candour, veracity,⁷¹ justice, generosity, magnanimity and other virtues win approbation,⁷² and the characteristic common to them is that they contribute to the public good.⁷³ Likewise, disapprobation is felt towards falsehood, dissimulation, treachery, instability, narrowness of mind, selfishness and malice: such things detract from the well-being of ourselves and others. The sense by which we are aware of our approbation and disapprobation towards these objects is the moral sense. Finding that we have a natural ability that we cannot but notice, Turnbull writes:

Now if we are determined by our nature to approve or disapprove characters, in the way that has been mentioned, we may give and ought to give, this aptitude, this determination in our nature a particular distinguishing name to denote it. Let it therefore be called a sense of the difference between actions or characters, or more shortly, a moral sense.⁷⁴

Turnbull, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, finds that likening the moral sense to a sense of beauty is particularly apt:

Does the bodily eye afford us perceptions of pleasure and pain distinct from the sensations of touch? And has the understanding or the eye of the mind, when it is employed about moral forms, no such discernment?⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *loc. cit.* . Turnbull recognizes that he has to put forward arguments to show that the moral sense and the sense of right and wrong are the same, and that the standards appealed to are shared ones. See *Moral Philosophy*, p. 110 ff.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷³ *ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 117.

He finds that the analogy is too strong to be resisted, and thus he confirms to his satisfaction that:

[T]he perceptions conveyed to the understanding by moral forms, will very properly be called by the same names, as the analogous ones produced in us by visible forms; that is, beauty and deformity, regularity and irregularity, proportion and disproportion, &c.⁷⁶

The last point to made is that Turnbull, like Henry More, compares our nature with the wise and good nature of God. Our delight in moral beauty, and our proclivity towards benevolence have their source and origin in God. Turnbull finds that it is nonsensical to ask why we feel pleasure at the proportion, order and beauty in natural and moral objects. God has so constituted us, and experience reveals to us the necessary connections between the pleasure we apprehend in certain objects, and the regularity or utility of such objects.⁷⁷ Turnbull, in effect, re-states a moral sense theory that is very close to Hutcheson's, without noticeable objections or further development of the major strands of ideas.

6:4 David Hartley

David Hartley is the next writer to be considered. He lived from 1705 to 1757 and wrote two major works, the *Enquiry into the Origin of Human Appetites and Affections* and *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*.⁷⁸

David Hartley, in so far as he is recognized today, is noted for holding an associationist psychology which underwrote his endorsement of a materialist and

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 118.

⁷⁷ Turnbull, *Moral Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 143-145.

⁷⁸ See Elmer Sprague's article on David Hartley in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (1967). Sprague reports that Hartley worked as a physician, and was a friend of Bishop Butler.

determinist view of mankind. More relevant to present concerns is that Hartley attributes to mankind a moral sense. He acknowledges Newton and Locke in his account of human nature, taking from Newton the idea of physical motion and sensation, and from Locke the laws of association of ideas, whether sensory or intellectual.⁷⁹ Hartley sets out to show the causal relations between physical vibrations and the association of ideas that they result in. He takes it that the physicalist account that he gives identifies the specific causes of our ways of thinking.

Concerning the moral sense, Hartley argues that we are constituted in such a way as necessarily to feel pleasure and pain according to a variety of original categories, including an original sensitivity towards moral pleasure and pain. These categories include: (1) the impressions made on the external senses; (2) natural or artificial beauty or deformity; (3) the opinions of others concerning us; (4) our possession or want of the means of happiness, and security from, or subjection to, the hazards of misery; (5) the pleasures and pains of our fellow creatures; (6) the affections excited in us by the contemplation of the Deity; or (7) moral beauty and deformity.⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that Hartley does not categorize sympathy with the moral sense. Hume and later Adam Smith consider sympathy a non-moral category. Under the rubric of sympathy Hartley discusses people's proclivity towards sociableness, benevolence and compassion. In the brief discussion of compassion in the Raphael material, Hartley gives a physical explanation of these feelings. He writes:

Now [compassion] in children seems to be grounded upon such associations as these that follow: the very appearance and idea of any kind of misery which they have experienced, or of any signs of distress which they understand, raise up in their nervous systems a state of misery from mere memory, on account of the strength of their imaginations; and because the

⁷⁹ Hartley takes it that all ideas are ultimately from a sensory source. See Hartley, *Observations*, § 636 and 638. References to David Hartley's work are confined to material from the *Observations on Man*, edited by D.D. Raphael in *British Moralists 1650-1800*, vol 2, pp. 113-127. (I refer to Raphael's numbering of paragraphs in citing Hartley's work.)

⁸⁰ Hartley, *Observations*, § 637.

connection between the adjuncts of pain, and the actual infliction of it, has not yet been sufficiently broken by experience, as in adults.⁸¹

Of the moral sense, Hartley seeks to account for the general resemblance, and personal differences in different people's approbation and disapprobation regarding virtue and vice. Our state of education, temper, profession, sex, and other factors account for the variation between our approbation,⁸² presumably with respect to a single virtue, or a single instance of a particular virtue. Instead of accounting for the similarity and variation between people, Hartley actually gives a list of reasons why we find virtue deserving of approbation. And here he makes it clear that revealed religion and virtue are in complete agreement. Meditating upon God, we are led to notice and love natural and moral perfection, wherever we see them:

And thus we may perceive, that all the pleasures and pains of sensation, imagination, ambition, self-interest, sympathy, and theopathy, as far as they are consistent with one another, with the frame of our natures, and with the course of the world, beget in us a moral sense, and lead us to the love and approbation of virtue, and to the fear, hatred, and abhorrence of vice.⁸³

6:5 Henry Home, Lord Kames

Our final figure is Henry Home, 1696-1772, who took the title Lord Kames in 1752 on becoming a Judge in the Court of Session.⁸⁴ Kames wrote prolifically in jurisprudence and philosophy. His major philosophical works are the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751), *Objections against the Essays on Morality and*

⁸¹ Hartley, *Observations*, § 645.

⁸² *ibid.*, § 646.

⁸³ *ibid.*, § 653. Hartley goes on to insist upon the authority of conscience, and an editorial note directs the reader to Butler.

⁸⁴ Bibliographical material on Lord Kames is contained in Norton, *From Moral Sense*, p. 236 ff. Norton reports that Kames had dealings of various sorts with Hutcheson, Hume, Butler, and perhaps George Turnbull. On the dealings between Hutcheson, Hume and Kames see *From Moral Sense*, p. 240. See also Norton, *David Hume*, p. 174.

Natural Religion Examined (1756), *Elements of Criticism* (1762), and *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774).⁸⁵

Even though he wrote twenty or so years after Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's work first appeared, Kames holds a moral sense theory little changed from these earlier writers. Norton writes that Kames's views in morals 'are almost entirely derivative'.⁸⁶ Kames acknowledges Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Butler among the moral sense writers so far considered, but he is not an uncritical epigone. Of Shaftesbury, he finds that he insufficiently recognized the obligatory aspect of the moral sense.⁸⁷ Kames finds that Hutcheson neglects to account for duty and obligation, emphasizing too much the role of benevolence in morals.⁸⁸ The unnamed 'author of the treatise upon human nature' is no more successful: on his account, sympathy is too weak to be able to control 'our irregular appetites and passions'.⁸⁹

Butler is alone in receiving Kames's unequivocal commendation. Kames writes that in the preface to the *Sermons* Butler plainly recognized the authority of the moral sense, and yet he was too brief in his exposition.⁹⁰ Kames agrees that the moral sense holds a normative correctness, but his further point is that the feelings of approbation and disapprobation accompanying the moral sense are of more fine grained quality than has

⁸⁵ Norton, *From Moral Sense*, p. 239, fn. 6, and p. 241, fn. 13.

⁸⁶ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 176. It is Norton's further point that the first part of the *Essays* deals with moral subjects in this unoriginal way, but that the second part deals with epistemological scepticism. According to Norton, Kames here systematically advances the idea that common-sense, or the growing body of shared knowledge built up by experience is sufficient to refute this form of scepticism. Kames and particularly Thomas Reid, according to Norton, put forward a *common-sense*, rather than moral sense, view of morals.

⁸⁷ Kames writes 'LORD Shaftesbury... has not proved virtue to be our duty, otherways than by showing it to be our interest, which does not come up to the idea of duty.' Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. 2 vols. in one, Edinburgh (1751). Facsimile ed. New York: Garland Publishing (1976), p. 54. (This I hereafter abbreviate as *Principles of Morality*.)

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 55-57.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 57-58. Hume is indisputably the author here, as Kames had access to Hume's *Treatise* before it was published. See Norton, *David Hume*, p. 174; and *From Moral Sense*, pp. 240-241. It is Kames's criticism that on such a view we are motivated either by occurrent appetites and passions, or by self-interest, but this is to misdescribe the complexity of human nature.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

yet been recognized. Kames thus sets out to explain the distinct feelings of the moral sense, allowing that there is no doubt that we are constituted by the author of nature with an unreflective sense of the fitness and meetness of some human actions, and unfitness and unmeetness of others.⁹¹ Introspection makes us certain that we all have these undefinable feelings of approbation and disapprobation. Kames writes:

This peculiar feeling, or modification of beauty and deformity in human actions, is known by the name of *moral beauty*, and *moral deformity*. In it consists the *morality* and *immorality* of human actions; and the power or faculty, by which we perceive this difference among actions, passes under the name of the *moral sense*.⁹²

Kames's concurrent task is to show the wisdom of God in devising human nature. As individuals we are weak and dependent on others, but this dependence requires that we understand others' emotions and needs. Hence God has made us sufficiently sensitive to these things, equipping us with an array of senses that are most often correct.⁹³

The final point is to indicate that Kames was fully aware of the need to be able to arbitrate among standards of moral taste. His *Elements of Criticism* contains a chapter, the 'Standard of Taste' which gives a comparison between standards of moral taste, and standards with respect to taste in the fine arts. He finds that there is less diversity among moral tastes than there is among general standards of beauty. This is as well, Kames continues, because it is of more importance that people agree in this aspect of their lives.⁹⁴ Although there are many gradations of moral taste, there is a conviction that there

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 49. See also Norton, *From Moral Sense*, p. 250, fn. 38 who writes that, from the second edition of this work, Kames gave up his views on freedom of the will, finding that man is a 'necessary agent'.

⁹² Kames, *Principles of Morality*, p. 50.

⁹³ It is in such material that Kames appears to disagree with Hume on the status of the artificial virtues, making instead a different distinction between primary and secondary virtues. See Kames, *Principles of Morality*, pp. 72-74. The first are necessary to the subsistence of society, but are not within our election or choice. The second seem to cover what we may now call supererogatory actions, including '[o]ffices of undeserved kindness, requital of good for evil, generous toils and sufferings for the good of our country', *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁴ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 6th ed., 2 vols., Edinburgh (1785). Facsimile ed. New York: Garland Publishing (1972), vol. 2, p. 495.

is 'a common nature or standard and of its perfection'.⁹⁵ This is a matter of uniformity and agreement among cultivated people, and regional differences are discounted.⁹⁶ Kames notes that there is a common standard, capable of being exercised by 'able judges'.⁹⁷ Like Shaftesbury, Kames describes a person of fine aesthetic sentiment. The point to note is that they bring a degree of perfection to their moral life as well. Kames writes:

Many circumstances are necessary to form such a judge: there must be a good natural taste... [which] must be improved by education, reflection, and experience: it must be preserved in vigour by living regularly, by using the goods of fortune with moderation, and by following the dictates of improved nature, which give welcome to every rational pleasure without indulging any excess. This is the tenor of life which of all contributes the most to refinement of taste; and the same tenor of life contributes the most to happiness in general.⁹⁸

6:6 Conclusion

The moral sense writers are not an homogeneous group. Joseph Butler, George Turnbull, David Hartley and Lord Kames all held versions of a moral sense theory. Accordingly, they share many of Hutcheson's tasks and the means of accomplishing them. Principal among these tasks is the defence of a view of human nature that allows for the genuineness of virtue and benevolence. These writers, nevertheless, also demonstrate the same limitations and problems that Hutcheson's writings raise. Most prominent is the difficulty that people seem to judge the same moral situation or action differently. The moral sense writers implicitly put forward, and indeed depend on, a

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 492.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 496-498. Kames argues that 'men, originally savage and brutal, acquire not rationality nor delicacy of taste till they be long disciplined in society'.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 498.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 501-502.

distinction between surface variation in such moral assessments and outright error. The residual difficulty, and one that they show no inclination in addressing, is whether there are stable distinctions that can be made between these two things. For if there is no agreement about whether a stable distinction can be maintained between error and superficial variation, the egoists and sceptics win their case for moral relativism. The moral sense tradition thus perceives a common enemy in the moral relativists, and they rebut this challenge by appealing to a natural faculty of conscience or the moral sense. By comparison to this common problem, the divergence among the moral sense writers here pales in significance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DAVID HUME

7:1 Introduction

Moral sense theories of the eighteenth century, though taken up by many writers, flourished for only a relatively short period of time. The reasons for the eclipse of such theories are complex. A thorough consideration of them is beyond the scope of this thesis. Briefly, however, there were two main reasons. One group of reasons basic to the demise of moral sense theories were internal to the theories themselves. In the preceding chapters discussing Hutcheson I raised questions about the explanatory worth of the claim that the moral sense is correct on all occasions, apart from those where self-interest or other forms of error intrude. The breadth and the non-falsifiability of this claim make its usefulness minimal.

A second internal problem was raised with respect to Hutcheson. Persons may have a cultivated moral taste, but it is still possible to ask the question, with respect to what is their moral-sense deliberation correct? Can people with similarly cultivated moral tastes disagree about specific moral cases? Hutcheson resists such questions, and as far as he deals with them, he does not give satisfactory answers.

A second group of reasons for the demise of the moral sense theories relate to conditions outside such theories themselves. There were always rival theories, and in the 1740s and late 1750s David Hume and Adam Smith published, and in Smith's case taught, theories very different from, and yet continuous with the moral sense theory of Hutcheson. This chapter looks at Hume's reorientation of the moral sense theory, and the following chapter looks at its further dismantlement by Smith.

Hume presented a moral theory that was radically different from, and yet continuous with the moral sense tradition. He argues for a description of human nature that differs in several important respects from the archetype considered so far. No longer is vice

categorized as unnatural; no longer is mankind deemed as having a perfectible nature. The similarity is that Hume acknowledges he deals with the moral sense writers' question whether moral discernment is primarily a matter of reason or sentiment. Hume, like the moral sense writers, finds that sentiment has a primary role. Despite this similarity, Hume does much to render the moral sense superfluous by replacing it with the notion of sympathy. This non-moral appreciation of other people's feelings and thoughts does much of the work of the moral sense. The residual question is whether Hume's adherence to a moral sense theory is wholehearted.

The chapter has three major sections after this introductory material. The first deals with Hume's description of human nature. The second looks at his attribution to mankind of a natural discernment of moral distinctions, founded on sentiment rather than reason. And the third considers his notion of sympathy, and his recognition of the role of the impartial moral spectator.

7:2 Hume on human nature

Hume's theological position

Hume differs greatly from the moral sense writers in his scepticism with regard to religious beliefs. His theological stance remains disputed. Hume is comparatively detached from his material, holding a form of scepticism similar to Montaigne and Bayle. He was repelled by the manner of the French *philosophes* that he encountered in the Paris salons of the mid-eighteenth century. Their atheism shocked Hume, and he distanced himself from what he saw as their intellectual arrogance. In the *History of England* he wrote:

While Newton seemed to draw off the veil off some of the mysteries of nature, he showed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical

philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity in which they ever did and ever will remain.¹

Hume was unlike the earlier moral sense writers in that he devised arguments questioning the providential design of the universe. Butler's *Analogy of Religion* was the orthodox view of the period, in which the argument from design was polished to a high degree of sophistication.² Butler, for example, argued from the design and harmony of the known universe to the belief in a benevolent and caring God. Hume questions this confident belief in a universe perfect in all of its interwoven parts. Such a view, for Hume, could not be sustained in the face of the everyday phenomena of storms, war, sickness and death. Hume's *Natural History of Religion* gives an anthropological account of religious beliefs, a mode of enquiry unthinkable for the earlier moral sense writers. Religious beliefs did not have privileged status, but could be questioned in terms of their cultural and historical setting.

Hume did not think that most people could suspend their religious beliefs: they might exchange one set of beliefs for another, but most people retained beliefs about the deity, and how this ought to affect their moral behaviour.³ Hume's own position differed greatly from what he took to be the common-sense religious beliefs. What is of moment is how Hume took religious beliefs to have no necessary place in a person's moral behaviour. Wollheim explains this view of Hume's thus:

From the religious hypothesis, properly understood, nothing whatsoever followed about how we should conduct our lives: nor indeed does morality stand in any direction over and above that which is gained from our 'reflexions on common life'.⁴

In effect what Hume achieved, even though it was perhaps not immediately appreciated, was a disentanglement of religious and moral motivation and standards of behaviour

¹ David Hume, quoted in Richard Wollheim, ed., *Hume on Religion*, London and Glasgow: Collins, (1963), p. 29.

² *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

³ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ *loc. cit.*

from one another. Whereas the Cambridge Platonists and the earlier moral sense writers held providential teleology to be the linchpin around which they built their optimistic account of human nature, Hume dispensed with such teleology, and confined himself to what he considered a consistently empirical view of human nature.

Hume on the naturalness of virtue and vice

Hume offers a view of human nature that differs from that of the moral sense writers in several important respects. One is that Hume concedes that virtue and vice are both natural, rather than virtue alone. According to Hume's view, virtue and vice are polar opposites. (Their application is confined to mankind, and not the animals.⁵) Hume, like the earlier moral sense writers, finds that 'natural' is an ambiguous term to be contrasted with a wide variety of things.

'Nature', for Hume, is opposed to that which is miraculous; that which is rare or unusual; and that which involves artifice.⁶ That virtues and vices are neither miraculous nor rare is easily shown. They are terms commonly and usefully applicable to people's actions and characters. Hume's argument that virtue and vice are both as artificial as the other is somewhat contrived.⁷ The difficulty is that he seems to use a fourth sense of 'natural', according to which some virtues and their opposite vices are natural, and others unnatural. For example, justice and injustice are both artificial, whereas generosity

⁵ Hume compares mankind's passions with the passions of animals, but finds that our self-consciousness, prudential self-interests, imagination and sympathy make us full moral agents, whereas animals are not. See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1978), pp. 397-398. (Hereafter this is abbreviated as *Treatise*.) Also, the disanalogy between man's instincts and the instincts of animals is pointed to. According to Hume, man's instincts change over time because of their modification by reason. This occurs at Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd edition., ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1975), p. 202. (This I hereafter abbreviate as *Enquiries*.)

⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 474-475. Hume postpones for the moment the question whether the virtues are natural or artificial; finding in the subsequent chapter 'Justice, whether a natural or artificial virtue' that the virtue of justice is artificial.

⁷ I have not considered how Hume's specific argument in this part of the *Treatise* for artificiality of virtue and vice relates to his central argument for the artificiality of some virtues rather than others.

and unkindness are both natural. I will discuss this fourth sense shortly. The sense of contrivance, I think, also comes from Hume's assertion at this point of the *Treatise* that *merit* due to virtues and vices is natural in some unspecified sense, though the *actions* attracting assessment in terms of merit are artificial, in that the worth of such actions depends on community agreement.⁸

Hutcheson took Hume to task for his rendering of the term 'natural'. Hume had sent Hutcheson a copy of the *Treatise* before it was published, as Scott reports in his biography of Hutcheson. Hume's well-known reply to Hutcheson's criticism reads thus:

I cannot agree to your sense of '*natural*'. 'Tis founded on final causes, which is a consideration that appears to me pretty uncertain and unphilosophical. For, pray, what is the end of man? Is he created for happiness, or for virtue? for this life, or for the next? for himself, or for his Maker? Your definition of natural depends on solving these questions, which are endless and quite wide of my purpose. I have never called justice unnatural, but only artificial.⁹

Hume's developmental account of human nature

It would be a mistake to think that Hume's assertion that (some) vice is natural implies that he thinks that mankind is basically vicious. Hume, however, does think that mankind is prudentially self-interested. Hume describes the development of morals over time. He finds the fiction of a Hobbesian state of nature too stark, but he accepts there was a brief period at the beginning of our history when there were no mechanisms to contain the selfish interests of those inclined to be inconsiderate towards others. But, realizing that the long-term security of their possessions and the quality of their life depended on their being allied to communities of people, even the meanest saw that the intelligent curbing of their interests meant that they could achieve more goods and security for themselves. Accordingly, they were willing to become party to the conventions of justice by which stability was introduced into the possession and

⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 475.

⁹ Hume, quoted in Scott, *Francis Hutcheson*, p. 117.

transference of goods and reciprocal duties.¹⁰ Hume considered justice the paradigm of an artificial virtue, contrasting it with natural virtues such as benevolence and humanity. The difference according to Hume, is that justice is a convention established by people to secure goods, whereas natural virtues are original parts of the human constitution. Natural virtues may be exercised to a greater or lesser degree, but they necessarily bring about good for the person herself and for others.¹¹ This is the fourth sense of 'natural' mentioned above, in which some virtues and vices are natural and others artificial.

Hume recognizes justice as a set of rules that is generally useful. Not every instance of justice brings about the best moral situation, all things considered, but it is important that the convention is maintained. Poor people do indeed have to repay their debts to rich misers, even though doing so incurs severe hardship. In his discussion of justice Hume also acknowledges the figure of the sensible knave. Such a person is just on all those occasions when it is expedient to be so, but when occasional infringements of any specific convention brings no disadvantages, such a person is willing to discard the convention.¹² Neither the infrequent hardships meted out in the name of strict justice, nor the infringements practised by the sensible knave pose genuine difficulties, in Hume's view, to the notion that justice should be fulfilled on all occasions if the convention and its advantages are to be sustained.

7:3 A natural sense of moral discernment

Hume, like the moral sense writers, attributes to mankind a sensitivity towards moral good and evil. In the opening pages of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*,

¹⁰ Hume discusses promise-keeping at length in comparison with justice. This is found in Book III of the *Treatise*, in the chapter 'Of the obligation of promises'.

¹¹ Compare Stanley Vodrasksa, 'Hume's Moral *Enquiry*: An Analysis of its Catalogue', *Philosophical Topics*, 12 (1983), pp. 79-108.

¹² Hume, *Enquiries*, pp. 282-283.

he dismisses moral scepticism as a theoretical stance that cannot inform a person's life. He prefers instead to deal with the controversy:

... concerning the general foundation of Morals; whether they be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment.¹³

Hume considers that Shaftesbury first made this distinction explicit, even though, according to Hume, he did not maintain the distinction.¹⁴ The choice as Hume sees it at this point is that virtue is conformity to reason, or that virtue is known by taste or sentiment. Hume sets up the distinction, but is ambivalent in his maintenance of it.

In the first place Hume adheres at least to the veneer of a moral sense theory. Mankind has a natural sense, either of sense or sentiment, by which the moral tenor of people's actions and characters are discerned. At such points Hume calls this moral discernment moral sentiment or moral taste, rather than the moral sense, and he does not insist on its *sui generis* status. Nevertheless, this ability has several important features in common with the moral sense:

[F]rom a primary constitution of nature certain characters and passions, by the very view and contemplation, produce a pain, and others in like manner excite a pleasure. The uneasiness and satisfaction are not only inseparable from vice and virtue, but constitute their very nature and essence. To approve of a character is to feel an original delight upon its appearance. To disapprove of it is to be sensible of an uneasiness.¹⁵

In this frame of mind Hume considers that the discernment of the moral qualities of actions and characters is one of *sentiment*, and not *reason*. The identification of sentiment's primary role in moral discernment occurs both in Book III of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, and the opening chapter of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁵ *Treatise*, p. 296. Other references emphasizing the primacy of approbation are, for example, *Treatise*, pp. 285, 299, 414, 456-458, 469-471; *Enquiries*, pp. 172-173, 219, 287. See also Hume, 'Of the Passions' in *Four Dissertations*, London (1757). Facsimile ed., New York: Garland Publishing (1970), pp. 138-139.

In the second place, however, Hume modifies what has been one of the major tenets of the moral sense theory, and argues that moral discernment is a process involving reason. Nevertheless, he at these points still retains the idea that sentiment is basic, because reason, in effect, cannot motivate us to action without our desires or an affective element concurring.¹⁶ But in making such qualifications Hume rejects the cognitive role of the moral sense, retaining what appears to be the affective role of the sentiments. He is not explicit enough for us to know whether he insists on the affective role of the moral sense as well as the affective role of the sentiments more generally. But these are relatively minor matters; the principal idea is that Hume occasionally gives an important role to reason in moral judgement. Hume writes in the *Enquiry*:

The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praise-worthy or blamable... 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.¹⁷

Hume here alludes to an informed and cultivated response of sentiment, but reason and cognition have paved the way for such a response. Of course, there is the issue of what Hume means by 'reason'. I deal with this in a later section, especially insofar as it raises the possibility that Hume's references to the moral sense are merely gratuitous.¹⁸

If Hume sometimes describes moral discernment as cultivated sentiment based upon reason, then occasionally he prefers to describe the process of discernment as engaging a cultivated sense of beauty. Peter Jones especially draws attention to the

¹⁶ This is the notorious doctrine of reason being only the slave of the passions. There is a wide literature which I do not enter upon. Nicholas Capaldi gives a survey of the major questions, and provides his own interpretation in *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, New York: Peter Lang, (1989), ch. 3 'Hume's rejection of the traditional moral "ought" '.

¹⁷ *Enquiries*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁸ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 96, fn. 4 gives an interpretation of the ambiguities in Hume's use of the term 'reason'.

influence of French aesthetic writers such as Dubos and Fontenelle upon Hume.¹⁹ These French writers and Hume speak of moral taste as the refinement or education of a natural principle.²⁰ Hume posits that there are two species of beauty, one impervious to refinement, and the other educable. To continue from the above quotation:

[I]n 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. 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.²¹

Generally then, Hume appears ambivalent about the elements and the processes of moral discernment. Reason and cultivated sensibility both have a place, though he wavers in their relative importance. Hume retains at least the veneer of a moral sense theory. While he has sufficient material to refute the moral sense theory, he does not do so.

Jones's triadic unity

In a previous chapter dealing with Hutcheson I made use of Peter Jones's commentary on Hume to question whether moral sense theories are exclusively subjectivist or objectivist. Jones's discussion of what Hume speaks of as an aesthetic sense was used as a starting point allowing me to substantiate, as I see it, the multiple nature of the moral sense claims.²² It is appropriate here to consider whether Jones's interpretation of

¹⁹ Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 93-105 for a discussion of Dubos, and pp. 98, 100 for mention of Fontenelle.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

²¹ *Enquiries*, p. 173. Hume gives no example of what might be included in the non-educable sense of beauty. He goes on to discuss moral taste in Appendix I of the *Enquiries* and in the essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'. This is contained in his *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller, revised ed., Indianapolis: Liberty Classics (1987), pp. 226-249.

²² This does not decide the issue whether the moral sense theory is accurate, or of useful explanatory value; merely that such theories make some claims that are subjectivist and other claims that are objectivist.

the aesthetic sense is similar to what Hume understands by the moral sense. First I briefly revise the triadic unity that Jones attributes to Hume.²³

This triadic unit consists in a determinate object to be perceived, some construal of conditions under which observations take place, and some characterization of the spectators and their qualities. Jones discusses only Hume's notion of the aesthetic sense, concerning the discernment and criticism of aesthetic object, but the structure appeared of use in understanding Hutcheson's notion of the moral sense. It helped to identify and locate the subjective and objective elements within Hutcheson's account. Whereas most modern criticisms of Hutcheson pose a stark choice between subjectivism and objectivism, Jones's structure, I claim, has the advantage that it allows us to see that Hutcheson uses both subjective and objective elements to advance different aspects of his moral sense theory. These are not mutually exclusive categories in the way many critics have taken them to be.²⁴ Typically, the choice is posed between subjective, personal responses or objective (non-affective or cognitive responses). Even critics as recently as Radcliffe consider Hutcheson is to be interpreted in such terms.²⁵

This, I think, is to misinterpret the breadth and the exclusiveness of the categories. I suggested in chapter 4 that a triadic structure allows us to identify three sets of claims made by Hutcheson regarding the moral sense, its objects and operation. Further, Jones's interpretation allows that these claims do not genuinely conflict, but are mutually supporting. Frankena holds that Hutcheson was not a naive realist, and with

²³ On the matter of Hutcheson's influence on Hume's ideas of aesthetic sensibility, Jones finds that such influence on Hume was minimal. Jones writes 'It may be suggested that Hutcheson's views on art owe something to Dubos, over and above the acknowledged debt to Shaftesbury. In the present context, at least, Hume's thoughts about art were stimulated primarily by studying Shaftesbury and above all Dubos, not Hutcheson, as we shall now see'. Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, p. 101.

²⁴ Compare, for example, Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', pp. 365 and 372; and Bernard Peach, 'Editor's Introduction' in Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press (1971), pp. 45-47 and 86-88.

²⁵ Radcliffe, 'Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism', pp. 410-414 and throughout. With respect to the triadic structure outlined by Jones, I do not claim that this structure provides evidence that moral discernment is as Hutcheson claims it to be. I claim merely that to understand the variety of Hutcheson's claims, and to see them as non-conflicting, Jones's structure is a valuable aid.

this that there were no objective features of moral situations to be perceived.²⁶ I think that Frankena is wrong, and that Hutcheson makes many claims for an ontological realism, based on his belief in providential teleology. These things I have argued for elsewhere. Hutcheson, I claim, is an objectivist in the strongest sense. He is also an intersubjectivist. This is apparent in his acceptance of a community of like-minded observers looking at moral situations, and being sensitive towards people's virtues and vices as displayed in those situations. As argued earlier, his ontological beliefs are based on his theological beliefs, and these are in practice indispensable for him. And following Jones, we can allow that Hutcheson is a subjectivist; not in the emotivist sense of personally embracing values, but in the sense of being so constituted by God that we cannot fail to notice those moral things that are pertinent to our way of life.

Returning to the triadic interpretation of Hume, Jones raises two possible objections to there being an aesthetic sense. The first is that we may not be able to explain pleasurable aesthetic experiences, even though we experience them. The second objection is that, even allowing such experiences to be explicable, we cannot settle on a precise description of the sentiments and pleasurable experiences themselves.²⁷ Jones posits that such objections miss Hume's point, arguing that Hume's understanding of aesthetic pleasure is that it is a specific type of pleasure of an educated sort:

Hume's 'proper', appropriate, or justifiable sentiment is not a brute, pleasurable, but otherwise indeterminable feeling, which is caused by identifiable external stimuli. Rather, it is a complex *response to* something attended to in specifiable ways; the attention is actively and consciously controlled, and the required causal relations exist only between objects with certain dispositional properties, and minds which think of those objects in restricted ways. The pleasures, if any are detectable, are tied to the beliefs and attitudes which constitute the viewpoint necessary for the required causal interaction to take place.²⁸

²⁶ Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', pp. 372-373.

²⁷ Jones, *Hume's Sentiments*, pp. 114-115.

²⁸ *loc. cit.*

Hume speaks of an aesthetic object with determinate dispositional properties, among them the properties of affecting suitably-placed and observant spectators. Such spectators accurately comprehend those determinate objects. It is not clear what Jones understands by saying that pleasures are 'tied to' constitutive and causal beliefs and attitudes. This aside, I take it that Jones has given us an important tool in understanding how the disparate elements of aesthetic (and moral) sense theories can cohere.²⁹

The issue, then, is whether Hume gives a similar account of moral apprehension as he does for aesthetic sensibility. For this to be the case Hume would need to describe stable moral objects with determinate causal properties able to provoke dependable responses in suitably-placed observers. That he does so can most clearly be seen in his discussions of what it is to observe and make moral judgements upon an enemy.

In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* Hume raises the issue how a person judges the qualities of an enemy. Depending on the partiality of the observer's point of view, he either sees such qualities as vicious and destructive, or as the martial qualities of combat and courage. The crucial thing is that Hume takes it that a general or impartial point of view is available. As with other moral sense writers, this is the point of view in which self-interest does not have a role. If self-interest taints the case, then it seems to modify an observer's position, metaphorically speaking. Hume considers that people cannot accurately describe themselves or others with virtue or vice terms from positions of partiality. This is because people's conception of their self-interest changes over time, in response to their changing conception of what their self-interest is. Only by taking precautions against the distortions of self-interest can a neutral position be found. In the *Treatise* Hume writes on this matter:

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 112-115. Jones here discusses the critic, a person of high and dependable aesthetic taste, contrasting such a figure with both the bad critic and the pretender. The pretender lacks the appropriate feelings of pleasure, though they acquire other cues which allow them to judge as others do. I do not know whether in the moral case we would want to argue that no-one is devoid of the appropriate feelings, even though they may not be motivated by them as others are. This lack of appropriate motivation would be inversion of a sort. But it is less problematic than ascribing a lack of feelings to some people, which seems to undercut the whole idea of a natural moral sense.

The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. 'Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another. It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness. But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgement may preserve himself from these illusions.³⁰

Much the same idea is put forward in the second *Enquiry*:

When a man denominates another his *enemy*, his *rival*, his *antagonist*, his *adversary*, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and to express sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of *vicious* or *odious* or *depraved*, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which he expects all his audience 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; he must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony.³¹

In characterizing the common or general moral point of view, Hume takes it that there are determinate moral objects to be accurately apprehended by all who occupy this common spectator position. Hume is not describing *merely* a consensus view of what sentiments impartial spectators would feel looking at a determinate moral situation.³² Nor is he claiming that because there is a unity of sentiments, therefore there are moral objects to be noted in the situation under perusal. If Jones is correct in finding in Hume a commitment to an aesthetic object (the painting, the poem, the history etc.) then a similar role in the moral case is occupied by the specific actions and characters of specific people.

³⁰ *Treatise*, p. 472. This is an occurrence where Hume takes it that the sentiments have a role in identifying the moral worth of what we are witnessing. *Treatise*, p. 348 is another such example where Hume claims perspective alters what we witness.

³¹ *Enquiries*, p. 272.

³² Hume is acutely aware of the problems of determinacy and stability of objects over time. This is not the difficulty that I need to deal with here. Hume's common sense-idea of stability is sufficient, in his view, to enable us to avoid these type of difficulties.

Nor is Hume using just a language argument. The quotation above from the second *Enquiry* may be taken to imply that the language of virtue and vice terms³³ is settled and not open to contention, but the added point is that such language is referential to real states of affairs, comprised of people's mental states and intentions. It is this which means that virtue and vice terms can be used correctly or truthfully, incorrectly or falsely. This makes Hume a realist in Sayre-McCord's sense and Norton's sense, both in the sense of intersubjectivity *and* ontological objectivity.³⁴ Hume recognizes that our assessment of different people alters according to the position and self-interest we bring to bear, but that in some sense the person judged presents a stable moral object for anyone's perusal. Hume writes:

The same man may cause either respect, love, or contempt by his condition and talents, according as the person, who considers him, from his inferior becomes his equal or superior. In changing the point of view, tho' the object may remain the same, its proportion to ourselves entirely alters.³⁵

Hume's discussion of the stable moral object of the enemy and the variety of conditions that affect how such an enemy is apprehended answers to his discussion of stable aesthetic objects that are differently apprehended by people with different aesthetic tastes. It is with the closeness of Hume's understanding of the moral sense and the aesthetic sense that I come to my next point. Hume conceives the aesthetic sentiment as engaged at the completion of a reasoning process. Aesthetic sensibility is a cultivated sensibility, not an immediate and incomprehensible response to aesthetic objects. Hume makes the same point with respect to the moral sense. It too should wait in abeyance until the moral situation as a whole has been apprehended by reason. This is a very different conception of the moral sense than that put forward by the moral sense writers so far considered.

³³ See 'Appendix 4' of the *Enquiries* for Hume's discussion of the differences between virtues and talents. This is 'Of Some Verbal Disputes'.

³⁴ Sayre-McCord, 'Introduction: the many moral realisms', p. 5; Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 134-135.

³⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 390. Compare Hope, *Virtue by Consensus*, pp. 60-61. Hope is critical of Hume's use of a visual analogy for the distortion of self-interest. Hope's major criticism against Hume is that self-interest does not guarantee partiality. Unlike Hope, I think Hume does make this point independently of Hope's criticism.

The moral sense in abeyance

The major difference between Hume's understanding of the moral sense, and that of the moral sense tradition so far considered is that Hume takes it that, in the event of a lack of material information, the moral sentiment should not become engaged. The discussion of this occurs in Appendix 1 of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. None of the earlier moral sense writers make this point; preferring instead to deal with the lack of information as an *error* of the moral sense. The difference is significant, because it implies that the earlier writers take it that the moral sense delivers up immediate moral apprehensions. Writers such as Hutcheson in particular assume that there is no difference between noticing a moral situation, and discerning that it is of a particular virtuous or vicious sort. Presumably Hutcheson's view is that, if a person discovers later that they were wrong in their apprehensions, they can indicate this by saying that they should not have found as they did. However, according to these earlier writers, there is no meaningful sense in which *some* apprehension could not have taken place.

Hume's view is that the moral sense, or at least moral sentiment, can and should hesitate to proclaim if we are in doubt about what it is we are witnessing. Hume describes a disanalogy between the relations and the object of a geometrical figure, and the relations and objects of a moral situation. Triangles and circles are laid out to view, and a speculative reasoner 'considers the several known and given relations of the parts of these figures, and thence infers some unknown relation, which is dependent on the former.'³⁶ The case is importantly different with moral situations. A person needs to be acquainted with all of the (correct) moral objects and their relations before they can consider moral agents in the situation either morally approvable or disapprovable. Only then is moral sentiment engaged, delivering its affective assessment of the situation, properly comprehended. Hume writes:

³⁶ *Enquiries*, p. 289-290.

If any material circumstance be yet unknown or doubtful, we *must* first employ our inquiry or intellectual faculties to assure us of it; and *must* suspend for a time all moral decision or sentiment. While we are ignorant whether a man were aggressor or not, how can we determine whether the person who killed him be criminal or innocent? But after every circumstance, every relation is known, the understanding has no further room to operate, nor any object on which it could employ itself. The approbation or blame which then ensues, cannot be the work of judgement, but of the heart; and is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment.³⁷

Hume emphasizes that we do not approve or disapprove *until* we apprehend the moral situation completely. This, I suggest, is much closer to the temporal lag that Norton finds in his interpretation of Hutcheson's moral sense thesis.³⁸ In Hume's case, but not Hutcheson's, an affective sentiment completes in some unspecified way the reasoned apprehension of the situation in all of its concrete detail. Hume makes this point only once, and does not give sufficient information to see whether he gives the moral sense a purely affective role, leaving cognition completely to the realm of reason. Previous moral sense writers have attributed both roles to the moral sense.

Let me clarify what I take Hume's position to be. Hume makes use of some of the terminology and arguments of the moral sense tradition to argue for an account of moral sentiment, including feelings of moral pleasure and displeasure, approval and disapproval in making at least intersubjective moral distinctions. With his concession that reason has a place in the accurate discernment of moral qualities of virtue and vice, Hume appears to be at odds with the thesis that moral distinctions are not made by reason. The issue is a complicated one; and Hume surely implies several things by his use of the term 'reason'.³⁹ Rather than trying to deal with this directly, I consider Hume's disanalogy between apprehending geometrical figures, and apprehending moral relations and objects.

³⁷ *ibid.*, (my emphasis).

³⁸ Norton, *David Hume*, p. 82; and my earlier discussion, ch. 4 above.

³⁹ Hume's discussion of the respective roles of reason and sentiment in moral discernment is contained especially in *Treatise*, Book III sections 1 and 2, the opening section of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and the first Appendix to the *Enquiries*, 'Concerning Moral Sentiment'.

Hume proposes that geometrical figures are comprehended by the understanding. The presumption is that there are no vague or incomplete geometrical objects.⁴⁰ He notes elsewhere that we do not confuse scalene and isosceles triangles, and he indicates a difference between comprehending general objects and comprehending or perceiving particular objects. Generally, we either reason concerning matters of fact or relations.⁴¹ In the geometrical case, a complete geometrical figure is comprehended in all its detail; the relations of the parts to each other are understood by the intellect. With an incomplete geometrical figure, we infer from known facts and stable relations to unknown relations. Then we are able to fully describe the completed figure.⁴²

The moral case is importantly different. When a people deliberate about their own conduct, they have to consider a complex moral object with its several circumstances and relations. In everyday terms, they have to consider in prospect which action they will perform, one which is prompted by the moral situation of which they are a part, and if they are so inclined, they will weigh in what considerations of utility or the public good would prescribe. Hume's example is whether to assist a brother or a benefactor. In his description of the moral case Hume makes two main points.⁴³ The first is that we cannot decide what best to do (or what to approve, if we are contemplating other people's behaviour) if we are unclear about some aspect or circumstance of the moral choice before us. This is comparable with there being a definite moral object or situation, though we are not fully cognizant of it. To fill out Hume's example, we may not realize that our brother is especially in need at the moment, because other family members are

⁴⁰ Hume discusses two types of what he calls 'probability'. In one the object is definite, though it is incompletely known; in the other the object is uncertain and, presumably, our judgement is uncertain because of this. I am unsure whether, according to Hume, in the second case we are aware or unaware of the uncertainty of the object. The answer will have a bearing on what cases he will consider as moral error, as here too there is an ambiguous moral object that people are interpreting in a singular, and incorrect, way. See Hume, *Treatise*, p. 444.

⁴¹ *Enquiries*, p. 287.

⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 289-230.

⁴³ *loc. cit.*. Compare Hume's discussion of mistakes of fact and mistakes of right, with Shaftesbury's similar distinction of errors involving the moral sense, discussed in ch. 3 above.

away. (Do I spend time with my brother, or my benefactor?) Reason of a kind is required to gather and sort the details of the case, seeking more information if required. Hume does *not* suggest that sentiment has a role in comprehending or assessing unfinished or vague moral deliberations.

The second major point, then, is that moral sentiment considers the completed moral figure (an apprehension of our own or someone else's action or character, or the prospect of a certain act) gilding or staining it with the correct form of approbation or disapprobation. Hume describes the orator's depiction of viciousness, and asks how we feel abhorrence. But at this point he no longer asks what the moral sense brings in the way of apprehension, but shifts to what the moral sense brings in the way of an affective response, and perhaps motivation.⁴⁴ Given this shift of focus, he remarks that if an observer does not feel indignation towards a person behaving barbarously, and compassion towards such a person's victim, then such an observer cannot identify where the cruelty or the viciousness resides in the moral situation.⁴⁵

Hume brings up the question *when* such cruelty could be apprehended, but in doing so he seems to minimize the point that he has just described of a person who noticed no cruelty in the most immediate apprehension of the situation:

No satisfactory answer can be given to any of these questions, upon the abstract hypothesis of morals; and we must at last acknowledge, that the crime or immorality is no particular fact or relation, which can be the object of the understanding, but arises entirely from the sentiment of disapprobation, which, by the structure of human nature, we unavoidably feel on the apprehension of barbarity or treachery.⁴⁶

Hume appears to be equivocating between saying that the moral sentiment (of disapprobation) supervenes upon or completes the moral apprehension (of barbarity), or

⁴⁴ This is crucially important in relation to Hume's insistence that reason is inert, and that it cannot be sufficient to motivate us to any action.

⁴⁵ Hume, as we have seen especially with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, uses the notion of observation in a metaphorical sense. Anyone considering the case, whether in actual situations, in histories or literary depictions all observe viciousness in essentially the same manner.

⁴⁶ *Enquiries*, pp. 292-293.

that the moral sentiment of disapprobation *is* the apprehension. The feeling of equivocation in the present passage is, I think, constant throughout Hume's moral writings. He uses the language of the moral sense theories, and yet he does not seem concerned that it raises questions that do not seem to be answerable within the terms of such a theory. His use of a moral sense theory, I contend, is superficial and somewhat incongruous as it is placed within his own, different, moral framework which he turns to when he is constrained or limited by the moral sense account.

Concerning this issue of the superfluousness of the moral sense in the face of reason, Hume makes the reasonable point that until we know if a person attacked in self-defence or not, we do not know whether he is criminal or innocent. The moral sense tradition so far considered does not take the same stance. Hutcheson often differentiates between 'intentional' and 'real' objects, but only in the first-person case, and it is the intentional moral objects which have a certain primacy or correctness. In cases of doubt about the third-person case, then it is a knowledge of others' intentions or motives which provides the necessary information. Despite this caveat, the moral sense writers so far considered do not raise the lack of knowledge about other people's intentions as a persistent problem. Their whole focus is to insist that people know by inspecting their feelings of approval or disapproval that a third person is vicious or not. The earlier moral sense writers allow that observers can occasionally be wrong, and such writers give what they take to be an explanation of what has brought about the error. Nevertheless, no amount of error or divergence in moral perspectives is sufficient, in their view, to bring into doubt the nature of a well-functioning human power. Hume's concession that we need to know what the case is before we engage the feelings or moral sentiments is a pointed criticism of the moral sense, whether he intended it to be or not.

Limitations regarding natural sentiments

That the moral sense, for Hume, can wait in suspension indicates that his notion of the moral sense is significantly different from that of the earlier writers. But perhaps the

most crucial question that the discussion of the knowledge of material circumstances raises is whether the moral sense performs any genuine tasks, or whether it is a chimera of philosophical construction. Hume has enough material to bring into doubt the extant notions of the moral sense, yet he does so in no systematic or comprehensive way. There are two ways in which Hume implies doubt about the existence or role of the moral sense. The first has been dealt with immediately above, and has to do with the redundancy of the moral sense in the face of reason. The second manner in which Hume questions the moral sense is less direct. It involves what Hume has to say about natural sentiments towards the artificial and natural virtues.

The second and less direct way in which the moral sense can be questioned in terms of Hume's theory is by asking what Hume says of the natural sentiments towards the artificial and natural virtues. The question is whether he makes a distinction between different kinds of 'natural' sentiments, and hence the different types of virtue. Other moral sense writers do not draw a distinction between artificial and natural virtues, and so do not need to make the claim that the moral sense discerns both kinds of virtues. Hume does draw the distinction, and inverts what I consider the anticipated order of explanation by discussing first the role of sympathy in discerning the artificial virtues, only then bringing in to the discussion the discernment of natural virtues.

In speaking of the artificial virtues Hume substantiates to his satisfaction that, while justice is an artificial virtue, its tendency to the public good is a crucial part of its definition. And, since the convention of justice is long standing, it is not surprising that people feel and have always felt sentiments of approbation and disapprobation on reflecting on the artificial as well as the natural virtues.⁴⁷

Appealing to a principle of parsimony, Hume finds that as utility is a stable measure of worth with respect to the artificial virtues, so it is with the natural virtues. 'We have happily attain'd experiments in the artificial virtues, where the tendency of

⁴⁷ *Treatise*, p. 578.

qualities to the good of society, is the *sole* cause of our approbation, without any suspicion of the concurrence of another principle'.⁴⁸ How can we doubt that the natural virtues tend to the good of mankind? he asks rhetorically. The only difference that he finds between the classes of virtues is that natural virtues on every occurrence bring about good, whereas the good of the artificial virtues is more diffuse.⁴⁹ The goods secured by the artificial virtues are of two kinds; either such goods as might be advanced on this occasion by the exercise of the (artificial) virtue, or the good of preserving the convention. In his earlier discussion of the artificial virtues Hume compared such virtues with conventions. Hence, Hume is occasionally at a loss to describe the worth of such virtues independent of their sustaining the related convention. In the case of justice, this means that Hume gives an explanation why the *convention* of justice should be sustained without explicitly mentioning that the principal good of justice is that which arises from behaving equitably towards other people.

Having argued that both the natural and artificial virtues evoke sentiments and are assessed in terms of their utility, Hume provides yet further material by discussing the repertoire of 'natural' sentiments. Hume raises questions about the range of this repertoire with respect to property, as distinct from the artificial virtue of justice, and with respect to the objects of pride, as distinct from pride. On both occasions he draws a distinction between original and natural sentiments.

On the relationship between property and justice, Hume raises an objection against there being natural sentiments towards property, and the tokens of property.⁵⁰ Hume asks in the second *Enquiry* how it is that communal agreement can generate the conventions of justice and property. Public utility is served by the establishment and maintenance of institutions which embody these notions. This does not diminish the importance of sentiments that we have towards such institutions. The realization that

⁴⁸ *loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 579.

⁵⁰ *Enquiries*, pp. 198-199.

justice and property have historical origins should, according to Hume, increase our feelings of duty, not reduce them. Hume posits the need for a distinction between original instincts and those that can be fostered by reason:

The dilemma seems obvious: As justice evidently tends to promote public utility and to support civil society, the sentiment of justice is either derived from our reflecting on that tendency, or like hunger, thirst, and other appetites, resentment, love of life, attachment to offspring, and other passions, arises from a simple original instinct in the human breast, which nature has planted for like salutary purposes. If the latter be the case, it follows, that property, which is the object of justice, is also distinguished by a simple original instinct, and is not ascertained by any argument or reflection. But who is there that ever heard of such an instinct?...

But farther, though it seems a very simple proposition to say, that nature, by an instinctive sentiment, distinguishes property, yet in reality we shall find, that there are required for that purpose ten thousand different instincts, and these employed about objects of the greatest intricacy and nicest discernment.⁵¹

Hume's argument involves a *reductio ad absurdum*. How can there be a natural sense of property or justice? The objects of property are many, and to discern them with a natural sense, we would need to have an infinite array of such senses. Hume does not bring this argument against the moral sense. His immediate concern is to defend the artificiality of justice. Partly this is achieved by disclaiming the notion of *original* sentiments towards the artificial virtues, even though he claims that it is *as though* we have such sentiments towards the artificial virtues as well.

A related argument occurs in the *Treatise* questioning the type of sentiments that occur with respect to pride (a 'natural' vice') and the objects of pride. Again, Hume considers that a distinction has to be made between original and natural causes of the passions of pride and humility.⁵² Hume is conjecturing about the variety that empirical investigation reveals, and arguing for principles of parsimony with respect to human nature. While different nations and ages place pride and humility in different objects, there is a well-known range of things which remains stable. Hume asks, 'Can we imagine it possible, that while human nature remains the same, men will ever become

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 201.

⁵² *Treatise*, p. 281.

entirely indifferent to their power, riches, beauty or personal merit, and that their pride and vanity will not be affected by these advantages?'⁵³ Art and industry, caprice and good fortune are the factors that Hume points to as responsible for expanding the range of objects by which pride and humility are evoked. But Hume rejects the idea of an innate sensibility towards all of these objects:

'Tis absurd, therefore, to imagine, that each of these [objects] was forseen and provided for by nature, and that every new production of art, which causes pride or humility; instead of adapting itself to the passion by partaking of some general quality, that naturally operates on the mind; is itself the object of an original principle, which till then lay conceal'd in the soul, and is only by accident at last brought to light.⁵⁴

Hume, I contend, thus brings into doubt the notion of the moral sense by questioning whether there is a static or limited range of objects towards which people can have sentiments of an original and unvariegated kind. He argues for a distinction between original and natural sentiments, and considers natural sentiments are within the moulding capacities of reflection and argument. Yet if Hume inadvertently brings into doubt the moral sense that previous writers have attributed to mankind, then he also attributes to people a distinctly different capacity that he calls sympathy.

7:4 Sympathy and the role of the spectator in Hume's moral theory

Sympathy

Hume differs from the moral sense writers by placing in a position of prominence what he calls 'sympathy'. This 'principle' of human nature has many tasks, often overlapping with what earlier writers attributed to the moral sense. But whereas the moral sense is an intrinsically moral power, sympathy is a *non-moral* ability allowing people to discern the thoughts and sentiments of others. Sympathy does not seem to be involved in assessing

⁵³ *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ *loc. cit.*

our own thoughts and sentiments, only the thoughts of others.⁵⁵ Hume considers sympathy non-moral in the sense of being more encompassing. Not only people's moral qualities, but their attitudes, beliefs and feelings are made known to us by the application of this ability. That Hume makes use of both the notions of the moral sense and sympathy raises again the spectre that the moral sense is a superfluous faculty. However, Hume does not criticize the notion of the moral sense in terms of sympathy. His discussion of sympathy does not serve as a systematic questioning or refutation of the moral sense.

It is well recognized that Hume means a variety of things by the term 'sympathy', and that he modifies his ideas between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*.⁵⁶ It is thus difficult to give a core meaning to the term. Rather than trying to give a comprehensive account of an amorphous term, I look at a section of Book III of the *Treatise* which is particularly germane for our present purposes. There Hume defends the idea that sympathy is involved in the esteem and disesteem we pay to the artificial and natural virtues and vices. He remarks that moral distinctions depend entirely⁵⁷ on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure; and he goes on to say that to discover the true origin of morals he must look again at some principles of human nature that he has considered previously:⁵⁸

We may begin with considering a-new the nature and force of *sympathy*. The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 339- 340.

⁵⁶ Philip Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between Sympathy and Morality with special Reference to Hume's Treatise*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1972), p. 42 fn. 1 considers that in the *Enquiry Concerning Morals* 'Hume does away with the whole mechanism of sympathy and with it the need to show a connection between sympathy and benevolence.' Mercer continues, 'In its place he puts the "sentiment of humanity" or benevolence.' This 'sentiment of humanity' I take to be the benevolent aspect of the moral sense that we have consistently seen attributed to the moral sense by earlier writers. Capaldi appears to agree with Mercer's assessment of Hume, writing in *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, p. 239, that '*The most significant change in the Enquiry [in comparison to the Treatise] is the revision of the role of sympathy.*'

⁵⁷ I would now say, following Jones, that moral distinctions depend on their being experienced to be fully existent, but this does not mean that moral distinctions involve subjective values.

⁵⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 574-575.

person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature.⁵⁹

Hume continues that when we see the effects of a specific passion in the voice and gestures of a person, we infer back to their passion. And if that passion is sufficiently lively or vivacious, we feel it ourselves.⁶⁰ Correspondingly, if we notice the causes of an emotion, such as the laying out of surgical instruments, we too feel the emotions of an expectant patient.

Hume goes on to say that our sense of beauty depends on the principle of sympathy. Where any object has a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor it is always regarded as beautiful; and correspondingly with deformity and pain.⁶¹ Hume makes it clear that the *utility* of the object is very often the criterion by which the beauty, and hence the pleasurableness of the object is to be ascertained. Pleasure and advantage are mentioned as other criteria by which the beauty of an object is assessed. The 'conveniency of a house, the fertility of a field, the strength of a horse, the capacity, security, and swift-sailing of a vessel, form the principal beauty of these several objects.'⁶² Hutcheson is not mentioned in this context, yet he gives a similar list and criteria of utility in his own account of the relatedness of a sense of beauty and moral sentiment.⁶³ As with the earlier moral sense writers, Hume considers that the processes

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 575-576. Compare Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics*, p. 9, where he discusses Hume's ideas on what it is to have fellow-feeling with another person; and Pall Ardal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1966), p. 45, where Ardal writes 'One cannot, on Hume's account, form the idea of another person's emotion unless one has had the corresponding impression.' Both Mercer and Ardal take it that we are unable to apprehend another's emotion unless we have previously experienced a similar one. They don't directly address the question about how we enlarge our repertoire of emotions. Is it that we understand linguistic refinements, or are the feelings associated with the new emotions significantly different? A different order of question is whether it is at such a point that the notion of the moral sense again begins to look somewhat redundant. Hume's present point in the quotation, I take it, is the limited one that people are sufficiently similar to form a community of people with like emotional experiences.

⁶⁰ Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, p. 156, is critical of the view, expressed by John Laird, that sympathy with someone else's toothache requires that we feel a toothache as well. This has been used as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hume's position, Capaldi writes.

⁶¹ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 576.

⁶² *loc. cit.*

⁶³ For example, Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, p. 102.

of discerning aesthetic beauty and moral qualities are similar. The similarity with aesthetic taste is discussed in a later section.

Sympathy and the approval of the moral spectator

Hume describes conditions under which sympathy is variable, but sentiments of approbation are not.⁶⁴ Such a division of labour reinforces the notion that sympathy is involved with assessing and approving other people, but that it does not do so in isolation from other reasoning processes and judgements. It is at such a juncture that Hume appeals to the notion of the spectator, and specifically marks a distinction between judicious and involved spectators. This is similar to Hutcheson's distinction between the self-interested observer and the competent judge. However, Hume does not imply that involved and self-interested spectators are necessarily injudicious, merely that this is contingently often the case. In this way he is more cautious than the earlier writers in conceding that self-interest may or may not affect the accuracy of their moral discernment. On the difference between sympathy and moral approbation due to different moral qualities, Hume writes:

We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us ... 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.⁶⁵

What follows in Hume is an argument based on the visual analogy of perspective to the effect that a steady and general point of view can be obtained. Such a viewpoint corrects our sentiments, or at least our language if our sentiments are recalcitrant.⁶⁶ The general point of view gives us a form of impartiality based on what judicious observers (in

⁶⁴Typically, this is the point at which the earlier moral sense writers began to discuss error, rather than mere variation.

⁶⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 581.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 582.

historical and literary situations as well⁶⁷) would have perspicuously apprehended with their moral sentiments.⁶⁸ The judiciousness depends on there being an absence of narrow self-interest colouring the point of view of the impartial spectator.

It is only in the subsequent section of the *Treatise* that Hume methodically discusses how our moral sentiments are open to correction as well. This is not his primary focus of concern, but in the course of explaining the merit or demerit of particular virtues and vices he discusses the principle of sympathy, as discussed above, and what he calls 'comparison'. This is:

... the variation of our judgements concerning objects, according to the proportion they bear to those with which we compare them.⁶⁹

Hume finds that no comparison is more obvious than with ourselves 'and hence it is that on all occasions it takes place, and mixes with most of our passions.'⁷⁰ In effect, this amounts to the admission that we do not unreflectively judge ourselves and others in an unbiased and neutral way. Hume strengthens his claim with a broad generalization that he takes to be justified by experience:

In all kinds of comparison an object makes us always receive from another, to which it is compar'd, a sensation contrary to what arises from itself in its direct and immediate survey. The direct survey of another's pleasure naturally gives us pleasure; and therefore produces pain, when compar'd with our own. His pain, consider'd in itself, is painful; but augments the idea of our own happiness, and gives us pleasure.⁷¹

Hume describes the spectacle of a shipwreck seen by an observer safely on shore. The signs of the passengers' horror and steadfast resolution can have a mixed result in

⁶⁷ Hume, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, discusses the apprehension and moral assessment of such situations. In all cases they seem parasitic on the notion of everyday apprehension of other people and ourselves, and make the presumption that the stage and the written history give us psychologically convincing portrayals of people's lives, complete with their intentions, aspirations and the like.

⁶⁸ Hume raises a second possible objection, that some virtue is not exemplified in action. Here Hume appeals to general rules which justify our judging in standard ways. See *Treatise*, p. 584.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 593.

⁷⁰ *loc. cit.* I have made no attempt to notice special problems and resolutions concerning Hume's concept of the self.

⁷¹ *Treatise*, p. 594.

observers. For those on shore, there is a combination of sympathy, in the more usual sense of pity, and compassion which is raised by comparing our own safety with the distress of others. Hume makes the suggestion that our moral assessments, as well as our emotions, are prone to distortion because of perspective. Aware of the limited generosity of mankind, Hume writes that 'We are quickly oblig'd to forget our own interest in our judgements of this kind, by reason of the perpetual contradictions, we meet with in society and conversation, from persons that are not plac'd in the same situation, and have not the same interest with ourselves'.⁷² The resolution Hume proposes is that people foster the standpoint of the impartial observer. Even though we may not share such an observer's values, such values are sufficient to give us shared ground that we need to continue in our moral community. Hume writes in this vein:

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. And tho' the *heart* does not always take part with those general notions, or regulate its love and hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools.⁷³

In such material Hume implicitly marks the difference between a *de facto* and an impartial observer. Like the moral sense writers, he does so in the language of perspectival distortion.

Hume achieves a similar distinction in his discussion of pride and humility. One of the tasks he sets himself in discussing these qualities is to discern a medium between the two. This medium he identifies as proper pride. Proper pride is the accurate self-respect of a 'man of sense and merit ... pleas'd with himself, independent of all foreign

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 602.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 603. Compare Hume, *Enquiries*, pp. 229-232, where he presents much the same argument. Explaining why we are not as much moved by the depiction of virtue in 'old history', Hume writes (p. 230) 'Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star, which, though to the eye of reason it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses, neither with heat or light. Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard.'

considerations'.⁷⁴ Hume even proposes that an accurate assessment of ourselves is to be obtained by viewing ourselves from an impartial position.⁷⁵ He encourages people to foster such an outlook. By doing so, he feels, they are more likely to adhere to the virtues.

For Hume, the impartial spectator plays two major roles: as a theoretical construction it allows us to understand the best of the moral standards that obtain in our society; and at a more personal level, the figure of the impartial spectator helps us to construct imaginatively what best to do in specific circumstances. In this second realm, the notion of the impartial spectator has a role in motivating morally good behaviour. Hume's discussion of the impartial spectator is furthered in his discussion of taste, whether aesthetic or moral.

Moral taste and the impartial spectator

The normative role that Hume assigns to the impartial spectator is best seen in his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Here he compares moral taste to aesthetic taste and argues that there is such a thing as an impartial spectator.

Hume begins by arguing that, although there is seemingly a great variety of tastes, no-one seriously considers that all tastes are equal.⁷⁶ Thus it is reasonable to seek a standard of taste: the implication is that both in the moral and aesthetic sphere this standard is to be found not by *a priori* reasoning, but by experience and general

⁷⁴ *Treatise*, p. 596. The opposite of this figure, Hume continues, is the sort of fool who must always find someone more foolish than himself to sustain his own good humour.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 545, 581-582, 589-590 and especially *Enquiries*, p. 276 where Hume writes 'By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue.'

⁷⁶ Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 227-228 and 232.

observation.⁷⁷ Hume seeks a middle ground between finding that no sentiment has a role in aesthetic taste, and finding that beauty is not a quality in things themselves.⁷⁸ The phrases are Hume's. He clarifies his position by remarking that there is such a thing as delicacy of taste, which is a thing of cultivated sentiment. Though this delicacy may be rare and sometimes slow to be acknowledged, its authenticity is known by the durability of its pronouncements on aesthetic worth.⁷⁹ Such assured and correct pronouncements are made by the impartial spectator. Hume writes of aesthetic taste:

A good palate is not tried by strong flavours; but by a mixture of small ingredients, where we are still sensible of each part, notwithstanding its minuteness and its confusion with the rest. In like manner, a quick and acute perception of beauty and deformity must be the perfection of our mental taste.⁸⁰

In the aesthetic case, the competent judge is known as the critic. When considering a work from a different age or nation, Hume remarks that the critic should take on the qualities of the original audience for which the work was intended, in order to form true judgements about it.⁸¹ The critic must consider himself as a 'man in general', and this, I suggest, is close to the idea of the impartial spectator in the moral case. Hume gathers together his thoughts on the aesthetic critic by writing:

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.⁸²

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 231.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 230. As Hume continues in the following paragraph, that though beauty is a matter of perceived beauty, there are accepted standards of taste (pp. 230-231).

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 243.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 236.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 239.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 241. In closing the essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', Hume raises a problem about the similarity of aesthetic and moral taste. He brings up the debate between the ancients and the moderns, and remarks that a modern sensibility is offended by representations of rough heroes who confound the limits of virtue and vice. This appears to be an argument for improving moral taste. The impression is strengthened as Hume writes immediately afterwards that there is great variety in speculative opinions, and men may adopt these different opinions easily. In the moral case, however, much more effort is required to judge of other manners 'and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized', (p. 247).

This figure is comparable with the person of high taste as described by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. The difference, as in the moral case, is that Hume does not appeal to a distinct, original sense, but to a natural and educable sensibility which involves reason and judgement either in the general fostering of the sensibility, or at least the correction of that sensibility when it is inaccurate in specific cases. While Shaftesbury and Hutcheson gesture towards the notion that the moral and aesthetic senses are educable, they are reluctant to allow reason, judgement or the understanding any consistent place in sensibility. The impression they foster is that a sensibility may be refined, but they give no detail as to how this might be achieved. Hume's insistence that reason has a role in sensibility is a marked change.

7:5 Conclusion

Hume is a difficult figure to classify within the terms of the moral sense theories so far considered. He nominally accepts and uses the veneer of a moral sense theory, though he abandons it when it is unhelpful in answering recalcitrant concerns. Hume, nevertheless, explicitly recognizes that he deals with the question whether moral distinctions are known by reason or sentiment. Like the moral sense writers, he consistently denies that such distinctions are known exclusively by reason. However, Hume does not appear aware of his own ambivalence on this matter. Unlike the earlier moral sense writers, Hume allows reason a distinct place in the mental processes of moral and aesthetic discernment. At times, such as in the first Appendix to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume comes very close to finding the moral sense redundant. He seems to have all of the necessary material to refute the moral sense, but he does not do so.

Hume's use of the moral sense theory is not without modification in another respect. He differs by positing a non-moral principle, sympathy, to explain our apprehension of other people's beliefs, emotions, and moral qualities. Sympathy appears confined to our assessment of others, and so Hume has to introduce the notion of

comparison, by which we apprehend our own moral and non-moral status with respect to others.

Whereas Hume is ambivalent between using a moral sense theory, and criticizing it either by direct or indirect means, Adam Smith is direct in his criticisms of such a theory. In the following chapter I consider Smith's account; his distinction between two types of moral sense theories, his refutation of one, and his endorsement of the other.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ADAM SMITH

8:1 *Introduction*

In the preceding chapters I have traced the major themes and developments in the moral sense theory from its earliest exponents, the Cambridge Platonists, through to Hume. In this chapter I shall complete this survey with an examination of Adam Smith's treatment of the moral sense theory. Adam Smith (1723-1790) forms a natural closing point for our consideration of moral sense theories of the eighteenth century. He both challenges the theory in the form Francis Hutcheson gave it and yet retains many recognizable elements in a distinct and new arrangement. This chapter will address both aspects of Smith. While Smith's refutation of moral sense theories is concentrated in the final book of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, first published in 1759, the second theme is more diffuse. Limitations of space mean that the second half of the chapter can do no more than locate the residual moral sense elements that Smith utilizes. Unlike Hume, Smith directly poses the question of the viability of moral sense theories. By categorizing such theories into two types, he is able to reject one and retain the other without inconsistency.

8:2 *Smith's direct criticisms of the moral sense theory*

Smith's classification of moral theories

The final part of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, part VII, contains his classification of moral theories.¹ He conjectures that all moral theories perform two

¹ D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie note that it 'seems likely that the first version of Smith's lectures began at this point, with a systematic survey of earlier theories before developing Smith's own view in the light of criticisms of Hutcheson and Hume'. Smith's moral thesis is expounded in earlier sections of this work. As this chapter will show, Smith is indebted to Hutcheson and the moral sense tradition, both for the notion of the impartial spectator and the role of the emotions in moral assessment. The editorial note occurs in Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (1976), Indianapolis: Liberty Classics (1982), p. 265, editors' fn. 1. (This I hereafter abbreviate as *TMS*.)

tasks: they ask the question, in what does virtue consist?² The answer is some description of those characters and tempers which are worthy of esteem. The second question is, by what power of mind are these virtuous characters, whatever they are, recommended to us?³ Smith considers the first question of great practical importance in our manner of living, while the second is of only philosophical interest.⁴ It is of course an understanding of the possible answers to the second question that has been the focus of the thesis.

Smith postulates that all moral theories of worth share a methodological observation. All the moral theories that have had any reputation have been founded on 'natural principles'.⁵ By 'principles' he understands empirical generalizations concerning what can be discovered by experience, general observation and introspection. In this he is in agreement with Hume's empiricism, for while the earlier moral sense writers also appealed to experience and introspection, they retained the notion of providential teleology and natural laws of human nature. The metaphysical status of these claims is difficult to reconcile with the more cautious understanding of empirical 'principles'. Smith demonstrates this more cautious use of the term in his reminder that, as many natural principles are based on partial and imperfect views of nature, such principles are to this extent incorrect.⁶

This confidence in discoverable principles is matched by Smith's rejection of teleological explanations. Like Hume, Smith avoids appeals to entities and explanations that are not supported by widespread common belief and observational regularities. This appeal to empirical generalizations is sufficient, according to Smith, to explain the moral and social phenomena that have arisen. Smith does not explicitly state his rejection of

² Smith, *TMS*, p. 265.

³ *loc. cit.*

⁴ *TMS*, p. 315.

⁵ *TMS*, p. 265.

⁶ *loc. cit.*

providential teleology, though his neglect to cite it as an ultimate explanatory device is markedly different from the earlier writers. He supports his appeal to empirical method in the essay 'The History of Astronomy'.⁷ Smith proposes that we seek to explain new phenomena by comparison with things or regular events that we are already familiar with. Our imagination looks for connecting chains of principles, and different sciences or branches of philosophy study natural events under their respective auspices. By studying the history of astronomical theories, Smith intends to illustrate his thesis that empirical observation and widespread agreement are sufficient to explain natural phenomena. Further, the same method is sufficient to discredit theories which appeal to dubious principles or entities.⁸ Not only astronomy, but other branches of study, including moral philosophy, make use of the same empirical methods.

Smith separately classifies moral theories according to both the nature of virtue and the nature of moral approbation. It is only the second classification, that of moral approbation, that I consider here. Smith discusses what he considers three major groupings. The division falls along the lines of whether the principles of moral approbation are due to self-love, reason, or sentiment.⁹ Smith's ensuing discussion also follows an historical résumé from Hobbes to his own contemporaries. Smith names Hobbes as the major exponent of the first grouping, though Pufendorf and Mandeville are also mentioned.¹⁰ Hobbes is the representative of a scattered group who hold the selfish view that people are indifferent to others, only taking refuge in society to procure

⁷ Adam Smith, 'The History of Astronomy', in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by I.S. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1980), pp. 29-105.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 86. Smith writes of the manner in which outmoded theories discard observational material in an effort to remain credible. 'The equality of [the] motions [of celestial bodies] was another fundamental idea, which, in the same manner, and for the same reason, was supposed by all founders of astronomical systems. For an equal motion can be more easily attended to, than one that is continually either accelerated or retarded. All inconstancy, therefore, was declared to be unworthy [of] those bodies which revolved in the celestial regions, and to be fit only for inferior and sublunary things.'

⁹ *TMS*, p. 315.

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*, Smith's fn.

the ease and safety they are otherwise incapable of securing. Smith holds such a portrayal to be despicable: it is an inaccurate and belittling view of human nature.

Smith next considers those systems which make reason the principle of approbation. Ralph Cudworth is cited as an exponent of this view. Smith has criticized Samuel Clarke earlier for holding a similar view.¹¹ Smith's disagreement with such authors is qualified: there is a manner in which virtue is conformity to reason.¹² It is by reason that the general rules of morality can be discovered. The regularities of experience can be gathered into general maxims and ideas, and this is the case with moral experience too.¹³ The error that Smith attributes to this view is that it takes reason to be the primary source of moral approbation and disapprobation. This, for Smith, is to mistake the nature of moral apprehension. He writes that reason can aid us in understanding the suitability of moral means and ends, but that reason is inert in motivating us to act, unless it is accompanied by the requisite and immediate sense and feeling. Although general rules can be formed as the result of experience, in no manner do these generalizations render pleasure and pain, approbation and disapprobation obsolete. The presence of reason begins to look redundant as Smith writes 'If virtue, therefore, in every particular instance, necessarily pleases for its own sake, and if vice as certainly displeases the mind, it cannot be reason, but immediate sense and feeling, which, in this manner, reconciles us to the one, and alienates us from the other.'¹⁴ Hutcheson is cited approvingly at this point. Smith attributes to him a clarity in describing the roles of reason and sentiment in our moral approbation:

As reason, however, in a certain sense, may justly be considered as the principle of approbation and disapprobation, these sentiments were, through inattention, long regarded as originally flowing from the operation of this faculty. Dr. Hutcheson had the merit of being the first who distinguished with any degree of precision in what respect all moral distinctions may be said to arise from reason, and in what respect they are founded upon

¹¹ *TMS*, pp. 318 and 265.

¹² *TMS*, p. 319.

¹³ *TMS*, pp. 319-320.

¹⁴ *TMS*, p. 320.

immediate sense and feeling. In his illustrations upon the moral sense he has explained this so fully, and, in my opinion, so unanswerably, that, if any controversy is still kept up about this subject, I can impute it to nothing, but either inattention to what that gentleman has written, or to a superstitious attachment to certain forms of expression.¹⁵

It is at this juncture that Smith considers the last major grouping of moral approbation. It postulates sentiment as the basis of moral approbation and disapprobation.

Moral sense theories of two kinds

Immediately, however, Smith divides this last category of moral theories into two smaller groups. There are those who postulate a special and distinct sense, and there are those who find no need to propose a *sui generis* faculty of moral perception to discern what it takes to be a discrete category of moral qualities.¹⁶ The first group called this sense the moral sense. Hutcheson is named as the major exponent of this view. According to the second group, there is no need to postulate a distinct moral sense:

Nature, they imagine, acts here, as in all other cases, with the strictest oeconomy, and produces a multitude of effects from one and the same cause; and sympathy, a power which has always been taken notice of, and with which the mind is manifestly endowed, is, they think, sufficient to account for all the effects ascribed to this peculiar faculty.¹⁷

In what follows, Smith raises what he takes to be damaging criticisms against Hutcheson's version of the moral sense theory. This is heavily interspersed with his comments about the second version of the theory, that of moral sentiments. It is this second version that Smith adheres to himself. At this point it is useful to remember that we have so far in this chapter only considered a small part of the last section of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith's positive moral theory is of course developed through the entire length of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, yet it is only in the

¹⁵ *TMS* pp. 320-321.

¹⁶ *TMS*, p. 321.

¹⁷ *TMS* p. 321.

concluding sections of this work that Smith gives a classification of moral theories among which his own can be located. With this reminder in view, I now deal fairly narrowly first with Smith's refutation of Hutcheson's version of the moral sense theory, and then his own retention of elements of that theory.

Smith's refutation of a moral sense theory

Smith briefly characterizes Hutcheson's version of the moral sense theory, and then criticizes it at the same time as bolstering his own version of a theory of moral sentiment. Basically, his intention is to make clear his reasons for rejecting accounts such as Hutcheson's. The major criticism that he brings to bear is that there is a fallacy involved in moving from the claim that there is a distinct set of moral objects or sentiments, to the claim that there is a distinct sense of moral perception or moral sentiment.

Smith begins his criticism by noting that Hutcheson had been at great pains to prove that moral approbation was founded neither on self-love nor reason.¹⁸ Hutcheson thus felt justified in isolating a distinct mental faculty which he called the moral sense. Hutcheson likened the operation of this sense to the external senses,¹⁹ finding that it was a reflex or internal sense similar to:

...such as a sense of beauty and deformity in external objects; a public sense, by which we sympathize with the happiness or misery of our fellow-creatures; and a sense of shame and honour, and a sense of ridicule.²⁰

Smith's argument against Hutcheson is basically threefold. The first is against a distinct moral sense, the second is against a *distinct* set of moral sentiments (the difference is

¹⁸ *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Smith cites Locke as providing the epistemological basis upon which Hutcheson builds, in *TMS*, p. 322. Norton would disagree, assessing Locke's influence on Hutcheson of less importance than would otherwise be expected. Compare Norton, 'Hutcheson's Moral Realism', pp. 400-405.

²⁰ *TMS*, p. 322.

between Hutcheson's repertoire of moral approbation and moral disapprobation, as opposed to Smith's thesis of non-specific sentiments and emotions having a role in moral assessment), and the third appeals to a language argument. Smith's criticisms are not always fair, and yet I agree with the outcome that he seeks.

Smith's first argument against Hutcheson is somewhat misplaced. It is that Hutcheson makes an error in insisting that the qualities which belong to the objects of any sense cannot, without absurdity, be ascribed to the sense itself. The sense of seeing cannot be either black or white, nor can the sense of tasting be either bitter or sweet. Hutcheson takes this position in the *Illustrations*, and extends the analogy in the moral case to say that neither can the moral sense be judged either good or evil.²¹

Smith appears to agree with Hutcheson that the external senses are not to be judged in terms of categories appropriate to the objects of those senses. But Smith rejects what he takes to be Hutcheson's point, that the moral sense cannot be judged in terms of the categories of good and evil. Hutcheson is thus wrong, according to Smith, to take it as equally absurd to call our moral faculties virtuous or vicious, morally good or evil.²² Smith correctly points out that we want to be able to say that not all moral senses are the same, and that some are morally better than others. Hutcheson's position, according to Smith, is that no such criticism can be levelled at people with different moral sensibilities.

The difficulty is that Smith is arguing against only a small fragment of Hutcheson's writing, and Hutcheson himself often makes the point in a variety of ways that not all moral senses are the same, and that some are morally better than others. These themes have been discussed at length in chapter 4 above. Hutcheson devises the notion

²¹ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, p. 236. The relevant argument is from pp. 234-238. In Peach's edition of the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, see p. 134 ff.

²² *TMS*, p. 323. A footnote by Smith refers the reader to the specific section of Hutcheson's *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*.

of the competent judge as a person with high moral sensibility, and he allows reason a place in correcting moral apprehensions when they have in fact been inaccurate.

Looking specifically to the argument that Hutcheson uses in the *Illustrations*, he does seem to conform to Smith's characterization. However, when looked at more closely, Hutcheson himself raises Smith's point as a possible objection, rather than conceding the position. Hutcheson's first reply is to insist that people *know* there is a difference between a sense approving benevolence, and a sense approving malice.²³ If a further objection is raised against this, Hutcheson resorts to a form of argument that he thinks has to be conceded even by consistently and narrowly self-interested people.²⁴ They have to concede, according to Hutcheson, that acting virtuously is to their self-interest. It is only such people, Hutcheson thinks, who would raise the objection that all moral senses are on a par.

Smith, then, misjudges Hutcheson's position on this issue. Nevertheless, he continues by making a much briefer comment on Hutcheson's notion of the moral sense that I think Hutcheson is not able to respond to. It is that Hutcheson has no argument to prevent there being a proliferation of internal senses. Smith writes of the dubious claim for a necessary relationship between senses and a set of distinct objects:

Approbation and disapprobation, it may be pretended, are certain feelings or emotions which arise in the mind upon the view of different characters and actions; and as resentment may be called a sense of injuries, or gratitude a sense of benevolence, so these may very properly receive the name of a sense of right and wrong, or of a moral sense.²⁵

This is structurally similar to Hume's *reductio* argument that we considered in the previous chapter. Hume though, only brings the argument directly against there being a natural sense or sentiment of property. In this way he seeks to bolster his own thesis

²³ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, pp. 234-235.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

²⁵ *TMS*, p. 324. Another possible way of interpreting Smith's point is not as a *reductio* by proposing a large number of senses, but inconsistently proposing a single (or dual) sense of moral approbation (and disapprobation), plainly rejected elsewhere in the *TMS*.

about the artificiality of justice and injustice. Smith is directly critical of Hutcheson. He challenges the idea that there are specific *moral* sentiments. I take it that Smith's argument here is that, if there were distinct moral sentiments, then there would need to be as many senses to be engaged by their corresponding sentiments.

This leads on to the second major argument that Smith raises against Hutcheson. Smith deals with it as a possible position of retreat for Hutcheson. If there is not a distinct, *sui generis* moral sense, then there are distinct moral sentiments. Moral approbation and disapprobation are specific sentiments whose role is confined to *moral* assessment. I think that Smith indeed is correct in the tenor of this criticism. Smith does not cite any specific part of Hutcheson's writings, yet he does not greatly misrepresent him when he says that Hutcheson claims that by introspection we discern a steady difference between our sentiments of moral approbation and our feelings of approbation towards natural goods.²⁶ Smith's criticism is twofold. He argues that there are no specifically *moral* sentiments; and he argues that our sentiments, whether or not they are involved in moral assessment, are much more tailored than Hutcheson concedes.

In order of appearance in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith actually deals with the argument for specific sentiments first. Anger, he writes, whether it is directed at a man, a woman or a child is unfailingly recognized as an emotion with general features in common, to the extent that the emotion is recognized as anger. Smith suggests that an attentive observer may notice distinguishing features between various sorts of anger. Smith's main point, however, is that everyone notices the general emotion being displayed, whereas few people will observe the specific form of the emotion. The criticism is that, if approbation and disapprobation (towards a specific moral situation) were like distinct emotions, we should be able to recognize such approbation and disapprobation in clear and plain ways, despite any surface variation that they might undergo. Smith finds that this does not occur. He finds that 'our emotion in one case is

²⁶ Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good*, pp. 107-108. This is discussed in ch. 4 above.

often totally different from that in another, and that no common features can possibly be discovered between them'.²⁷ Smith continues on the same point:

Thus the approbation with which we view a tender, delicate and humane sentiment, is quite different from that with which we are struck by one that appears great, daring and magnanimous. Our approbation of both may, upon different occasions, be perfect and entire; but we are softened by the one, and we are elevated by the other, and there is no sort of resemblance between the emotions which they excite in us.²⁸

Smith's second point in this area is that we do not merely respond with a generic form of moral approbation or disapprobation. Rather, we apprehend by means of sympathy the emotions of other people, and in response to the appropriateness of their emotions, we have a complex response of either approbation or disapprobation. Smith, I think, is able to successfully make his point that we do not confuse the disapprobation we feel towards cruelty on the one hand, and mean-spiritedness on the other.²⁹ Both are vices, but they are different vices with different cognitive content, and our sentiments are sufficiently tailored to discern a difference.

Smith's third argument makes an appeal to the absence of specific expressions in language referring to the moral sense. In a comment which brooks no reply Smith writes:

[I]t is strange that this sentiment, which Providence undoubtedly intended to be the governing principle of human nature, should hitherto have been so little taken notice of, as not to have got a name in any language. The word moral sense is of very late formation, and cannot yet be considered as making part of the English tongue.³⁰

Till recently neither English nor other languages have had a term for the moral sense. This in itself, as Smith notes, undermines the credibility of the philosophical claim that there is such a distinct faculty. This need not necessarily reflect badly on the common-sense view that sentiments have an important role in our moral life, and it is this insight of Hutcheson's that Smith seeks to preserve in his own positive thesis concerning moral

²⁷ Smith, *TMS*, p. 325.

²⁸ *loc. cit.*

²⁹ *loc. cit.*

³⁰ *TMS*, p. 326.

sentiments. In the following I consider Smith's criticisms of Hutcheson on the issue of correct moral sentiments.

Smith's endorsement of a theory of moral sentiments

In answering Hutcheson Smith brings forward in a variety of guises an argument for correct moral sentiments. It is this which sharpens the claim that, while he rejects a form of the moral sense theory, he retains elements of it crucial to his own positive thesis.

In his replies to Hutcheson, Smith brings up the argument that there are such things as 'correct moral sentiments'. As we have seen above, Smith thinks that Hutcheson's view is that the moral sense is neither good nor evil. This raises the possibility, so Smith thinks, that Hutcheson has no argument against a person who approves in cruelty as virtuous.³¹ Smith's rejoinder is that, if we saw a man applauding at a barbarous and unmerited execution ordered by an insolent tyrant 'we should not think we were guilty of any great absurdity in denominating this behaviour vicious and morally evil in the highest degree'.³²

Smith contrasts what he takes to be this display of moral indifference, with his own view of correct moral sentiments. He writes:

Correct moral sentiments, on the contrary, naturally appear in some degree laudable and morally good. The man whose censure and applause are upon all occasions suited with the greatest accuracy to the value or unworthiness of the object, seems to deserve a degree even of moral approbation.³³

³¹ *TMS*, p. 323. This is the burden of Butler's criticism against Shaftesbury, as we have seen in ch. 6, on the authority, or what I have called the normative correctness of the moral sense.

³² *loc. cit.*. Both Hutcheson and Butler describe the abhorrence most observers feel witnessing a tyrant. They use the point to insist on a natural response of indignity and condemnation towards such a person. Hutcheson and Butler are able to concede Smith's point about the moral assessment of the moral sense itself, but Smith is correct to see that Hutcheson is not sufficiently interested to do so in the way that Smith himself is.

³³ *TMS*, p. 323.

Smith goes on to suggest that discerning judges have a delicate precision of their moral sentiments; and while such sentiments may be insufficient to guarantee virtuous conduct, sentiments of a sufficient degree are a necessary prerequisite to such behaviour.³⁴ This is made feasible because the same standards inform our criticism of both our own and others' behaviour.

My only remark is that Smith criticizes Hutcheson unfairly on the matter of differentiating between forms of moral sense. Shaftesbury perhaps more emphatically than Hutcheson writes of the possibility of high standards of moral taste, but Hutcheson too makes room for this in his discussion of the competent moral judge. It is reasonable that by 'correct' sentiments Smith intends normative correctness, and not mere cognitive correctness. The difference, as we saw in our discussion of Shaftesbury is this: cognitive correctness might be secured by feeling pity rather than disdain in a particular situation, whereas normative correctness is a matter of (always) responding with a compassionate action on those occasions when pity is evoked.

Smith is more self-conscious than Hutcheson, and indeed the whole moral sense tradition to this stage, in asking what makes 'correct' sentiments so. When Shaftesbury and Hutcheson consider a form of this question, it is with the assurance that God has perspicuously designed human nature with its array of senses, so that there are only infrequent occasions on which the moral sense is wrong. Smith's form of this question is different. In asking about the manner in which sentiments are correct, Smith's answer rests more heavily on the role of other people sharing the same viewpoint. Not only are specific sentiments and emotions approved or disapproved of in moral terms, 'but that proper and improper approbation appear, to our natural sentiments, to be stamped with the same characters'.³⁵ On what grounds, he asks, do we approve of some forms of approbation and disapprobation as proper, and some as improper? Smith's appeal to the

³⁴ Smith writes 'Virtue requires habit and resolution of mind, as well as delicacy of sentiment; and unfortunately the former qualities are sometimes wanting, where the latter is in the greatest perfection', *TMS*, p. 324.

³⁵ *TMS*, p. 325.

point of view of an uninvolved third person, and the match or divergence of their sentiments with our own, allows us to form general notions of what correct moral sentiments consist in. And if the coincidence or opposition of sentiments is informative in the one case, are they not so in all other cases, he asks.

Smith is thus not dismissive of the role of sentiments in moral assessment, but his criticism is that there are no sentiments peculiar to the moral sense. Neither, he argues, are these sentiments non-cognitive or merely personal responses. His insistence on a community of like-responding people, responding for determinate causal reasons, is sufficient to bring into doubt these possible objections. In turning now from Smith's *elenchus* to his positive theory, we can see that he is careful to set out his relative distance from the moral sense writers:

When we approve of any character or action, the sentiments which we feel are ... derived from four sources, which are in some respects different from one another. First, we sympathize with the motives of the agent; secondly, we enter into the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions; thirdly, we observe that his conduct has been agreeable to the general rules by which those two sympathies generally act; and, last of all, when we consider such actions as making a part of a system of behaviour which tends to promote the happiness either of the individual or of the society, they appear to derive a beauty from this utility, not unlike that which we ascribe to any well-contrived machine.³⁶

Smith thus retains a theory of moral sentiments, while resoundingly criticizing the theory of moral sense, especially in the form held by Hutcheson.

8:3 *Sympathy and Smith's positive moral theory*

Sympathy

Smith's positive moral edifice is built upon what he takes to be an empirically accurate account of mankind. Like Hume, Smith continues to use some of the terminology of the earlier moral sense writers, but the cumulative changes are striking. I draw no direct

³⁶ *TMS*, p. 326.

comparisons between Hume and Smith on the use of term ‘sympathy’, but turn directly to Smith’s use of this notion.³⁷

‘Sympathy’ is the basic psychological component with which Smith explains the dynamics of our moral life. It is with this notion that Smith begins his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. While it receives much of his attention, the first definition is that it is the imaginative sharing of other people’s feelings, sentiments, and sensations.³⁸ Smith writes that we are unable to enter others’ bodies and thoughts, but by thinking about how we would feel in their situation, we are able to come close to understanding and sharing other people’s experience of specific events and situations.³⁹ Sympathy is non-moral, involved in apprehending not only moral feelings and situations, but non-moral feelings and evaluations as well. Sympathy is primarily non-evaluative in the wider sense of necessarily not approving or disapproving what comes under its auspices. That is the work of reason and moral evaluation; and Smith finds that we evaluate moral behaviour and character traits according to their propriety and impropriety,⁴⁰ and their merit or demerit.⁴¹

Smith thinks that most people constantly and with moderate ease discern the sentiments of others, taking such sentiments into consideration continuously. Sympathy has a major role in this discernment, as has been noted in closing the previous section. Smith considers that we have two responsibilities with respect to sympathy; one in our capacity for expressing emotions, and the other in our capacity as spectators. The first involves Smith’s description of the socialization and restraint of the display of our

³⁷ Ardal gives a comparison of Hume’s and Smith’s account of sympathy in *Passion and Value*, pp. 133-147. Mercer also makes a brief comparison, though finds that Hume’s account suffers from inconsistency, and Smith’s from circularity. Compare Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics*, pp. 95-97.

³⁸ *TMS*, p. 9.

³⁹ Even from Smith’s first definition, it is clear that he does not intend sympathy to be either the mere contagious assumption of other people’s feelings, or a non-cognitive recognition of either their feelings, and our own understanding of them. Imagination, a task of the intellect, has the basic part in sympathy.

⁴⁰ *TMS*, p. 27 ff. (I. ii and iii.)

⁴¹ *TMS*, p. 67 ff. (II. i.)

passions so that by-standers and observers can enter into them with more facility. Neither extreme joy nor extreme grief can be wholeheartedly shared by others,⁴² and the bearer of extreme passions makes himself more understandable if he can mute the pitch of his extreme passions.⁴³ According to Smith, a second responsibility on the part of everyone is frequently to try and imagine the situation of others. We can forget our own situation only momentarily, and it is Smith's point that we would be more virtuous if we cultivated our imaginative reconstruction of others' passions.⁴⁴

Smith's developmental account of human nature

The notion of sympathy has received careful exposition by Ralph Lindgren,⁴⁵ T.D. Campbell,⁴⁶ and Knud Haakonssen.⁴⁷ Rather than trying to survey the breadth of this literature, I concentrate on several important points that Lindgren makes concerning sympathy. Lindgren, in *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, attributes to Smith a developmental account of people's self-consciousness and the moral consideration of others. Basic to the possibility of both, Lindgren conjectures, is Smith's notion of sympathy.

Lindgren finds in Smith a three-stage developmental process to moral maturity. Lindgren refers to these as 'the life of pleasure, the life of emulation and the life of

⁴² *TMS*, p. 21.

⁴³ This does not sit comfortably with what Smith says of the polishing of manners, where he describes people in more polished societies are more able to express the full range and depth of their emotions, without fear of estrangement or risk. See *TMS*, pp. 206-207 (V..ii.9-10).

⁴⁴ *TMS*, pp. 20-22.

⁴⁵ J. Ralph Lindgren, *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff (1973).

⁴⁶ T.D. Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, London: George Allen and Unwin (1971)

⁴⁷ Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press (1981). (This is hereafter abbreviated as *Science of a Legislator*.)

virtue'.⁴⁸ Very young children try to satisfy their passions as they arise in turn from numerous internal and external stimuli. Pleasure is sought and pain avoided, and the young child begins to remember the associations between similar circumstances and the sensations accompanying them.⁴⁹

In becoming effectively disciplined a number of changes occur to what is originally merely the reflex behaviour of the infant. In developing the notion of agency Smith reminds us that infants are brought up in social groups and families. As such, infants fall under the discipline of others, who bring them to recognize that their present sensations are the result of their previous actions. This is not achieved at once, but children learn over time that they are the indirect cause of their own present sensations of both pleasure and pain. With the growing recognition that pain is to be avoided, children become aware that some of the pain they suffer is as a result of causing others' discomfort.

Lindgren reports of Smith that a second stage is reached when, by recognizing that it has caused another person to suffer pain, the child begins to take notice of what it imagines to be the other persons' resentments. The child takes such resentments into account when determining their own future actions.⁵⁰ It is at this crucial point, Lindgren suggests, that people begin to take notice of the sentiments of real or imagined spectators of their actions. This introduces the possibility of impartiality between themselves and others. The notion of spectatorship is especially dealt with in the final section of this chapter, where we look at Smith's gradation of moral spectators.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lindgren, *Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 41. The further point that Lindgren notes is that Smith emphasizes the role of pain in morally educating the young, rather than on the role of pleasure.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 42. See also pp. 43-48 for an account of this second stage, that of emulation.

⁵¹ Briefly, I claim that Smith has three grades of spectator- a *de facto* spectator, an impartial spectator, and an ideal spectator. These embody different moral standards.

The third stage that Lindgren finds in Smith is built upon the child's regard for the sentiments of others. This concern for the regard of others affects the child's behaviour, so that they impose an amount of discipline on themselves to govern their passions. Lindgren quotes Smith saying that it is at this point that individuals decide 'where and how far every other principle of our nature either ought to be indulged or restrained'.⁵²

The shift from the life of emulation to the life of virtue may be incomplete in certain individuals for any period of time. At this point, young adults or older children are prone to vanity. Smith writes of this that 'He is guilty of vanity who desires praise for what, indeed, very well deserves it, but what he perfectly knows does not belong to him.'⁵³

Smith gives not only an account of *how* people are able to sympathize with the feelings of others, but also *why* they should wish to be able to do so.⁵⁴ Smith's thesis is not so distant from our moral sense writers: people are irreducibly social creatures, and desire the approval and good will of others. Smith concedes that societies or communities can subsist if their members are bound by ties of justice and utility, but groups of people cannot survive for long if their members are ready to injure and hurt one another.⁵⁵ The most comfortable form of society is one in which beneficence has a ruling place. Describing this ideal cohesive force, Smith writes:

IT is thus that man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable

⁵² Smith, quoted in Lindgren, *Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, p. 42. Compare pp. 48-53, where Lindgren gives his account of the third stage of moral development, that of virtue proper.

⁵³ Smith, quoted in Lindgren, *Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, p. 103 ff.

⁵⁵ *TMS*, p. 86.

bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices.⁵⁶

Thus, although Smith gives a developmental account of human nature, at least in the sense that individuals go through a pattern of psychological and moral change and refinement, he shares with the earlier moral sense tradition a basically optimistic view of human potential. People are irreducibly social, and at their best they foster the concerns of others as much as their own. Central to this ability to care for others is a sensitivity to their concerns, and a preference to see such concerns fostered. It is with the notion of propriety that Smith advances these aspects of his moral theory. Propriety is the concern we have not only to appear virtuous, but actually to be virtuous.

8:4 *Propriety*

Smith discusses what it is for people to be sensitive to the moral standards and expectations of their community. The concern for how we appear in the estimation of others, and in the estimation of the impartial spectator is central in understanding the motivating forces of morality. Smith gives the term ‘propriety’ to the notion that we not only care to appear worthy, but that we care to be worthy. This latter and stronger expectation particularly involves the role of the impartial spectator. This I discuss later. The present section considers propriety more generally.

Smith writes that emulation and seeking the approval of others result from our social dealings. While we seek the approval of others, we must be concerned about how we appear in their eyes. Smith concedes the reasonableness of every person being intimately concerned with their own care, ‘and as he is fitter to take care of himself than any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so’.⁵⁷ But even though there is a sense in which people are more interested in themselves, they soon recognize that their

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 82.

estimation in the eyes of others is significant. Young children soon become aware that if they transgress the moral bounds of others, they suffer in other people's estimation, and in turn, their self-estimation.⁵⁸ Smith's explanation of our shared moral values is based upon the idea that we judge and are judged by others.

To expand a little, Smith's point is that we are not merely self-interested. The regard of others is a necessary part of how we see ourselves, and if that regard is unkind, it has an impact on how well we live. In discussing that the motivation to be just is independent of its utility, Smith writes:

We must, here [in causing the misfortune of others], as in all other cases, view ourselves not so much according to that light in which we may naturally appear to ourselves, as according to that in which we naturally appear to others.⁵⁹

But this ability to imagine ourselves from the point of view of someone else is insufficient by itself to provide the moral backbone that Smith requires for his theory. For this he turns to the notion of propriety; or that view which says that we are concerned not only to see ourselves as others see us, but that we are concerned to be moral whether or not we are observed.⁶⁰

This is the crux of Smith's moral account. While it does not involve him arguing for a distinct natural *moral* power or faculty, it makes the strong claim that almost everyone has a cultivated sensibility towards virtue and vice. Even though people are endowed with an original desire to please their fellows, and an original aversion to offend them, these propensions alone would not have rendered a person fit for society.⁶¹

Nature, accordingly, has endowed him, not only with a desire of being approved of, but with a desire of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men. The first desire could only

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ *loc. cit.*. See also *TMS*, p. 114 ff. Smith, as is well known, is critical of Hume's emphasis on the notion of utility in assessing the worth of moral behaviour.

⁶⁰ Compare Haakonssen on Hume's and Smith's different ideas of propriety and sympathy in *The Science of a Legislator*, pp. 45-61.

⁶¹ *TMS*, pp. 116-117.

have made him wish to appear to be fit for society. The second was necessary in order to render him anxious to be really fit.⁶²

The approving what is morally worthy is central to what is meant by 'propriety'. It is, according to Haakonssen, the appropriateness of the match between a person's motivations and actions and the situation of which they are a part.⁶³

The endorsement of such approval in actions and feelings is a component of propriety, and not merely an additional feature. Smith describes the balance that must be struck between recognizing that good and virtuous intentions do not necessarily bring about the results that we intend, and the recognition that merely virtuous intentions are morally insufficient. Smith's point is that virtue is not secured merely through good wishes and intentions, especially if we do not tend to our actions with persistence and alacrity. Smith writes:

The man who has performed no single action of importance, but whose whole conversation and deportment express the justest, the noblest, and the most generous sentiments, can be entitled to demand no very high reward, even though his inutility should be owing to nothing but the want of an opportunity to serve.⁶⁴

Smith is willing to give, if not the content of propriety, because of the difficulty of formulating accurate general rules,⁶⁵ then a *test* as to what can and should count as the content of propriety. In one of the early chapters of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* he remarks that sentiments or affections of the heart motivate action, and on these sentiments the virtue or vice of that action must ultimately depend. These sentiments can be looked at from two aspects. One aspect looks at the suitability of affections to their cause, and the other looks to the suitability of affections to their ends, or the effects they bring about. The first is a measure of propriety or impropriety, and the second is a measure of merit or demerit. Smith's criticism is that philosophers of late have been

⁶² *ibid.*, p.117.

⁶³ Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *TMS*, p. 106.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 156-161 and 174-177.

neglectful of the first category, in which consists 'the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness of the consequent action'.⁶⁶ In common life, Smith writes, people take both categories into consideration. Indicative of the communal nature of our moral world and moral standards, Smith writes:

When we judge in this manner of any affection, as proportioned or disproportioned to the cause which excites it, it is scarce possible that we should make use of any other rule or canon but the correspondent affection in ourselves. If, upon bringing the case home to our own breast, we find that the sentiments which it gives occasion to, coincide and tally with our own, we necessarily approve of them as proportioned and suitable to their objects; if otherwise, we necessarily disapprove of them, as extravagant and out of proportion.⁶⁷

Thus Smith consistently makes a place in his moral theory for the moral assessment we encounter at the hands of others. He also discusses the notion of conscience, or the moral assessment we bring to bear on ourselves.

8:5 Conscience

Smith postulates that we measure the moral worth of other people's actions and characters before we realize that we receive the same type of scrutiny.⁶⁸ Accordingly, much of his attention is directed to explaining the standards by which we judge the behaviour of others. As a necessary adjunct to this, in part III of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith deals with the foundation of our judgements concerning the measurement of our own sentiments and conduct. Unsurprisingly, we find Smith claiming that, 'The principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, seems to be altogether the same with that by which we exercise the like judgements concerning the conduct of other people.'⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 18. Haakonssen discusses this in *The Science of a Legislator*, p. 54 ff.

⁶⁷ *TMS*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 109.

Smith rarely speaks of conscience, though he is comfortable to speak of the consciousness of our own propriety and merit. He recognizes that in the first-person case there are conflicting pressures, one towards an accurate discernment of our own worth, and the other to a special disability in judging ourselves.

In one sense, Smith recognizes that everyone is in a privileged epistemological position, knowing better than anyone else their own motives and intentions. In our assessment of other people we are often forced to conjecture about their motives and intentions. Our assessment of the propriety of their motives is coloured by the utility or inutility that their 'actions' bring about.⁷⁰ Smith not only distinguishes between the first-person and the third-person case, but he also draws moral consequences pertinent to this distinction. His terms in the present case are, respectively, 'the man within' and 'the man without'. He writes:

If the man without should applaud us, either for actions which we have not performed, or for motives which had no influence upon us; the man within can immediately humble that pride and elevation of mind which such groundless acclamations might otherwise occasion, by telling us, that as we know that we do not deserve them, we render ourselves despicable by accepting them. If, on the contrary, the man without should reproach us, either for actions which we never performed, or for motives which had no influence upon those which we may have performed; the man within may immediately correct this false judgement, and assure us, that we are by no means the proper objects of that censure which has so unjustly been bestowed upon us.⁷¹

Smith's concession that we are particularly well placed in our own case is balanced by his recognition that our very point of view involves the risk of perspectival distortion when we measure both ourselves and others. We overestimate the worth of ourselves, and underestimate the worth or goodness of others. Our preference for ourselves means that, for Smith, we sometimes act with narrow self-interest uppermost. Nevertheless, he

⁷⁰ Smith discusses the gap between intentions and the the outcomes of actions that are actually brought about. See *TMS*, pp. 97-108.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 131.

does not suggest that all of our actions are merely self-interested: other categories of motive include duty and virtue.⁷²

Like the moral sense writers, Smith uses the language of perspective to describe and warn against the distortions of narrow self-interest. Smith draws an analogy between looking at physical objects and looking at determinate moral situations. Smith begins with physical objects, describing a scene viewed from several vantage points. To our vision objects appear large or small according to their distance relative to ourselves, and not their real dimensions. We remedy these visual distortions by imagining the scene we view from a number of vantage points. Hence we arrive at some more secure judgement of the real size of objects. 'Habit and experience' allow us to make these corrections almost without our being aware of the correction.⁷³

In the same way selfish and original passions concerning our own self-interest cannot be measured accurately against the real needs of others, so we judge our own interests as more worthy than those of other people. Smith writes of the correcting procedure in this moral case:

Before we can make any proper comparison of those opposite interests, we must change our position. We must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us.⁷⁴

Habit and experience work here too, and we are often insensible that we make these corrections. The recognition of the need for correcting personal bias has been one of the hallmarks of the moral sense writers since Shaftesbury.

Further, like the earlier moral sense writers, especially Shaftesbury and Butler, Smith attributes a role of authority to the corrective principle of conscience. He compares

⁷² Smith gives as motives for action: duty, *TMS*, pp. 161-162; religious observance, p. 171; benevolence, p. 172; and virtues, p. 174 ff.

⁷³ *TMS*, p. 135.

⁷⁴ *loc. cit.*

our hearing of a distant disaster with experiencing a small amount of pain ourselves. Our own pain is of much greater moment to us, even though it is incomparably less significant. Yet, for Smith, we should imagine and feel compassion for the pain of others. As we are so prone to selfishness, Smith would have us foster an impartial viewpoint towards ourselves:

It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. It is he who, whenever we are about to act so far as to affect the happiness of others, calls to us, with a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions, that we are but one of the multitude. ... It is from him only that we learn the real littleness of ourselves, and of whatever relates to ourselves, and the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of this impartial spectator.⁷⁵

In this manner we become more sensitive to the needs of others, and aware that our own behaviour detracts from their well-being if we are not considerate.

8:6 *The moral spectator*

Smith's gradation of moral spectators

Smith shares with the moral sense tradition a need to distinguish between those people with a low moral sensibility, and those who are virtuous. Further, like the earlier writers, Smith partly explains what he means by virtue in terms of the impartial spectator.⁷⁶ While earlier discussion has provided much evidence that the whole moral sense tradition appeals to impartiality, at least to diminish the distorting effects of narrow self-interest, Smith gives a heavier emphasis throughout his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to the role of the impartial spectator. Such a spectator judges at the highest moral standard available. But occasionally Smith attends to the role of other forms of moral spectator. In this

⁷⁵ *TMS*, p. 137.

⁷⁶ Often Smith implies that agency is closely linked to spectatorship, so that high qualities of discernment and sensibility are characteristically to be found in those who have a care to be virtuous, whether or not that is accurately discerned by the multitude. See, for example, *TMS*, pp. 309-313, where Smith disagrees with Mandeville on the nature of vanity, and the relationship between vanity and honour.

section I suggest that Smith is unusual in providing, not a twofold, but a threefold distinction between grades of moral spectator.

The material is scattered throughout the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but a case can be made for attributing to Smith a threefold gradation of moral spectator: as he is, as he could be, and as he should be.⁷⁷ This forms an orderly progression in the moral qualities of such spectators, whether real or imagined.⁷⁸ The orderliness of the progression is something that I impute to Smith. His discussion of the various grades of moral spectator is not confined to single sections of his work, and he contrasts only two grades of moral spectator at any one time. Apart from these considerations, Smith uses a variety of terms that do not involve differences of gradation. Whether a spectator is 'real' or 'imaginary' is morally indifferent. Other terms that Smith uses include the 'great demi-God within the breast', the 'indifferent' spectator and the 'flawed impartial spectator'. However, it is not always clear to what moral gradation such spectators can be assigned.

The lowest level of moral spectator is the man within the breast as he actually is.⁷⁹ Smith's criticism is that such a figure is very often biased in terms of narrow self-interest. Such an observer has the limited merit of being the casual observer at hand without special knowledge or ties with the people involved; or he is the self-interested person involved more closely in the situation. In the virtuous and honourable man, by contrast, there is a steady conception of and congruity between our real self-interests and our perceived interests. But in the bulk of mankind fallibility and a lack of self command prosper, and in such a state we assess moral situations, our own prospective actions, and

⁷⁷ The phrase is Knud Haakonssen's.

⁷⁸ It is Smith's point that the same purpose is served in moderating and correcting our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, whether such spectators are known to be a part of the moral situation, or whether we merely imagine their presence and assessment, and hence moderate our own assessments in the light of this additional information. See, for example, *TMS*, p. 292 for Smith's indifference to whether we appeal to real or imagined spectators with respect to the same moral standard.

⁷⁹ Such a spectator is generally compatible with what I have described in ch. 4 as Hutcheson's *de facto* observer.

the approbation due to others with only mediocre discernment.⁸⁰ Specifically, Smith alludes to such a partial observer when he writes 'Men of no more than ordinary discernment never rate any person higher than he appears to rate himself'.⁸¹

Recognizing the special fallibility we have in assessing our own moral behaviour, Smith describes at some length the nature of self-deceit. He begins with the idea that there are two different types of occasions when we consider our own behaviour, either in prospect or in retrospect. 'Our views are apt to be very partial in both cases; but they are apt to be most partial when it is of most importance that they should be otherwise'.⁸² It is the vehemence of passions and violent emotions that are blamed for much of this partiality. This is in common with the moral sense writers: it is Smith's particular insight that we are most partial when it is most crucial that we should not be.

As well as describing the *de facto* spectator, Smith discusses the role and qualities of the impartial spectator. This is the man within the breast as he could be. Even though people are prone to self-love, they are not left without a remedy. Our very sociability involves us in the moral assessment of others, and their estimation of us. Smith writes:

Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly leads us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided. Some of their actions shock all our natural sentiments. We hear every body about us express the like detestation against them. This still further confirms, and even exasperates our natural sense of their deformity. It satisfies us that we view them in the proper light when we see other people view them in the same light.⁸³

It is upon such specific observations of moral situations which recur that the general rules of morality are formed. Such general rules embody the *content* of our normative moral assessments. Experience shows us that when impartiality has prevailed in our

⁸⁰ *TMS*, pp. 162-163.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 260.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 159.

dealings with other people and our assessments of such dealings, moral approbation is due.

The impartial spectator takes reasonable steps to be fully informed about the situation she so judges, and she is unbiased, either in the sense that she is not personally involved in the situation at hand, or by not bringing an inordinate amount of benevolence to bear.⁸⁴

Smith cites many examples of the impartial spectator at work. One memorable one is of Brutus condemning two of his sons to death for traitorous acts against Rome.⁸⁵ Brutus is impartial in the sense of putting aside his fatherly feelings, and judging his sons solely on the merit of their treachery.

Like the earlier writers, Smith gives a normative role to the impartial spectator. Cautioning that the rules of morality can only be given a general formulation, Smith envisages that any person can supplement those rules by appealing to the man within the breast. This correcting perspective allows general moral rules to be inflected in the light of the pertinent aspects of moral situations. Smith writes:

[Questions of propriety] must be left altogether to the decision of the man within the breast, the supposed impartial spectator, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. If we place ourselves completely in his situation, if we really view ourselves with his eyes, and as he views us, and listen with diligent and reverential attention to what he suggests to us, his voice will never deceive us. We shall stand in need of no casuistic rules to direct our conduct. These it is often impossible to accommodate to all the different shades and gradations of circumstance, character and situation, to differences and distinctions which, though not imperceptible, are, by their nicety and delicacy, often altogether undefinable.⁸⁶

Smith is in no doubt that real people can attain the moral standard of the impartial spectator. While he gives such a spectator a normative role, he does not think that this

⁸⁴ This is in contrast to the point made by Whichcote and Hutcheson, to the effect that a good moral observer measures situations in terms of the positive good or consideration allowed to other people. Such view takes benevolence, rather than moral neutrality or malevolence, to be natural. See, for example, chs. 2 and 3 above.

⁸⁵ *TMS*, p. 192.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 226-227.

sets an unattainable moral standard. Nevertheless, I proposed earlier that Smith has a threefold gradation of moral spectator, and it is on his ambivalence about what is to count as a high moral standard that such a point will rest.

I suggest, then, that at least on occasions, Smith makes a distinction between an impartial moral spectator and what we may call an ideal, impartial spectator. This ideal moral spectator is the man within the breast as he should be. Smith does not use the term 'ideal spectator', yet in a number of places he alludes to a difference between two standards of moral perfection. Acknowledging that we are imperfect creatures⁸⁷, Smith concedes that we fall short of the perfect propriety that the ideal impartial spectator would expect, even though we are commonly able to, or are expected to, attain an adequate moral standard.⁸⁸ The divergence between an ideal standard and a commonly attained standard is also to be found in Smith's discussion of the nature of virtue.⁸⁹ The claim is that Smith differentiates between people who direct their moral behaviour according to one rather than the other of the standards. If we measure our behaviour by the standard of exact propriety, the ideal standard, then we are imperfect despite our best endeavours. Such a person:

... remembers, with concern and humiliation, how often, from want of attention, from want of judgement, from want of temper, he has, both in words and actions, both in conduct and conversation, violated the exact rules of perfect propriety; and has so far departed from that model, according to which he wished to fashion his own character and conduct.⁹⁰

However, if we consider ourselves by the moral standard which is commonly attained, that of ordinary excellence, then we are sometimes correct in seeing that we attain this measure. At other times we rarely have the insight to see that we fail to achieve even this middling standard. In aiming only at this common standard Smith suggests that we are less than morally perfect. Smith's description here is of persons who are frequently blind

⁸⁷ See, for example, Smith, *TMS*, p. 25.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26. This adequate moral standard is that which the impartial spectator holds us to.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 247.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

to their own limitations and sometimes led astray by a less than perfect standard.⁹¹ Such persons confuses ostentation and success for the goodness of virtue, and so are satisfied with the shadow of virtue and not its substance. Though such middling people are less than ideal spectators, Smith writes that the virtuous person has nothing to fear from their inaccurate estimations:

The man who neither ascribes to himself, nor wishes that other people should ascribe to him, any other merit besides that which really belongs to him, fears no humiliation, dreads no detection; but rests contented and secure upon the genuine truth and solidity of his own character. His admirers may neither be very numerous nor very loud in their applauses; but the wisest man who sees him the nearest and who knows him the best, admires him the most.⁹²

In such a wise man we have the personification of the ideal moral standard, and it is this which justifies our attributing to Smith the notion of what may be called the ideal moral spectator.

Campbell and Haakonssen on Smith's impartial spectator

Having set out reasons for attributing to Smith a gradation of moral spectators, we now look at the discrepancy between T.D. Campbell and Haakonssen's interpretation of Smith's impartial or ideal spectator. This is to show that there is no unambiguous understanding of the role or qualities attributable to such a spectator.

Campbell and Haakonssen can agree that the ideal spectator is supposed to present a 'humanly possible figure', not an omniscient but unfeeling, disembodied figure that we would never aspire to be.⁹³ Despite this amount of agreement, Campbell and

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 253.

⁹³ Compare Campbell's disagreement with Roderick Firth's notion of the qualities of an ideal observer. Campbell reports this in his *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, pp. 128-134. (The principle reference is to Firth, 'Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 12 (1952), pp. 317-345.) Campbell's reply is in *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, pp. 134-139. As Campbell describes the disagreement, Firth envisages an ideal observer with non-moral characteristics to an extreme degree. By contrast, the humanly-possible figure of the impartial spectator that I have described as belonging to the moral sense tradition is much closer to Campbell's notion. This ideal

Haakonssen diverge on how they see Smith's spectator as 'ideal'. This is even with seeming agreement that Smith's impartial spectator embodies in some way an 'ongoing social process'.⁹⁴ Campbell says that Smith's impartial spectator:

... does embody a norm but it is a norm only in the sense of an average standard which emerges from the interplay of the reactions of ordinary spectators and agents; he personifies the results of a process of interaction whereby an agreed set of moral principles are evolved.⁹⁵

Campbell makes some gestures towards saying that Smith has a gradation of moral spectators. He cites Smith's use of the terms 'indifferent' and 'impartial' with respect to spectators, going on to liken the indifferent moral spectator to a person not involved in the situation under perusal. This lack of involvement, for Campbell, appears to refer to a lack of shared or conflicting interests. Indifference and impartiality can be equivalent, as Smith at one point identifies them with each other. Campbell himself acknowledges this, quoting from Smith on this matter. Smith writes at one point that 'The spectator is "indifferent" relative to the sufferings of a person in pain because he does not feel this pain himself; this also makes him "impartial" even when there is only one person principally concerned.'⁹⁶ Campbell goes on to speak of ideal spectators, as distinct from average spectators: their 'ideal' qualities are that they are well informed and impartial. Continuing this idea, Campbell writes:

My suggestion is that this latter concept of the ideal impartial spectator represents both the inner tribunal of conscience and the point of view towards which moral argument leads in its attempt to achieve harmony of sentiments, and as such it is to be identified with the point of view to which any ordinary person may be led by a process of argument, in contrast to the point of view which a casual observer naturally adopts.⁹⁷

spectator is so in the sense of being a legitimate aspiration; not that we can actually reach this (ideal and impartial) standard. (In the sense that Smith describes people as aspiring to this standard, then the impartial spectator is closer to Haakonssen's description of this figure, rather than Campbell's. This is to be discussed later in the chapter.)

⁹⁴ A. Small, quoted in Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, p. 137.

⁹⁵ Campbell, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 162.

Campbell thus equates an ideal moral standard with that which is made available by ordinary but unbiased spectators.

Haakonssen, I think, would disagree, finding evidence instead of a different form of ideal standard. He reminds us of the process involved in assessing ourselves with respect to a standard, and not merely the empirical instantiations that we see around us. 'We are started off by asking whether others would think our behaviour proper, but this leads us to ask whether it is in fact proper'.⁹⁸ According to Haakonssen, this detachment of morality, in principle, from the social circumstances which gave rise to it allows us to envisage and be motivated by absolute propriety. Haakonssen continues:

Just as a displacement can take place in the moral principle applied, so it will be accompanied by a displacement in moral ideals. We are started off in moral life trying to apply other men's ideas of propriety and aiming at their approval and consequent praise; but we soon end up trying to apply propriety as such, that is, the impartial spectator's idea of propriety, and aiming at the approval and praise of the impartial spectator, aiming at absolute approval and praiseworthiness.⁹⁹

This displacement is not towards a static ideal of moral behaviour, but it is a displacement from what is present and actually instantiated to what is an improvement upon the existing standard. In this way, Smith leaves open the possibility of a changing moral standard in different times and places. Whereas Campbell interprets the fluidity of moral standards as moral relativism, Haakonssen concentrates upon the *method* by which ideal standards are set, and finds a stability here which circumvents relativism.

Haakonssen writes:

[The] very seeking of social approval, of the approval of the actual spectators, has a strong tendency to become a search for another and higher judgement and approval which is *common to agent and spectator*. This search for a third standpoint of impartiality may never, or very rarely, be completely successful, but the really important point ... is that it is the *search* itself which makes social life possible; it is the *search* for a common standpoint that is common, not necessarily the standpoint.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator*, p. 56. By 'propriety', Haakonssen means the aptness of a given action and motive to its situation.

⁹⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 58.

Smith is as cautious as Hume in his appeal to empiricism and his disquiet about teleological explanations. According to Haakonssen, Smith's search for moral ideals involves neither a relativism with respect to the content of these standards,¹⁰¹ nor the moral sense writers' endorsement of teleology. Smith's notion of unintended consequences is part of his means of explaining the growth of morality. But Smith's explanation of the growth of moral rules and the improvement of moral standards does not depend on participants having a conscious understanding of what are the cumulative results of moral standards and expectations.

Like Hume, one of Smith's major purposes is to explain the form of moral knowledge without needing recourse to undemonstrable postulates concerning *final* causes.¹⁰² Haakonssen writes that Smith suggests that the most we can be certain about are *efficient* causes. We are limited to knowing that the moving wheels of a watch cause it to tell the time; we cannot know whether the watch has any desire to show the time.¹⁰³ Similarly in explaining the cohesiveness and durability of our social and moral life. Smith identifies efficient causes that have to do, not with reason, but with instincts and the unintended consequences of tending to such basic desires as those involved in self-propagation and the preservation of the species. In looking after our personal affairs the fortuitous consequence is that the good of other people is also secured. And while we might not aim directly at securing other people's happiness, it is often a consequence of what we do aspire to do and manage to bring about.¹⁰⁴ At best, people try to behave in a virtuous fashion. Good directly accrues to themselves and their community. Even if

¹⁰¹ Compare Lindgren's criticism of Campbell on the amount of moral relativism that Smith accepts. Lindgren thinks that Campbell concentrates too much on surface variation, seeing more divergence than Smith actually acknowledges. Lindgren, *Social Philosophy of Adam Smith*, pp. 36-38.

¹⁰² Compare Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator*, pp. 77-82.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰⁴ As Smith acknowledges, Mandeville saw this cohesiveness, but he dwelt upon it in a derogatory manner. Mandeville was most impressed by the indirect relationship between acting for selfish interests, and yet public goods still ensuing. Mandeville's insight is that explanations of people's behaviour has to make a place for the notion of unintended consequences, and the development of ways of behaving over time. Smith's criticism is that people are not as narrowly self-interested as Mandeville considers. See, for example, *TMS*, p. 308 ff.

people behave in a slightly less considerate manner, they may often still bring about some good to other people. Smith's reluctance to appeal to teleological explanations is balanced by his confidence in explanations in terms of efficient causes. For Smith, we may not be able to demonstrate the cohesiveness and moral order of the universe, but there is nevertheless a social order of great intricacy and force that is worthy of study and respect. God may not have given us a static moral sense, but we have a cluster of moral sentiments that are fashioned by social forces and enduring human needs.

8:7 Conclusion

For Smith, almost all people have a repertoire of basic instincts and desires, and these instincts and desires are the material upon which their natural moral sentiments are moulded. But people's 'natural' sentiments are almost immediately after birth intertwined with social forces and expectations. Stable communities need to provide security and a basic amount of goods to their members; and the more flourishing communities provide an environment in which well-being can prosper. Not all societies approach this level of happiness, and yet neither is happiness to be secured by reason and intentional social design, whether this design be human or divine.

The maintenance of moral standards is an integral part of the happiness of individuals and communities. There may be surface variations in the moral ideals among different communities in different historical settings. Nevertheless, for Smith, moral standards are constantly tied to the ideal, impartial spectator. Though we do not achieve this ideal, our conception of the ideal and our striving for it are a constant part of what it is to be properly human. Smith has given an explanatory tool by which we can understand the formative pressures behind existing moral standards, wherever they are instantiated. By challenging the moral sense theory of Hutcheson, Smith did away with the notion of a static moral sense. However, his own theory of moral sentiments is heavily indebted to Hutcheson. This theory, with its roles for sentiment, propriety and

the standards of the ideal spectator is recognizably similar to, and yet significantly different from the earlier theories of moral sense.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

This thesis can be understood in two ways. On one understanding, it traces the loose line of historical development of the moral sense theory from its origin with the Cambridge Platonists, its refinement with Lord Shaftesbury, to the height of its epistemological detail with Francis Hutcheson and its demise at the hands of Hume and Adam Smith. Yet, I have argued that these later writers made use of specific aspects of the moral sense theory, and that Smith formulated a new theory of moral sentiment.

The second way the thesis can be understood is as a close consideration of the basic building blocks of the moral sense account, ontological, epistemological and psychological. The moral sense theory of the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century, I have argued, makes a core of claims that have to be disentangled from one another and assessed on their merits. For, we found, in Smith's rejection of a moral sense theory, he acknowledges the enduring legacy of the moral sense writers.

While the historical line of transmission structures the thesis, I have in no manner given an historically exhaustive account. So, in concluding, I want to consider again the major themes, as much to assess as to restate them. A point of clarification: by the earlier moral sense writers I include specific members of the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Turnbull, Hartley and Kames. Hume and Smith, I think, belong to categories of their own. Hume retains the veneer of a moral sense theory, while, even unwittingly, providing arguments for its downfall. Smith discerns two types of moral sense theory. He rejects the moral *sense* theory, in favour of a theory of moral *sentiment*.

The whole moral sense tradition, Smith included, shared a vehement antipathy to the claims of sceptics and egoists that moral distinctions and standards are a personal matter. Shaftesbury states the counter-position: to make such claims is to place oneself beyond reasonable disagreement. Sceptics cannot consistently maintain such extreme views. If

offended, they seek revenge or justice, and in doing so they show the shallowness of their adherence to a consistently sceptical or egoist position. Hobbes and Mandeville were taken to hold such distasteful views.

Another major body of opposition, especially for the earlier moral sense writers, were the Calvinists. They insisted that moral standards flow from God, and that because of original sin, the overwhelming majority of mankind are unable to attain virtue and the promise of redemption.

Cousins to the early moral sense writers were the rationalists, such as Samuel Clarke. They shared with the moral sense writers a belief in man's capacity to discern between good and evil, and his capacity for moral goodness. The difference between this group and the moral sense writers is that, for the rationalists, reason, rather than sense, sentiment, or sensibility is taken to have a major role in discerning moral good and evil, and motivating people towards moral good.

The moral sense tradition, while it was not perfectly homogeneous, shared a confident belief that man is basically good and able to be virtuous. The early moral sense writers founded this belief on the notion of providential teleology. God in his goodness has designed a perfect and perfectly cohesive universe. All parts work for the good of themselves, and for the good of the whole. Mankind is in a special position, for we are conscious of God's goodness, and with our moral goodness, we display as much as humanly possible God's reflected beauty.

Central to the discernment of moral good and evil, and motivating us towards moral good, is the faculty of the moral sense. For the early moral sense writers, this is a separate faculty with a distinct, if diverse range of tasks. Like the external senses such as sight and taste, it is universal, its activity is non-willed and its apprehensions or judgements are most often correct. All of these things can be known, according to the early tradition, by comparing the moral sense with these other senses. God would not have given us faulty faculties, for how else could we survive and prosper?

This confidence in the correctness of the deliverances of the moral sense can be understood in two ways. Shaftesbury is the only one to make the explicit distinction: it is between what may be called the cognitive correctness and the normative correctness of the moral sense. Behaving in a virtuous or morally best manner assumes that we understand the present situation of which we are a part. Cognitive correctness is a matter of judging that the scene we see is, for example, of a criminal being justly punished rather than a person being wantonly hurt. Normative correctness is closer, I claimed, to Butler's notion of the authority of the moral sense. In the present example, recognizing that just punishment is being done, the claim is that we *should* feel outrage at their crime and justice in their punishment. To feel pity or compassion for their punishment is a matter of normative incorrectness.

Common to the moral sense writers is the recognition that people differ a great deal in what they see as virtuous and vicious, right and wrong. This diversity was able to be explained, such writers thought, by likening it to the occasional errors of the other senses. A person with jaundice cannot see colours accurately, and a person with a fever has an undiscerning palate. Similarly, they claim, self-interest obstructs the workings of our moral sense, and causes the seeming variety in our assessments of virtue and vice. The sheer number of counter-instances is not sufficient, in their view, to bring into doubt the existence of this natural sense.

As well as the comparison with the external senses, some of the early moral sense writers in particular compared the moral sense to a sense of beauty. By doing so they wanted to draw attention, as they saw it, to the way in which to act virtuously was beautiful. Such writers tended to write as though a person with a sense of beauty would also be virtuous, and that by improving one sense, the other would also be improved.

Whether the moral sense writers were comparing the activity of such a sense with the external senses or the apprehension of beauty, they conceded that errors could be made. In both comparisons, their answer was to appeal to what may be called the impartial spectator. In the first case, this was a heuristic device to qualify what was meant by normal observers working in normal conditions. In the second case, the

impartial spectator was a device to qualify what was meant by a high sensibility. The moral sense writers were confident that what was virtuous could be known and agreed upon by all such morally-competent judges. So, even if reason was given a lesser place in moral sense theories, the community of agreement among impartial spectators was felt to be a stable measure by which virtue could be known.

These, then, are the major themes common to the moral sense tradition. A turning point occurred with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiment* of 1759. In this work Smith was directly critical of the moral sense theory in a way that Hume was not. He identifies two types of moral sense theory. The first type presumes a providential teleology, and attributes to mankind a natural and *sui generis* moral sense. This is the moral sense theory that we have been dealing with in all of the previous writers except Hume. (Hume's difference is that he appeals to a natural range of sentiments used in moral assessment, rather than a static and original moral sense. Despite this, Hume's terminology is very often one of a moral sense theory.) Smith especially acknowledges Hutcheson as a worthy predecessor. He was the first, in Smith's eyes, to correctly identify the roles of reason and sentiment in moral assessment. Sentiment, of course, is the more fundamental.

But Smith does not accept Hutcheson's ontological presumptions. Remaining aloof on the matter of teleology, Smith confines himself to an explanation of our social and moral life in terms of efficient causes; in the moral case in terms of the permutations of sympathy in its many psychological guises. Smith rejects the moral sense theory in favour of a theory of moral sentiments. He does not claim that there is a distinct set of *moral* sentiments, but that *all* sentiments can have a role in moral assessment. He makes the claim that moral approbation and disapprobation do not have a unique affective tone, but that appropriate sentiments in given circumstances have a role in *what* we are morally approving or disapproving.

Smith's underlying criticism, or the point to which his criticism brings us, is that the moral sense is a philosophical chimera, a non-existent entity. In their zeal to insist on man's goodness and moral capabilities, the early moral sense tradition made the mistake of identifying a *sui generis* moral faculty with a distinct range of tasks. While we may still consider such tasks and capabilities as central to the human condition, locating them in a single faculty unwittingly destroys some of their credibility. The fallacy that Smith identified is that there is no justification for, and no extra security in, claiming a distinct psychological faculty answering to a distinct set of ontological objects.

The most common objection brought against the moral sense theory in the eighteenth century was that we do not have a distinct organ of moral sense. It is possible to understand the objection in this way: as there is no organ of moral sensation, neither do we morally assess people's virtues and vices in terms of the sentiments. This view is compatible with either the rationalists or the moral sceptics. A possible rejoinder to this was available in Ralph Cudworth's *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. While this was not published till 1731, it was written in the seventeenth century, and may have been available in manuscript to Locke and Shaftesbury. Nevertheless, to my knowledge it was not brought as a direct criticism of the moral sense theory. The pertinent point that Cudworth makes is that it is not specific organs that perceive, but the person as a psychological unity.¹ This dismissal of the idea of discrete mental faculties was not contemplated by the earlier moral sense tradition. Only with Hume and Smith is there reassessment from within about the nature of the moral sense.

The early moral sense theorists did not want to weaken their position to claiming *only* a metaphorical sense of sight, giving an extended description of the moral sense and the apprehension of moral qualities. Their appeal to a sense of beauty was not a metaphorical retreat, and it was certainly not a retreat to personal affective responses to what different people conceived as beautiful. In the thought of the period, like-minded

¹ John Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1951), pp. 54-55.

people would have dependable responses to causal factors in objects which they apprehended.

Hence, the moral sense theory makes an amalgam of objective and subjective claims. I have argued that we do not need to decide between these claims: they are not genuinely conflicting in the way that many modern critics take them to be. The objective strand of claims deals with the ontological status of virtuous and beautiful objects. Belief in a providential teleology provided the groundwork from which the early moral sense writers insisted on the ontological stability of moral objects. The subjective strand of claims focussed on the act of apprehension, claiming that like-constituted and properly-constituted people assess the same moral situation in the same manner. While a 'subjective', personal response is indeed being identified, this is in no manner an idiosyncratic response. What emerges is the notion of a community of like-responding people. But it is not the notion of community that corroborates the correctness of the response: correctness is still some measure of perspicuity in noticing things that exist in some stable ontological sense.

Having come to the point that the moral sense is a philosophical chimera, what more can be said? By insisting on a natural and *sui generis* sense, the moral sense writers secured, so they thought, the separate capacities attributed to the sense as a whole.

To question the existence of the sense, they thought, was to question man's goodness. This is the strand of the moral sense theory that tends to confuse the moral sense with benevolence. From Benjamin Whichcote to Hutcheson and Lord Kames, this has been a constant feature of the early moral sense writers. Such writers were ambivalent between finding mankind capable of good or evil, and yet more likely to be good rather than evil. In part this is motivated by their utter rejection of the Calvinist view that only a few of mankind are capable of moral good. Yet the moral sense writers' optimism about the goodness of human nature misled them into often implying that the moral sense was sufficient to make people morally good. The moral sense was to this extent not a neutral ability that could be used well or ill. Rather, it was taken to cause, and explain, the moral goodness, as they saw it, of the bulk of mankind.

Another incipient confusion to do with the moral sense sees its roles as including both moral assessment and motivation. This is not problematic in itself until another level of confusion is added. The moral sense writers take it that emotions are particularly close to the moral sense. But they are unclear whether there is a strict set of moral emotions, say of moral approbation and disapprobation, or whether the moral sense in its motivating role involves a wider range of emotions in more complex ways. Another difficulty in the area is that the moral sense writers do not distinguish between necessary and sufficient motivation. Sometimes a suitable response is purely emotional; being suitably outraged on seeing injustice flourish, for example. At other times a person needs to take action for motivation to have been sufficient. The moral sense writers tend to generalize at this point, so that they sound more normative than their theory actually warrants. Let me try to characterize these confusions a little more.

The first is more in the order of a preliminary point. The early moral sense writers see the moral sense as both assessing our own and others' emotions, thoughts and actions. Further, they see the moral sense as having a role in motivating us to morally good behaviour. (This begins to slide into the notion of the moral sense as benevolence at this point.) This motivation is tailored to some conception of an appropriate response.

The confusion is whether the assessment of the moral sense in turn *motivates* either a pleasurable or emotional response, or *comprises* one of those (pleasurable or emotional) responses. By introspection, such writers claim, we notice that we react in certain stable ways to injustice, cowardice, temperance, kindness and the like. We feel moral approbation towards virtue of whatever form, whether in action or character, and we feel disapprobation towards vice. The question that the early moral sense writers do not make explicit is what role other emotions have in the moral response. To feel abhorrence at witnessing a particular crime is not without argument the same as moral disapprobation. The moral sense writers waver in their emphasis, and by not giving the necessary detail, I am left unsure of the relationship or co-extensiveness of the moral

sense, and the emotions more generally. Only with Smith and Hume is the emphasis more securely placed on a range of natural emotions, moulded by social expectations.

A further feeling of disquiet is added when we notice that the moral sense is often taken to motivate more than an emotional response. Given a person's role in a situation, the characterization of that situation is such that they should respond with an action of compassion, generosity, justice or the like. The confusion is strengthened further when we notice that the moral sense writers do not distinguish between necessary and sufficient motivation. The resulting complexity and inability to explain moral assessment and action without further layers of argument makes for a very unsatisfactory theory. This is without a reminder that the moral sense is taken to be incorrect on all those occasions on which narrow self-interest intervenes. Once this range of difficulties is taken into account, the theory has almost no plausibility in this form.

The moral sense theory may have been a flimsy construction from its inception, whether or not we accept the teleological premises on which it was based, but in bolstering and criticizing such a theory new arrangements of answers emerged concerning the roles of reason and sentiment in our moral life. In this manner, although the moral sense theory had a relatively short period of flourishing in the first half of the eighteenth century, its significance is not confined to its immediate historical period.

As Smith acknowledges, the moral sense theory makes explicit for the first time, and in some detail, the indispensable role of sentiment, or the emotions, in our moral life. Hume and Smith secure the idea that we assess and respond to moral situations with our emotions. Other people behave likewise, so that a full understanding of moral situations has to take our own and others' emotions into consideration.

Hume describes witnessing a scene of murder, and not finding the requisite abhorrence until we look in our own breast. Within the bounds of knowing that this is indeed murder, and not warranted self-defence, there is a sense in which it is right and proper to feel such abhorrence. For if we did not do so, an intellectual distaste does not

seem sufficient, and nor does it seem to describe what does appear to be the case in our personal experience. To experience emotions and to partly assess our own and other's moral behaviour in terms of those emotions are aspects of what it is to be human.

Hence, the rejection of uninflected original feelings of moral approbation and disapprobation, in favour of a repertoire of natural emotions that are moulded and educated by living with people is instructive. The moral role of this larger body of emotions has to be accommodated in any moral theory of worth.

Another aspect of the moral sense tradition worthy of recognition is its notion of the impartial spectator. Devised to answer queries about disagreements in moral assessment with the moral sense, the notion of the impartial spectator outgrew its original role of countering mistakes of selfish and narrow self-interest. It became, especially with Smith, a methodological tool both to explain empirically moral standards and moral behaviour, and to motivate people to achieve and better those standards. By cultivating the viewpoint of the impartial spectator, we have a ready guide to virtuous behaviour.

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