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# The problem of partiality in 18th century moral philosophy

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Dissertation

**THE PROBLEM OF PARTIALITY IN  
18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BRITISH MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my teachers, past and present.

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**THE PROBLEM OF PARTIALITY IN  
18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BRITISH MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The dissertation traces the development of what I call “the problem of partiality” through the work of certain key figures in the British Moralism tradition: John Locke, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Francis Hutcheson, John Gay, David Hume, Joseph Butler, and Adam Smith. On the one hand, we are committed to impartiality as a constitutive norm of moral judgment and conduct. On the other hand, we are committed to the idea that it is permissible, or even obligatory, to expend disproportionate resources promoting the good of our loved ones over the good of strangers. However, these two commitments conflict with one another. This problem challenges us to provide an account of the scope and limits of reasonable partiality that does justice to both commitments. I argue that confronting this tension is a central project of early modern ethics. I offer a rereading of the British Moralism tradition, centered on debates about partiality, and thereby shift discussion of the tradition away from concerns about meta-ethics and moral epistemology, to issues of *practical ethics*.

The topic of partiality remains central in contemporary ethics, as is evident in ongoing debates about the place of empathy in moral judgment, and the role of love in shaping our moral commitments. Though the aim of the dissertation is not to settle questions about the scope and limits of reasonable partiality, the focus here remains fixed on how the concept of partiality was problematized in our ethical thought, and how it informs our discussions in normative ethics and moral psychology. Alongside building a bridge between early modern scholarship and recent work in ethics, the dissertation casts light on two understudied figures in the British Moralism tradition – Cockburn and Gay – who contributed greatly to debates about partiality. By examining their contributions, I reconsider their place in the history of modern ethics and therefore provide a more contextualized account of philosophical thought in the period.

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## INTRODUCTION

My dissertation traces the development of what I call the *problem of partiality* through the work of certain key figures in the British Moralism tradition: John Locke, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Francis Hutcheson, John Gay, David Hume, Joseph Butler, and Adam Smith. On the one hand, we are committed to impartiality as a constitutive norm of moral judgment and conduct. On the other hand, we are committed to the idea that it is permissible, or even obligatory, to expend disproportionate resources promoting the good of our loved ones over the good of strangers. But these two commitments seem to conflict with one another.<sup>1</sup> This problem challenges us to provide an account of the scope and limits of reasonable partiality that does justice to both commitments. I argue that the problem of partiality is a central concern of modern ethics. My dissertation offers a rereading of the British Moralism tradition, focused on debates about partiality.

The topic of partiality remains central in ethics, not only with the “puzzle of partiality” (in Simon Keller’s terms) but with discussions about the place of empathy in moral judgment, the role of love in shaping our moral commitments, and the proper scope

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Keller pursues a problem he refers to as the “puzzle of partiality.” He states the puzzle as follows: “If morality is all about promoting overall enjoyment, or respecting people as autonomous creatures, or respecting everyone’s rights, then special relationships would not appear to hold any moral significance. No one comes with a great capacity for enjoyment and suffering, to be more autonomous, or to have different basic right just because she is your friend, or just because she has any other particular connection to you. So why should a person’s particular connection to you give you any reason to treat her differently from how you treat others? Why should the fact that someone happens to share some relationship with you make a difference for how you ought to treat her, or how you may permissible treat her. This is the ‘puzzle of partiality’.” *Partiality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 4. Keller is not interested in the history of this puzzle, while that is my primary concern in this dissertation.

of moral concern.<sup>2</sup> Though the aim of the dissertation is not to settle questions about the scope and limits of reasonable partiality, I am nonetheless concerned with how partiality is problematized in our ethical thought and how it informs our discussions in normative ethics and moral psychology. Alongside building a bridge between early modern philosophical scholarship and contemporary ethical theory, the dissertation casts light on two understudied figures in the British Moralism tradition – Cockburn and Gay – who contribute greatly to debates about partiality. By examining their contributions, I reconsider their place in the history of early modern ethics. Before examining this history, it is important to consider the topic of the dissertation – the problem of partiality.

### **What is the Problem of Partiality?**

What is the “problem of partiality”? The problem can be stated as follows. Most of us have a basic commitment to equality: every person, human or non-human animal, is deserving of equal moral regard. It is impermissible to disregard a person in our moral

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<sup>2</sup> Both empathy and love have recently received great attention in the philosophical literature. For more on the place of empathy in morality, see: Daniel Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Heidi Maibom (ed.), *Empathy and Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Harper Collins: 2016). For more on love and morality, see: David Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Ethics* 109 (1999): 338–74; Niko Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 135–89; Harry Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004); Kieran Setiya, “Love and the Value of a Life,” *Philosophical Review* 123 (2014): 251–80; Kyla Ebels-Duggan, “Love, Respect, and the Value of Humanity,” *Re-Evaluating the Value of Humanity*, ed. Sarah Buss and Nandi Theunissen (forthcoming); Kieran Setiya, “Other People,” *Re-Evaluating the Value of Humanity*. For work on the scope of reasonable partiality, see: Whiting, Jennifer, “Impersonal Friends,” *Monist* 74 (1991): 3–29; Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, “Friendship and Moral Danger,” *Journal of Philosophy* 97 (2000): 278–296; Diane Jeske, *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Generates Reasons* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Brian Feltman and John Cottingham (ed.), *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships, and the Wider World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

decision-making, though their interests can be permissibly overridden. Every person should, in the dictum attributed to Jeremy Bentham by J.S. Mill, count for one, nobody for more than one. Our commitment to moral equality is thought to have originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with figures like Rousseau and Kant. There are reasons to doubt the sincerity and depth of our commitment to equality – consider the history of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. – but it remains an ideal of moral thinking and the cornerstone of mainstream political philosophy.

That said, we may give more weight to our interests or those of our loved ones than to the interests of strangers, and not unreasonably so. We do not expect parents to expend the same level of effort or resources on other children as they do on their own. There are limits to reasonable preferential treatment. We question any person who claims to recognize no reasons to act for the good of strangers. If one is positioned to assist a stranger without putting oneself at risk, one has reasons to provide assistance in the manner that one is able. Still, no one is expected to spend their days attending solely to the interests of other people. We see nothing wrong with providing for one's family; with pursuing passions and hobbies that give one's life meaning; with spending Saturday night alone at the movies. Entertaining thoughts about another's fulfilling, important, or harmless, desires often give us a sense of joy on their behalf. We cherish the thought of someone spending quality time with their family or discovering a new film.

Not only do we find it *permissible* that people favor the interests of their family, friends, and loved ones over the interests of others; we think these relationships provide them with special reasons to act and to structure their desires in certain ways. To have a

friend, child, or partner, requires one to at least partially recognize the legitimacy of certain agent-relative reasons over one's conduct. We do not expect others to pay for our child's piano lessons. Insofar as I have the requisite income and my child possesses a desire and curiosity about learning to play piano, there is a strong reason for me to see that they are given the option to play. Holding constant the desire and curiosity my child has to play the piano, it does not follow that my neighbor has a reason to subsidize my child's playing unless they have agreed to do so. Once we enter into relationships, we are compelled to act in ways that we would not otherwise – to not recognize the force of these reasons would be an extraordinary error of practical reasoning.

That said, what is the limit to reasonable preferential treatment, and how do we weigh those reasons afforded us by our personal relationships with those reasons connected to matters of more general concern? There are two strategies philosophers typically use to answer these questions. One is to argue that there is an illicit connection made between our commitment to equality and the claim that the moral perspective is *impartial*. In other words: when we look at things from a moral perspective, we do so without privileging the interests or concerns of any individual or group. It is no surprise that preferential treatment comes under suspicion here. But one could also maintain a commitment to equality while rejecting the idea that the moral perspective is impartial. Perhaps morality begins from a concern for one's family or friends but does not preclude a concern for, compatriots, immigrants, etc. This strategy confronts the problem of

partiality by rejecting the assumption on which it is constructed: that morality is impartial.<sup>3</sup>

Another strategy is to argue that, from an impartial perspective, one is able to justify degrees of preferential treatment.<sup>4</sup> Were each individual to consider the interests of all in making decisions, the results would be disastrous. It is better that individuals remain primarily invested in the interests of those with whom they are most acquainted; when it comes to impacting the general welfare, we should not expect the same level of dedication. In this sense, it is possible to justify some degree of partiality on impartialist grounds – though the above case has a consequentialist flavor, it need not. One need only pinpoint reasons that authorize preferential conduct and delineate *pro tanto* justifiable conduct from unjustifiable conduct. The tension between our commitment to equality and our concern to focus on the good of our near and dear is merely apparent. Unlike the first strategy, which rejects the assumption on which the problem of partiality is based, the second resolves the problem by showing that it is less threatening than it appears.

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<sup>3</sup> The literature on this topic is vast. For some important writings that forward this general position, see: Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73.14 (1976): 453-66; Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers: 1973-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-20; Susan Wolf, “Morality and Partiality,” *Philosophical Perspectives: Ethics* 6 (1992): 243–259; Dean Cocking, Justin Oakley, “Indirect Consequentialism, Friendship, and the Problem of Alienation,” *Ethics* 106.1 (Oct. 1995): 86-111; Sarah Stroud, “Permissible Projects, Partiality, and Plural Agency,” *Partiality and Impartiality*, 131-49; Samuel Scheffler, “Morality and Reasonable Partiality,” *Partiality and Impartiality*, 98-130; Erroll Lord, “Justifying Partiality,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19.3 (2016): 569–90.

<sup>4</sup> The following only scratch the surface on this topic: Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 134–71; Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Ashford, “Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality,” *Journal of Philosophy* 97.8 (2000): 421–39; David O. Brink “Impartiality and Associative Duties,” *Utilitas* 13.2 (2001): 152-72; Francis Kamm, *Intricate Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brian McElwee, “Impartial Reasons, Moral Demands,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 14.4 (2011): 457–66.

How do we take our basic commitment to moral equality seriously while making room for reasonable levels of partiality in our decision making and conduct? There seems to be a tension here; regardless of how one chooses to resolve this tension, there is a downstream impact on one's general views about ethics. As Simon Keller notes, "the debate about reasons of partiality is a site at which higher-level claims in ethical theory are tested and brought into conflict."<sup>5</sup> While the question of how to make room for the partialist aspects of our moral thinking in ethics is significant on its own grounds, it also forces interlocutors to get clear about their views on moral rules, motivation, reasons, etc. A similar situation plays out in debates about the role of love or empathy in morality. These debates allow scholars to consider abstract issues about partiality and impartiality by looking at more concrete issues, for which we have more settled intuitions.

I am concerned in this dissertation with how the problem of partiality arose and was treated in the British Moralism tradition. At the time, love was not a salient moral issue and empathy only became a topic of philosophical concern in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> What led the British Moralists to question the limits of reasonable partiality were worries about factional conflict and conflicts in moral judgment. On one level, the fact of existing conflict drove philosophers to be concerned with how to ameliorate faction. On a moral level, philosophers like Locke sought to provide a set of constraints on action to which all could bind themselves. These philosophers saw themselves as defending theories that could be accepted by any reasonable person. Politically, they were supportive of social

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<sup>5</sup> Keller, *Partiality*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> See: Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Love's Enlightenment: Rethinking Charity in Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

orders that stressed toleration and the freedom of thought. Such an order, they argued, disarms faction and provides the conditions for moral progress. For reasons of space, I ignore this political dimension, though it is certainly a component of the history.

### **Where Should One Begin?**

A chief problem I confronted when deciding to write this dissertation was where to begin. For most interpreters, modern moral philosophy begins with Hobbes; for others, with Montaigne. For both, modern ethics begins with a response to a *challenge* – in the case of Montaigne, pyrrhonian skepticism; in the case of Hobbes, the political implications of skepticism.<sup>7</sup> Versions of Montaigne’s and Hobbes’ views crop up throughout in the modern period, in the works of Mandeville, Nicole, Bayle, and others. As the narratives traditionally go, the writings of these figures precipitated a crisis in modern ethics and gave rise to moral realism and other amicable forms of constructivism. There is truth to that narrative. Few are the object of as much ire as Hobbes or Mandeville in 18<sup>th</sup> century conversations about ethics and politics. That said, the story of modern ethics as an outgrowth of concerns about moral and political skepticism has been told, and by scholars better equipped to do so than I am. I begin my dissertation not by

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<sup>7</sup> Schneewind is good on this point. See: *Invention of Autonomy*, 37-57; 82-101. See also: Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Margaret Wiley, *The Subtle Knot: Creative Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

considering the alleged horrors of Hobbism, but with a figure responsible for much of the positive project of modern ethics: John Locke.<sup>8</sup>

There has recently been increased attention paid to Locke's ethical writings. Admittedly, it is difficult to discern what, if any, ethical theory can be gleaned from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. When discussing ethics in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke suggests the pupil only be instructed in the Holy Bible, Cicero's *De Officiis*, and Pufendorf's *De Officio Hominis et Civis*.<sup>9</sup> He also suggests Pufendorf's *De Jure naturali et Gentium*, which instructs one "in the natural rights of men, and the original and foundations of society, and the duties resulting from thence."<sup>10</sup> Locke's, early works, *Two Tracts on Government* (1660-2) and *Essays on the Law of Nature* (1663-4), are concerned with the nature, scope, and authority of moral law. The first text concerns the extent to which an individual's religious conscience

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<sup>8</sup> For recent work on Locke's ethics, see: Mark D. Mathewson, "John Locke and the Problems of Moral Knowledge," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2006): 509–22; Patricia Sheridan, "Pirates, Kings, and Reasons to Act: Moral Motivation and the Role of Sanctions in Locke's Moral Theory," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 37.1 (2007): 35-48; Sorana Corneau, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Antonia LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Andrew Israelsen, "God, Mixed Modes, and Natural Law: An Intellectualist Interpretation of Locke's Moral Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21.6 (2013): 1111-1132; Patricia Sheridan, "Locke's Latitudinarian Sympathies: An exploration of sentiment in Locke's Moral Theory," *Locke Studies* 15 (2015): 131-162; Elliot Rossiter, "Hedonism and Natural Law in Locke's Moral Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54.2 (2016): 203-225; Phillip Mitsis, "Locke on Pleasure, Law, and Moral Motivation," *Moral Motivation: A History*, ed. Iakovos Vasiliou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153-178. This is just a small collection of the recent literature on Locke's ethical theory.

<sup>9</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and of the Conduct of the Understanding*, edited by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 139.

<sup>10</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 139.

places a rightful limit on a magistrate's political authority.<sup>11</sup> The second text was penned as a series of disquisitions to be given at Christ Church, Oxford. The *Essays* are the culmination of Locke's moral views as a student of natural law – along with the usual classical references, he engages with Grotius, Culverwell, Hooker, and Sanderson.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, one might see Locke as a Neo-Scholastic natural lawyer with absolutist tendencies. However, even in these earlier writings, Locke rejects the usual grounds for natural law – tradition or intuition – and argues that its grounds are “reason and sense-perception.”<sup>13</sup> Guided by reason, our senses help us uncover the laws of nature as laid down by God. Any reasonable human has access to the truths that God means us to comprehend. Locke notes that “[A]n agile, capable mind, versatile and ready for anything, furnished with reason and knowledge, and a body besides which is quick and easy to be moved hither and thither by virtue of the soul's authority, that all this

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<sup>11</sup> Locke penned his *Two Tracts* as a response to a work by the nonconformist minister, Edward Bagshaw, titled *The Great Question Concerning Things Indifferent to Religious Authority* Bishop Robert Sanderson's *De Obligatione Conscientiae* (1660). Robert Sanderson, a theologian and casuist, was most known in his day for the publication of *Logicae Artis Compendium* (1615), which was considered a standard logic text in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The work to which Bagshaw is responding, *De Obligatione Conscientiae*, was published posthumously in 1660.

<sup>12</sup> Though I do not discuss Grotius in this dissertation he exercised enormous influence over Locke and others writing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Grotius' *De iure belli ac pacis libri tres* (1625) was a great success. His work enjoyed further success when it was translated into English by Jean Barbeyrac in 1736. Nathaniel Culverwell is a lesser known theologian associated with the Cambridge Platonists. The influence of his work, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (1652), published posthumously and originally given as a series of lectures in 1645-46, can be seen throughout Locke's *Essays*. Likewise, Richard Hooker, the English theologian most known for his five volume work, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594-97), exercised enormous influence over Locke's political thought more generally, particularly when it comes to the optimistic account of human's reasoning capacities to grasp natural law.

<sup>13</sup> John Locke, “Essays on the Laws of Nature,” *Political Essays*, ed. by Mark Goldie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 100.

equipment for action is bestowed on him by a most wise creator.”<sup>14</sup> Human beings feel “disposed and ready to contemplate God’s works and that wisdom and power of his which they display, and thereupon to assign and render praise, honour, and glory most worthy of so great and so beneficent a creator.”<sup>15</sup> Experience and reason lead us to consider the glory of God and gives us knowledge of our duties to him; we discover our duties to others and also to ourselves through a similarly natural process.

Although human beings are well-positioned to appreciate the nature of their duties, Locke recognizes that the *mere recognition* that we are obligated to act morally is insufficient to motivate action. After proving the existence of the moral law and its attendant duties in the *Essays*, Locke recognizes he has yet to broach the issue of authority, noting that “we have already proved that this law is given as morally binding, and now we must discuss the extent it is in fact morally binding.”<sup>16</sup> He notes that a “fixed and permanent rule of morals...[is] so firmly rooted in the soul of human nature...[that] human nature needs change before this law can either be altered or annulled.”<sup>17</sup> While the recognition of duty is insufficient for action, there is a connection between the basis of morals and the human frame, such that we consider it “appropriate” to fulfill those things associated with our “rational nature.”<sup>18</sup> Locke thinks that we have prudential reasons to

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<sup>14</sup> Locke, “Essays,” *Political Essays*, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Locke, “Essays,” *Political Essays*, 105-6.

<sup>16</sup> Locke, “Essays,” *Political Essays*, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, “Essays,” *Political Essays*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Locke, “Essays,” *Political Essays*, 125.

act morally. He expands his account of moral motivation in the 1670's, when he begins to see the structure of our pleasure and pains as giving us information about how to act.<sup>19</sup>

As Locke's writing turned to psychology, he developed an increasingly complex account of how people come to desire objects and to act on them. Locke's account of sanction became more sophisticated, drawing on his work in medicine and in his reading, and in some cases translating, of moralists like Nicole. Locke continued to argue that morality is written on the human frame by God and the content of our duties are revealed through reflection – to care for ourselves, to enter into society, and to praise creation. Locke became increasingly tolerant of diversity as he began to factor in how customs and institutions can differently express the values representative of our core duties.<sup>20</sup> We see this diversity most clearly in our duties to others. There is a plurality of ways to reasonably organize the family, according to Locke. The meaning of what it is to be a

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<sup>19</sup> One figure who got Locke to think more deeply about psychology was Pierre Nicole, the French Jansenist theologian, known for his joint publication of the *La logique, ou l'art de penser* (1662), with Antoine Arnauld, and for his fourteen-volume *Essais de morale* (1671-79). Locke was introduced to Nicole's work while traveling in France during the mid-1670s. Locke had intended to translate the *Essais* into English but settled on translating three essays: "On the Existence of a God," "On the Weakness of Man," and "On the Way of Preserving Peace." After producing the translations, Locke gave them as a gift to the Shaftesbury family, his patrons until the late-1670s. The translations did not see publication until 1828. See: John Locke, *John Locke as Translator: Three of the 'Essais' of Pierre Nicole in French and English*, ed. Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000). Locke also became acquainted with Pierre Gassendi's work, whose scientific and moral views can be seen to have had an impact on Locke in the 1680s.

<sup>20</sup> As Daniel Carey has pointed out, Locke uses the methods of natural history, as seen in the work of Robert Boyle, and evidence given by travel literature that undercuts the claim that human beings possess innate knowledge of moral principles. After all, moral practices differ greatly around the globe and not all of these differences can be attributed to depravity or aberrations. Locke never let go of the idea that natural law exists, and that this law is binding on all human beings *in virtue of God's commands* (which opens up the possibility that atheists fail to recognize the proper grounds of moral obligation). Still, he does not argue that the content of morality is everywhere the same. I recognize the controversial nature of my claim. In this way, my reading of Locke has been influenced by Carey's reading in *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

good child, parent, husband *will change*. Whatever the organization of the family happens to be, provided that it is beneficial, obligates those who live under its jurisdiction to act and to support and defend its continued existence.

Locke's observation about the diversity of moral views, and his claim that there is a minimal, universal set of duties based in our nature, was exciting for many of his contemporaries. Notably, these moral duties tied us back to God – while their content was connected to human nature, their authority derived from the will of God. This view at once gave God an elevated role in morality while detaching him from its content. Locke preserves a place for God in morality while not accepting straightforward voluntarism, which he associates with the enthusiasm of religious mystics and extremists.<sup>21</sup> Instead, we get the picture of a moral theory that is at once modest – not laying down rules for every area of conduct in human life and allowing for reasonable diversity – and scientific – being based in an understanding of human beings, the knowledge of which presumably becomes more sophisticated over time. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century era there was a great deal of skepticism about the progress of moral thought, and Locke's writings signal a way forward.

But there was still disagreement about the way forward. This conflict comes out especially in the differences between first-generation Lockean like Samuel Clarke,

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<sup>21</sup> I do not touch on the topic of enthusiasm in the dissertation – except briefly in Chapter 3. For more on this subject, see: Nicholas Jolley, "Reason's Dim Candle: Locke's Critique of Enthusiasm," *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter Anstey (New York: Routledge, 2003), 179-91; Victor Nuovo, "Enthusiasm," *The Bloomsbury Companion to Locke* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 141-43; Nicholas Jolley, *Toleration and Understanding in Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Peter Anstey, "Locke, the Quakers and Enthusiasm," *Intellectual History Review* (forthcoming); Kathryn Tabb, "Locke on Enthusiasm and the Association of Ideas," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* (forthcoming).

Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Damaris Masham, and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Each of these figures diverge in their moral views and depart from Locke's writings in some manner. Take Clarke, the arch-rationalist and moral realist. For him, Locke fails to provide a stable foundation for our duties; he argues that we should think of our duties as grounded in relations of fitness that hold between ourselves and certain modes of conduct. Clarke develops the side of Locke that stresses morals as a demonstrative science, while excising this claim from the empiricist context in which Locke makes this point.<sup>22</sup> Shaftesbury balks at the idea that ethics is a demonstrative science while taking issue with Locke's focus on sanctions as largely external. Still, Shaftesbury sees in Locke a model for how we can understand our relation to the authority of moral duty, viz. reflection. Human beings possess a capacity that connects us to our nature and provides us with information about how to act.

Locke provides figures writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with an attractive program to undertake, one that shaped the direction of moral philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is a further a tension that develops in the Lockean program. For Locke, the duties that we have to others are grounded in our desire for society. Sociability goes beyond entering into agreements with others and maintaining fidelity to them; it also includes partaking in certain emotions that bond us to others (benevolence, compassion, love). These bonds are

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<sup>22</sup> I have not included Clarke in the dissertation, though he exercised enormous influence over Butler. For more on Clarke as an ethical thinker, see: Henry Sidgwick's *Outline of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1886), 179-83; J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*, 310-22; Erin Kelly, "Moral Agency and Free Choice: Clarke's Unlikely Success against Hume," *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie* 84.3 (2002): 297-318; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, Vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 372-98.

strongest between family, friends, and lovers. If we take seriously that these emotions provide us with guidance about how to conduct ourselves, our time will be spent nurturing these relationships. What is problematic about this result? When Locke talks about our duties to others, he means not only our family but also our compatriots. It seems obvious that we should assign greater weight to those duties that concern our narrow circle, but doing leads to bias and faction. The result is that people privilege the good of some over others, even to the extent that they entertain malice against those outside their circle, which gives rise to violence.

How do we weigh our duties to our near and dear against those we owe to people generally? And how do we ground the idea that we are justified in focusing our energy primarily on those with whom we are most acquainted? And how can we answer these questions and provide support for our moral attitudes within the context of a Lockean moral science that treats ethics as based in a view of human beings as sensible, social, and rational? Locke does not provide us with the resources to address these issues, but those following in his wake – including those discussed in this dissertation – try their hand at these matters. While the following narrative overlooks various topics, it also gets at those fundamental questions that concern many writers in the period; questions that continue to exercise the interest of researchers in ethics and moral psychology. Issues about love, empathy, partiality, etc. are viewed as central moral concepts in a way they were not twenty to thirty years ago. It is with Locke that these discussions begin.

### The Scholarly Context

This dissertation covers some much-studied figures in the history of ethics – Locke, Hume, and Smith – others are recognizable but less discussed – Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler – and still others often overlooked – Cockburn and Gay. Were the dissertation longer, I would have covered the influence of Pufendorf, the legacy of Cambridge Platonism, alongside the writings of Damaris Masham, Mandeville, Carmichael, and Lord Kames. My dissertation stands in a tradition of writings on the British Moralists tradition, and would not exist without the work of Stephen Darwall, Knud Haakonssen, Isabel Rivers, J.B. Schneewind, Michael Gill, Terence Irwin, Colin Heydt, Aaron Garrett, and Christian Maurer.<sup>23</sup> In this section, I consider how the work of these scholars shaped the dissertation, and how it complements the scholarship on the British Moralists.

The idea of the “British Moralists” as a tradition came from L.A. Selby-Bigge’s 1897 edited publication, *British Moralists*, which featured readings by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Smith, and Jeremy Bentham in volume 1 and, in volume 2, Samuel

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought: 1640–1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1995); Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1996); J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press 1991, 2000); Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, Vol. II; Colin Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain: God, Self, and Other* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Christian Maurer has also done some superb work on the British Moralists: *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis: Key Debates from Eighteenth-Century British Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

Clarke, John Balguy, Richard Price.<sup>24</sup> Selby-Bigge grouped these thinkers on the basis of their allegiance to particular “schools” of thought – the sentimentalists in the first volume, the intellectualists in the second. He distinguishes these figures based on their moral epistemology: the “‘intellectual’ and ‘sentimental’ schools...two lanes of thought in this period...they are primarily distinguished by their adoption of reason and feeling respectively as the faculty which perceives moral distinctions, a faculty declared in each case to be peculiar and not identifiable with ordinary reason or ordinary feeling.”<sup>25</sup>

When D.D. Raphael produced a second edition of *The British Moralists* in 1969 (the edition of which most of us are familiar) he rejected Selby-Bigge’s classification, saying that “the dichotomy [between the intellectualists and sentimentalists] has only a limited application and is not necessarily more significant than two or three other possible methods of classification.”<sup>26</sup> Raphael chose instead to classify the moralists chronologically, starting with the publication of Hobbes’ *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1650), and ending with Jeremy Bentham’s *An Introduction to the Principles*

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<sup>24</sup> Important here are William Whewell’s *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (1862) and Henry Sidgwick’s *Outline of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (1886). Selby-Bigge also included John Brown, John Clarke, Ralph Cudworth, John Gay, Thomas Hobbes, Lord Kames, Locke, Mandeville, William Paley, and William Wollaston in the “Appendix” as background reading. Selby-Bigge also contrasts the moralist with the “satirist” (Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists, being Selections from Writers principally of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. with Introduction and analytical Index by L.A. Shelby-Bigge in two volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897, xi-xii). As he points out, “When the moralist says that men ought to regulate their conduct on certain principles and ought to cultivate certain motives in preference to others, the satirist tests the possibility of these principles, by asking whether in fact men do usually or ever act on them: he does not ask how far men recognize them as ideals or standards of conduct.” He continues, “the whole force of satire, as distinguished from cynicism, is the force of contrast—between profession and practice, between reality and sham; and the denunciation of the sham is by implication the recognition of the reality” (xi-xii)

<sup>25</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xxviii.

<sup>26</sup> D.D. Raphael, *The British Moralists 1650-1800*, selected and edited with comparative notes and analytical index (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), vi.

of *Morals and Legislation* (1789).<sup>27</sup> Raphael treated the chronological manner of categorization as neutral to the matter of philosophical content, which he saw as an improvement over the Selby-Bigge edition.<sup>28</sup> Raphael's decision to begin the narrative of *The British Moralists* with Hobbes's *Elements* is in line with Whewell and Sidgwick, who argue that modern ethics is largely a response to Hobbes.<sup>29</sup>

Terence Irwin follows Raphael in arguing that Selby-Bigge's application of sentimentalism and intellectualism are vague.<sup>30</sup> Irwin suggests returning to Whewell's distinction between dependent and independent morality, which denotes both metaphysical and normative elements.<sup>31</sup> A morality is independent insofar as its *content* is independent of human nature or will and its *authority* is not based in its fulfilling any of our desires.<sup>32</sup> A dependent morality is one whose content is based in human nature and whose authority is based in our desires, preferences, or will.<sup>33</sup> Irwin claims that sentimentalism maps onto dependent morality and rationalism onto independent morality.<sup>34</sup> He shifts questions about sentimentalism and rationalism in the British

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<sup>27</sup> Raphael, *The British Moralists*, v.

<sup>28</sup> Raphael, *The British Moralists*, vii.

<sup>29</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 2, 203-5. Cf. Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 12-15; John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2007), 23-102.

<sup>30</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 204.

<sup>31</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 206-7.

<sup>32</sup> Darwall refers to the normative component of independent morality as "externalism" (*The British Moralists*, 9-12). He sees normative externalism as independent from what we might refer to as moral realism. While he recognizes that realism was alive and well amongst the British moralists he doubts the same for externalism.

<sup>33</sup> For more on this point, see my discussion of Darwall below.

<sup>34</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 206. Irwin is interested in the metaphysical component of dependent morality – a view he refers to as naturalism – as the successor to Aristotelianism.

Moralist tradition away from moral epistemology to moral metaphysics and issues about normativity, where these concepts continue to play a role in contemporary ethics.

With Selby-Bigge, Raphael, and Irwin, the focus is on topics in what Colin Heydt calls the “theory of morals,” which he opposes to “practical ethics,” or questions about “what we ought to do and be.”<sup>35</sup> For Heydt, scholars give undue weight to theoretical disagreements between figures in the British Moralism tradition and overlook the equally practical and edificatory orientation of their writings. I align myself with Heydt, alongside Haakonssen and Rivers, as someone being principally concerned with practical ethics, although I make note of scholars like Gill and Maurer later in this section, whose work has greatly informed my own. Before doing so, however, it is important to say a bit more about practical ethics, its roots in the modern period, and the place of this dissertation in the scholarship on this tradition. Modern practical ethics has its roots in natural law and in also Latitudinarianism and non-conformist Protestantism.

Isabel Rivers examines the religious roots of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century ethics in her work, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*. In volume one, Rivers discusses the controversy between the latitudinarian and non-conformist traditions of Protestantism. The former plays a vital role in the British Moralism tradition, insofar as its central figures were the Cambridge Platonists. These figures rejected the Calvinist narrative of human depravity, and held fast to the idea that humans were created in the image of God, who gave us the tools of reason and conscience to access the precepts of moral conduct. Many took as central Baron Herbert of Cherbury’s claim, “*Tota fere Ethica est Notitia communis*” –

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<sup>35</sup> Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 3.

morality is a collection of natural precepts, discoverable by reason and reinforced by conscience.<sup>36</sup> As Rivers notes, to those in this tradition, “man is by nature sociable and disposed to act well; sin is an unnatural deviation from this disposition; man naturally pursues happiness, though he often miscalculates the method of attaining it; happiness is achieved through holiness, and understood properly is in fact that same thing.”<sup>37</sup>

The other way in which the latitudinarian tradition exercised influence over the British Moralists is through their chosen manner of writing: the sermon. While few of the British Moralists I treat in the dissertation published sermons, their works are edificatory in nature. Rivers stresses that central to a successful sermon is the idea that one’s interest, happiness, and natural sociability are connected with one another, such that if one wishes to fulfill any one of these ends, one must aim at the others as well. The latitudinarians and non-conformists were interested in shaping the will and affections to help us achieve virtue and salvation.<sup>38</sup> Rivers also sees these themes in the work of Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, whose “affectionate religion” plumbed the depths of human nature in order to understand how the heart and passions, as opposed to reason, could be the key to leading the truly religious life.<sup>39</sup> For Rivers, the dialectic between sociability, reason, and the passions in 17<sup>th</sup> century religious circles lays the groundwork for 18<sup>th</sup> century debates about the “ethics of sentiment” and the rationalism of Price and others.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 1, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 1, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 1, 145; 148; 150.

<sup>39</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 1, 168.

<sup>40</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 2, 1.

The topics of sentiment and self-love play a significant role in the work of Michael Gill and Christian Maurer. Gill's *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* centers on what he calls the "Human Nature Question": "[are] human beings naturally good or evil? Are we naturally drawn to virtue or vice? Is it natural for us to do the right thing, or must we resist something in our nature in order to do what is right?"<sup>41</sup> He uses this question as a starting point to examine the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume. While each of these figures answer in the affirmative to the human nature question, Gill is careful to track the nuances of each of their views. Gill begins his work with the Cambridge Platonist reaction to Calvinism, which is significant as the Platonists are often overlooked in the history of modern ethics. Darwall also considers the work of Ralph Cudworth, though only in the context of *hegemonikon* as a precursor to Butler's conscience, which prefigures Kantian autonomy.<sup>42</sup> Schneewind discusses the Cambridge Platonists in the context of perfectionism, a tradition leading to Leibniz that he sees as distinct from the British Moralists.<sup>43</sup>

Christian Maurer begins at a similar place as Gill with his book, *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis: Key Debates from Eighteenth-Century British Moral Philosophy*.<sup>44</sup> Maurer considers the extent to which human nature is good, though more than Gill, Maurer is interested in the empirical question of what motivates human action.

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<sup>41</sup> Gill, *British Moralists*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Darwall, *British Moralists*, 103-148.

<sup>43</sup> See: Schneewind, *Invention of Autonomy*, vii-viii.

<sup>44</sup> Maurer, *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis*. See: Christian Maurer, "Self-interest and Sociability," *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. James A. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 291-314; Christian Maurer, *Self-Love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis: Key Debates From Eighteenth-Century British Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

This focus on human motivation leads Maurer to investigate the phenomenon of self-love in greater detail than does Gill, which allows him to discuss Mandeville, Butler, and Campbell, alongside Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume. Maurer's focus on the concept of self-love, and the role it plays in broader ethical and political discussions during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, leads us to have a better understanding as to why certain philosophers answer the human nature question in the manner that they do. Maurer's discussions of the passions and moral self-cultivation are first-rate, and my treatment of Butler has benefited from Maurer's analysis of his psychology. I have also learned a great deal about the 18<sup>th</sup> century reception of Stoicism from Maurer's writings. This influence can be seen especially in how I frame Shaftesbury's and Smith's writings.

My dissertation is close in spirit to the projects of Maurer and Gill. Both seek to understand the British Moralists tradition by focusing on a particular issue of philosophical concern – the extent to which humans are naturally disposed to virtue and the nature of human motivation – that was salient for these figures. I merge the contextualism of Maurer with the more philosophical approach of Gill, and in some ways, Darwall. Maurer and Gill show in their works that it is possible to frame a discussion of this tradition around a concept or question while still doing justice to the intricacies of the historical period. The principal issue I have with Darwall's and Schneewind's writings is their backwards looking-approach to modern moral philosophy. While we can learn much about Kant's ethics by placing him in a wider 18<sup>th</sup> century context that includes Hume and Hutcheson as much as it does Christian Wolff, to write a

philosophical history of the British Moralists tradition with this aim in mind is to read the tradition *teleologically*. I seek to avoid this tendency in my own work.

The other root of modern practical ethics is the natural law theory. Knud Haakonssen and Colin Heydt both see natural law as the assumed backdrop for moral theory outside of Cambridge, where Platonism held its sway. Haakonssen argues that the work of figures like Pufendorf gave the British Moralists the recourse to combine two different ideas. First, the idea that Newton provides a workable scientific model that can be applied to morals with the end of building a moral science; and second, the concern with practical ethics, or the norms that govern our interactions with God, with others, and with ourselves.<sup>45</sup> Natural law provides us with a model for a comprehensive moral theory and of an account of moral obligation. Newtonian moral science, with the help of history, gives us an idea of how the *content* of these duties can be grasped and how they change over time.<sup>46</sup> Haakonssen argues that a tension develops between the more historical account of the content of morality and the more rigid structure of natural law, particularly with the concept of rights. He argues that this tension propels the development of moral thought and conjectural history in the period.

Colin Heydt digs deeper into the topic of practical ethics in his work, *Moral Philosophy in Eighteenth-century Britain*. Heydt focuses on issues like marriage, rights, slavery, etc. in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and how views about these matters changed alongside ethics curriculum in the universities. He uses the 18<sup>th</sup> century reception of Pufendorf's *De Officio* in the English and Scottish university system as his starting point to discuss

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<sup>45</sup> Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, 7.

shifting attitudes about our duties to God, to ourselves, and to others. Our duties to God concern natural theology, while the others are divided into ethics (duties to ourselves), private jurisprudence (duties to others *qua* human being), economic jurisprudence (duties to others *qua* family), and political jurisprudence (duties to others *qua* state).<sup>47</sup> This schema produces a set of non-overlapping duties and a comprehensive moral theory. The content of these duties can be encompassed in the dictums to know and to worship God; to preserve and to cultivate ourselves; to not harm others and to be sociable.

These thoughts about practical ethics are made systematic by Pufendorf's *Officio*, which Heydt argues becomes the basis of university-level moral education in Britain. In Scotland, he notes, the first chairs of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh all lectured on Pufendorf – this influence is seen in the teachings of Carmichael and Hutcheson.<sup>48</sup> Heydt claims that there are similar stories to be told in Aberdeen and Glasgow, though the account is more complicated in the case of Cambridge and Oxford. Regardless, once Pufendorf's dominance in the wider university curriculum is recognized and the account of ethics in the *Officio* is treated as largely correct, it is easy to see how Pufendorfian natural law became the *conventional morality*.<sup>49</sup> Central to this conventional moral theory are questions about how to conceive of our private jurisprudential duties (those regarding fellow humans), or how to weigh our ethical duties (those regarding ourselves) with our economic or political jurisprudential duties (those

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<sup>47</sup> Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 5-12.

<sup>49</sup> Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 15.

regarding the family or state). Questions about *what to do and what to be* come to the forefront during this period, while moral theory falls to the background.

I share Heydt's approach to the British Moralists, focusing more on the content of morality than on matters having to do with autonomy, moral metaphysics, or the quandaries of self-love. While Heydt's discussions of our duties to God and to ourselves are significant, I focus instead on our duties to others. Heydt treats questions related to marriage and law, the latter of which is connected to conversations about the shifting conception of law during this time. These questions are surely of central importance to philosophers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century but they are not the whole story when it comes to understanding the nature and scope of our duties to others. Unlike duties to ourselves or to God, our duties to others are fragmented. We can understand and worship God at once; we can preserve ourselves and cultivate our talents. But we cannot attend to private, economic, and political jurisprudential duties all without conflict. After all, our duties to our family, to strangers, and especially to the state may potentially, or even often, be at odds with one another and call out for our exercising practical judgement.

It is the conflict between these duties to others, and the subsequent weighing of these duties, that I am focused on in this dissertation. I am interested in how the British Moralists thought of the relation between our *partial* duties and our *impartial* ones. Over the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these duties were conceived of less as a part of a larger system of natural law, and more as a series of duties being grounded in different aspects of our nature. Because of this shift, the idea of there being a conflict between duties became more plausible as it became difficult to maintain that they were harmoniously coincident with

one another. Skepticism about the harmony of our duties was made all the clearer by the political conflict experienced by many of the figures featured here. It is this journey towards the realization that those duties central to our lives conflict with one another that I track over the course of this dissertation. That is, the attempt of the British Moralists to come to terms with the idea that *it might not all work out* in the realm of morality.

### **Looking Forward**

In Chapter 1, I argue that the problem of partiality arose in the wake of Locke's call for a moral science. I go on to consider the work of Catharine Trotter Cockburn and Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Third Earl of Shaftesbury). Both thinkers share Locke's commitment to a human nature based ethics. Shaftesbury's claim that morality is anchored in our sociable sentiments is of particular importance here. He recognizes our sentiments are inconsistently felt – we are more closely bound to our loved ones than we are to our neighbors and compatriots. Our sentiments are therefore apt to bolster factionalist tendencies. After Shaftesbury, the challenge is to construct a model of impartiality within the broader context of a Lockean moral science. Meeting this challenge means answering how agents can attain impartiality in deliberation and how they come to see norms of impartiality as genuinely authoritative.

I examine two models of impartiality. In Chapter 2, I consider the view set forth by Gay and Hume, according to which impartiality consists in using an externally justified principle to guide one's deliberation and conduct. I argue that the ideal Gay and Hume choose is usefulness. On this view, being impartial consists in giving considerations of utility overriding weight in moral matters. To ensure that this model is

workable, they each provide accounts of how an agent comes to see utility as authoritative: Gay relies on association, while Hume expands the account to include pride and what he calls the *delicacy of taste*. In Chapter 3, I examine the model of impartiality defended by Butler and Smith, according to which impartiality means using heuristics like conscience or the impartial spectator to reflect on the aims of our sentiments and to direct our conduct in light of these aims. For them, this process does not entail using principles to correct our sentiments; our guide to moral conduct are these sentiments, which are reliable provided that we shield ourselves from self-deception.

These two models of impartiality force us to confront the tension between the normative significance of our special relationships and our concerns about parochialism, faction, and moral disagreement. By examining how these models interact with one another, we gain a better understanding of what commitments are at stake on either side of this tension and learn how to better manage it in practice. I end the dissertation by arguing that Butler and Smith provide the more workable theory of impartiality, and that we should begin here in thinking about partiality. The problem of partiality became less of a focus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the influx of skepticism about the Lockean moral science. For Reid, Bentham, and Kant, reason discovers or shapes the contours of morality, and the sentiments are extraneous to the content of morality. Developments in moral psychology have led philosophers to rediscover the British Moralists tradition and the tides have begun to turn. The problem of partiality has come back into view.

## LOCKEAN MORAL SCIENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF PARTIALITY

In the introduction, I outlined the *problem of partiality*. In this chapter, I examine the problem as it first emerged, in Locke's 18<sup>th</sup> century reception in Britain. There are two Lockean commitments shared by the figures discussed in this dissertation: first, the *aim of morality* is to coordinate disparate sets of interests for the purposes of promoting happiness; second, the *content of morality* is discovered by a science of human nature. These views do appear in the work of some natural lawyers (Pufendorf, in particular); however, Locke was the first to combine them with a scientific account of human nature, thereby securing the promise of a moral science.

In this chapter, I explore the work of Cockburn, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson. For Cockburn, we know our moral duty by reflecting on our nature, but we require sanctions to counteract our selfish and factionalist tendencies. Shaftesbury is more optimistic, claiming that we cultivate an impartial love for the good of all by way of an aesthetic appreciation of nature. Shaftesbury does indicate throughout his work that the love that humans are likely to feel is partial. But herein lies a problem. If virtue consists in the experience of love, morality will be fundamentally partial, which will undermine the aim of coordinating our lives together. However, if there is to be a more universal species of love, Shaftesbury has to account for both its existence and its desirability.

For Hutcheson, we are concerned for the general happiness, but it exercises little influence over us.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Shaftesbury, Hutcheson claims there is little room for

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<sup>50</sup> Francis Hutcheson, "[we] desire the happiness of any known *Sensitive Nature*...were there no *Oppositions of Interest*...and *sufficient Power*, we would confer upon every Being the highest

universal love to trump these “*Oppositions of Interest*.” He instead relies on compassion, gratitude, and honor, the former two being “particular benevolence,” or motives that impel us to act for the good of particular individuals or groups.<sup>51</sup> These motives are responsible for moral conduct but they are also partial. Though we may desire to base ethics in our sociable sentiments, these sentiments reinforce factionalist tendencies that undermine our moral aims. That said, how can we find a place for partiality that is supportive of morality while correcting for its pernicious outcomes? This is the problem of partiality.

The chapter is divided into five sections. First, I discuss the outline of Locke’s moral theory. Second, I examine Cockburn’s defense and extension of Locke’s ethics. Third, I explore Shaftesbury’s account of moral virtue as love, directed at the system of nature. I show how his position gives rise to a conflict between two different standpoints on human nature. Fourth, I explore how Hutcheson’s defense of Shaftesbury codifies the problem of partiality in the British moralist tradition. I end the chapter by considering how the extent to which the problem of partiality changed how 18<sup>th</sup> century moralists looked at the aim of moral theory.

### **John Locke and the Birth of Modern Moral Philosophy**

John Locke’s (1632-1704) empiricism is based in his views about the limits of knowledge. He notes in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689): “he that knows any thing, knows this in the first place, that he need not seek long for Instances of

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Happiness which it could receive “Illustrations on the Moral Sense,” *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 188.

<sup>51</sup> Hutcheson, “An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections,” *Essay*, 32-3.

his Ignorance. The meanest and most obvious Things that come in our way, have dark sides, that the quickest Sight cannot penetrate into. The clearest, and most enlarged Understandings of thinking Men find themselves puzzled, and at a loss, in every Particle of Matter.”<sup>52</sup> While our attempts to grasp truths about the natural world are futile, we can attain knowledge about both God and ourselves. For Locke, this knowledge reveals to us the proper vocation of reason and of inquiry:

“Since our Faculties are not fitted to penetrate into the internal Fabrick and real Essences of Bodies; but yet plainly discover to us the Being of GOD, and the Knowledge of ourselves, enough to lead us into a full and clear discovery of our Duty... ‘tis rational to conclude, that our proper Employment lies in those Enquires, and in that sort of Knowledge which is most suited to our natural Capacities, and carries in it our greatest interest, *i.e.* the Condition of our eternal Estate. Hence I think I may conclude that *Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general.*”<sup>53</sup>

Locke’s moral theory is natural law-based.<sup>54</sup> Human beings require rules to steer clear from vice. In his earliest writings, *Two Tracts on Government* (1660), Locke notes,

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<sup>52</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), IV.iii.22.

<sup>53</sup> Locke, *Essay*, IV.xii.2. See: Patricia Sheridan, *Locke: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 2-4; John Colman, *John Locke’s Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 76-106; Timothy Stanton, “Locke and His Influence,” *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. James A. Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25-27.

<sup>54</sup> Traditionally, Locke is seen as a voluntarist about the content of morality and a hedonist about moral motivation. For this view, see: Colman, *Locke’s Moral Philosophy*; Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’: 1640-1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); J.B. Schneewind, “Locke’s Moral Philosophy,” *Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199-225. Others have stressed that the

“if private men’s judgments were the moulds wherein laws were to be cast ‘tis a question whether we should have any at all.”<sup>55</sup> He claims that there is no *necessary* connection between the dictates of conscience says and what God demands of us.<sup>56</sup> Virtue means acting on rules “discernible by the light of nature and indicat[e] what is and what is not in conformity with rational nature.”<sup>57</sup> There are three aspects to these laws: “[first], it is the decree of a superior will, wherein the formal cause of a law appears to consist... Secondly, it lays down what is and what is not to be done, which is the proper function of a law. Thirdly, it binds men, for it contains in itself all that is requisite to create an obligation.”<sup>58</sup> Laws are then a) issued from an authority, b) possess specifiable content, and c) have sanctions attached to instances of non-compliance.

For Locke, “Actions are considered, as Good, Bad, or Indifferent, and in this respect, they are *Relative*, it being their Conformity to, or Disagreement with some Rule,

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distinction often made between Locke’s accounts of moral content and moral motivation is too strong. For them, our pleasures, pains, and natural sentiments help guide us to moral ends by serving as an indication of what God demands of us. See: Patricia Sheridan, “Pirates, Kings, and Reasons to Act: Moral Motivation and the Role of Sanctions in Locke’s Moral Theory,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 37.1 (Mar., 2007): 35-48; Patricia Sheridan, “Locke’s Latitudinarian Sympathies: An exploration of sentiment in Locke’s Moral Theory,” *Locke Studies* 15 (2015): 131-162; Elliot Rossiter, “Hedonism and Natural Law in Locke’s Moral Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54.2 (Apr., 2016): 203-225. For alternate interpretations, see: Phillip Mitsis, “Locke on Pleasure, Law, and Moral Motivation,” *Moral Motivation: A History*, ed. Iakovos Vasiliou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153-178; Andrew Israelsen, “God, Mixed Modes, and Natural Law: An Intellectualist Interpretation of Locke’s Moral Philosophy,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21.6 (2013): 1111-1132. A reading of Locke I have yet to reckon with is given in Sorana Corneanu, *Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> John Locke, “First Tract on Government,” *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21. Cf. John Locke, “Essays on the Law of Nature,” *Political Essays*, 108-110. While scholars raise questions about the consistency between Locke’s early and later writings on ethics, it can be assumed that the “Essays on the Law of Nature” and the “Two Tracts” espouse relevantly similar views.

<sup>56</sup> See: Coleman, Locke’s *Moral Philosophy*, 9-28.

<sup>57</sup> Locke, “Essays,” 82.

<sup>58</sup> Locke, “Essays,” 83.

that makes the action to be regular or irregular, Good or Bad.”<sup>59</sup> Since an action is bad only on the basis of its non-conformity with natural law, an action is only bad if God, the author of natural law, as such. That said, God does not *arbitrarily* determine the content of the moral law. God made happiness the “great end” of humans and the moral law is framed with this end in mind.<sup>60</sup> As Locke notes, God “has made man such that these duties of his necessarily follow from his very nature.”<sup>61</sup> God’s crafting of law is constrained by human nature. Locke’s view is consistent with others in the natural law tradition; he argues that we access the law by reflecting on what is required of us to achieve happiness in society. God does not imprint the moral law on our souls – he instead gives us the tools to access this law.

A central aspect of Locke’s moral theory in his account of the nature of moral ideas.<sup>62</sup> He refers to moral ideas as “mixed modes,” which are a species of “modes,” or ideas of features that inhere in substances.<sup>63</sup> A simple mode is a complex idea whose constituent parts are variations on a single idea, while a mixed mode is a complex idea

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<sup>59</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxviii.15. Cf. “Essays,” 88.

<sup>60</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.68. Cf. “Essays,” 106; “Second Tract,” 63.

<sup>61</sup> Locke, “Essays,” 126. Cf. Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.49.

<sup>62</sup> See: Steven Forde, “‘Mixed Modes’ in John Locke’s Moral and Political Philosophy,” *Review of Politics* 73 (2011): 111-148. Forde argues that Locke’s use of “modes” has its basis in Robert Boyle and Samuel Pufendorf. Of particular importance is Pufendorf, who considered moral ideas to be “certain Modes superadded to natural Things and Motions by understanding Beings, chiefly for the guiding and tempering the Freedom of voluntary actions, and for the procuring of a decent Regularity in the Method of Life” [Samuel Pufendorf, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, ed. Mr. Carew (London, 1729), 3]. Locke had a deep respect for Pufendorf’s works, going so far to recommend *On the Whole Duty of Man* and *Of Law of the Nature and Nations* alongside Cicero’s *Offices* to an aspiring pupil interested in ethics and civil law. See: Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 139.

<sup>63</sup> Locke, *Essay* III.xiii.1-6

whose constituent parts include distinct simple ideas.<sup>64</sup> Mixed modes draw on different experiential sources.<sup>65</sup> Take “government,” which is composed of many simpler ideas (laws, offices, privileges, etc.) combined to form different types of government (republic, monarchy, democracy, etc.). Experience does not necessitate any one combination of the ideas, distinguishing mixed modes from ideas of substances.<sup>66</sup> Consider “sacrilege”: there is nothing about burning a Bible that makes it “sacrilege.”<sup>67</sup> What makes an action sacrilege has nothing to do with the facts about the case – *that* there’s a fire, *that* I started the fire, *that* I’ve deliberately thrown a book in the fire, *that* this book happens to be a Bible, etc. – but with my interests as they relate to the Bible. These interests, for Locke, determine my taking the book burning to be sacrilege.

It may seem counterproductive to base an ethical theory on the claim that moral ideas are fabrications; however, there are two advantages to this view according to Locke. First, it is metaphysically parsimonious: if one explains how moral ideas arise from our ordering of experience through language and thought there is no need to assume the *innateness* of moral ideas.<sup>68</sup> Locke can explain the moral diversity in the world without having to establishing a singular definition of murder and showing how all other manners of defining murder are mistaken.<sup>69</sup> Second, treating moral ideas as mixed modes

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<sup>64</sup> Locke, *Essay* III.xxii.2.

<sup>65</sup> Locke, *Essay* III.xxii.1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxiii.1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Locke, *Essay* III.v.5. He also uses the examples of adultery (III.v.3) and stabbing (III.v.2).

<sup>68</sup> Locke, *Essay* I.iii.

<sup>69</sup> Locke is fascinated by moral diversity and the problem it presents for constructing a moral science: “He that will carefully peruse the History of Mankind, and look abroad into the several Tribes of Men... will be able to satisfy himself, That there is scarce that Principle of Morality to be named, or *Rule of Vertue* to be thought on (those only excepted that are absolutely necessary to hold Society together, which commonly too are neglected betwixt distinct Societies) which is

offers a ready-made response to any concerns about the *source* of moral knowledge. If we are responsible for the production of moral ideas, we have a maker's knowledge of morality, which allows ethics to become a demonstrative science.<sup>70</sup>

Importantly, treating moral ideas as mixed modes only entails relativism about moral ideas, which is to say that people will have different ideas about what theft or murder entails. Divergence in the use of concepts does not imply a difference in moral standards, or in considered judgments. Take the concept of theft: a story about its cognitive genesis in people's minds does *not* tell us anything about whether it is wrong to steal in a particular instance. As Locke points out, we can define stealing as "the taking from another what is his, without his knowledge or Allowance" but the fact that some action is an instance of stealing does not settle its wrongness: "the private taking away his Sword from a Madman, to prevent his doing Mischief, though it be properly denominated *Stealing*...yet when compared to the Law of God...it is no Sin or Transgression, though the Name *Stealing* ordinarily carries such an intimation with it."<sup>71</sup> To determine the wrongness of an action, we require some standard that is external to the action.

For Locke, natural law plays the role of regulating the application of our moral ideas. Laws involve sanctions, since "law is to no purpose without punishment."<sup>72</sup> A rule is a law only if someone can recognize that noncompliance will be punished; Locke

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not, somewhere or other, *slighted* and condemned by the general Fashion of *whole Societies* of Men, governed by practical Opinions, and Rules of living quite opposite to others" (*Essay* I.iii.10). Cf. "Essays," 120-127. See: Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftsbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14-68.

<sup>70</sup> Locke, *Essay* IV.iii.18-23. Cf. *Essay* IV.xii.8. See: Sheridan, *Locke: A Guide to the Perplexed*, 85-90; Israelsen, "God, Mixed Modes, and Natural Law."

<sup>71</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxviii.16.

<sup>72</sup> Locke, "Essays," 113.

identifies three such sanctions: civil, social, and divine.<sup>73</sup> Civil punishments follow from the violation of laws laid down by the magistrate; shame follows from the violation of social laws, while hellfire awaits those who run afoul of divine law. Because divine sanctions are greater than civil law or the “law of opinion,” divine law is “the only true touchstone of moral Rectitude.”<sup>74</sup> Divine law then ground moral obligation. Civic laws and social norms have a place in our lives but only insofar as they hold court over their relevant sphere of influence and see their authority as constrained by God.<sup>75</sup>

For Locke, any rational person will recognize that “the observance of this law [of nature] gives rise to peace, harmonious relations, friendship, freedom from punishment, security, possession of our property, and – to sum it all up in one word – happiness.”<sup>76</sup>

However, this recognition will not often translate into reliable compliance with the moral law. Central to Locke’s view of moral motivation is his account of “uneasiness.”<sup>77</sup>

Though the wise person recognizes that a virtuous life is the best one, some uneasiness regarding the noncompliance with God’s dictates is required for us to act well. The ultimate degree of uneasiness is the fear of eternal damnation; Locke goes so far as to say that without eternal damnation there would be no stable incentive to be good.<sup>78</sup> He does admit that the “law of opinion,” which its associated praise and blame, is often produces

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<sup>73</sup> Locke, “Essays,” 106.

<sup>74</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxviii.8.

<sup>75</sup> Locke, “Second Tract,” 66-67; “Essays,” 117.

<sup>76</sup> Locke, *Essay* I.iii.6; “Ethica A,” *Political Essays*, 318-19; “Ethica B,” *Political Essays*, 319-20.

<sup>77</sup> As Locke notes: “Good and Evil, present and absent, ‘tis true, work upon the mind: But that which immediately determines the *Will*, from time to time, to every voluntary Action, is the *uneasiness of desire*, fixed on some absent good, either negative, as indolency to one in pain; or positive, as enjoyment of pleasure. That it is this uneasiness, that determines the Will to the successive voluntary actions” (*Essay* II.xxi.33).

<sup>78</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.55.

enough uneasiness to get us to act correctly.<sup>79</sup> Locke thinks we are obligated, to cultivate a fear of damnation and the desire to be thought well of by others.<sup>80</sup> Due to the postlapsarian state of human beings, these sources of uneasiness may not be sufficient to ensure moral conduct, but it is our best hope.

Locke leaves us with a tension between the law-like structure of morality and the happenstance nature of moral ideas. Because of the contingency involved in the construction of mixed modes and the constraint that morality be law-like, Locke looks beyond human nature to ground his moral theory. Regardless of how we choose to interpret Locke, the philosophers who followed immediately in his wake put greater stock in his empiricism than in his quasi-voluntarism. These figures found in Locke's work the possibility of constructing a moral science that treats our nature as sensitive, rational, and sociable. I turn now to Cockburn.

### **Revising Locke: Catharine Trotter Cockburn**

In 1702, Catharine Trotter Cockburn published *A Defence of Mr. Locke's 'Essay of Human Understanding', wherein its Principles, with reference to Morality, Revealed Religion, and the Immortality of the Soul, are considered and justified: In answer to some Remarks on that Essay* (1702). The remarks to which Cockburn is responding are three pamphlets, published between 1697 and 1699. The author of these works argues that Locke's empiricism cannot account for the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the immutability of moral distinctions. After reading Cockburn's "Defence," Locke wrote to her, saying: "Give me leave...to assure you that as the rest of the world take

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<sup>79</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxviii.II.

<sup>80</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.53.

notice of the strength and clearness of your reasoning, so I cannot but be extremely sensible, that it was employed in my defence. You have herein not only vanquished my adversary, but reduced me also absolutely under your power.”<sup>81</sup> Locke’s approval of Cockburn’s treatment of the *Essay*, and endorsement of her response to the pamphlets, is evidence that she is a key source for the 18<sup>th</sup> century reception of Locke.<sup>82</sup>

The first criticism to which Cockburn responds is that Locke’s empiricism cannot account for the immutability of moral ideas because *all* ideas are based in experience, and we possess no sensuous faculty that can draw the distinction between virtues and vices.<sup>83</sup> However, Cockburn responds, Locke maintains that moral ideas are not given directly in experience but are the result of reflection on human beings and their interests.<sup>84</sup> Moral ideas seem to be simple because they are often employed without reflection. However, the fact that we apply a particular concept quickly has more to do with our moral competency than with the origin of the concept itself. As Cockburn points out, “if he [pamphlet author] means, that without respect to men, or to society, though mankind has never been, or never been designed, justice, gratitude, fidelity, &c. had been good, and

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<sup>81</sup> John Locke, *Selected Correspondence*, ed. Mark Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Letter 3234.

<sup>82</sup> For more on Cockburn’s life, see: Martha Brandt Bolton, “Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter,” *Hypatia’s Daughters: Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers*, ed. Linda Lopez McAlister (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 139-64; Anne Kelley, *Catharine Trotter Cockburn: An Early Modern Writer in the Vanguard of Feminism* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002). For her relation to Locke, see: Jane Duran, “Early English Empiricism and the Work of Catharine Trotter Cockburn,” *Metaphilosophy* 44.4 (2013): 485–495; Jessica Gordon Roth, “Catharine Trotter Cockburn’s Defence of Locke,” *The Monist* 98.1 (2015): 64–76; Patricia Sheridan, “Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law: The extent of Catharine Trotter Cockburn’s Lockeanism in her Defence of Mr. Locke’s Essay,” *Hypatia* 22.3 (2007): 133–151.

<sup>83</sup> Catharine Trotter Cockburn, “A Defence,” *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Patricia Sheridan (New York: Broadview, 2006), 40.

<sup>84</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 41.

their contraries evil; I confess myself incapable of having a notion of these virtues abstract from any subject to conceive.”<sup>85</sup>

Even if moral ideas are complex, there is a lingering problem with the Lockean framework: its voluntarism. Locke conceives of natural law as consisting of a set of dictates that govern one’s relation to oneself, to society, and to God; while the law’s content is distinct, God is the *ground* of our moral obligations. As the pamphlet author points out: “if *good* and *evil*, virtue and vice, are not such in their own nature, *they must be so from the arbitrary will of God; and all things are indifferent, till he declare this, or that, to be sin, according to his pleasure.*”<sup>86</sup> Cockburn argues this interpretation is mistaken, noting that the content of virtue depends on human nature: “God, having made man such a creature as he is, it is impossible, that good and evil should change their respect to him, as that *pleasure* can be *pain*, and *pain pleasure*, which no one in his senses will affirm.”<sup>87</sup> She continues, “all *moral good* consis[ts] in doing, willing, or choosing, for oneself or others, whatever is the *natural good*; and all moral evil, in doing, willing, or choosing whatever is a *natural evil*, to oneself or others.”<sup>88</sup> Since moral good consists in performing actions that conduce to natural good, God cannot dictate the content of morality without also changing our nature.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 42.

<sup>86</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 43.

<sup>87</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 43.

<sup>88</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 43.

<sup>89</sup> As Cockburn notes, “if the law of nature is the product of human nature itself (as the great Grotius speaks) it must subsist as long as human nature; nor will this foundation make it the less sacred, since it cannot be doubted, that it is originally the will of God, whilst we own him the author of that nature, of which this law is a consequence” (Cockburn, “A Defence,” 44).

But, the pamphlet author objects: Locke bases obligation “*upon future punishments and rewards, and upon the arbitrary will of the law-giver.*”<sup>90</sup> The author claims that, for Locke, the obligation to act morally is dependent on external sanctions. The author’s claim is that a) Lockean obligation is hedonistic, and so b) one has an obligation to act in a way that secures pleasure and guards against pain; c) God is the ultimate source of pleasure and pain, so d) we are obligated to act in accordance with his will. However, Cockburn argues, the author fails to recognize the distinction between the *nature* of the law and the *force* of the law:

“*Locke says, that the will of God, rewards and punishment, can only give morality the force of a law; that does not make them the first grounds of good and evil, since...to know what the will of God is (antecedently to revelation) we must know what is good by the conformity it has to our nature, by which we come to know the nature of God, which therefore may be to him the first ground or rule of good; through the will of God, &c. can only enforce it as a law.*”<sup>91</sup>

For Cockburn, the author conflates the fact that rewards and punishments provide a necessary motivation for agents to act morally with the claim that these sanctions are the *source* of our obligation to comply with natural law. Although human beings may sometimes require the threat of eternal damnation to act morally, what it means to act morally is determined by human nature and not by these sanctions.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 46.

<sup>91</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 47.

<sup>92</sup> In a later edition of “A Defence,” Cockburn added the following footnote: “Some, who had lately read this defence, have thought that the author’s sentiments, on *the grounds of moral obligation*, were different when this were written. The grounds of moral obligation are not here

It is here that Cockburn introduces the language of “fittingness,” commonly identified with Samuel Clarke (1675-1729).<sup>93</sup> For Clarke, we bear certain relations to ourselves, to others, and to God. Each agent is obligated to act in a way that is “fitting” with these relations: being pious, righteous, and sober (i.e., proper recognition of one’s relation to God, to others, and to oneself).<sup>94</sup> These fittingness conditions, which determine the content of morality, are independent of God’s will; our obligation is “antecedent to all Consideration of any particular private and personal Reward or Punishment.”<sup>95</sup> We are obligated to honor God because our relation to him is as his inferior; we have duties of equity to our fellows because of our equal standing with them.<sup>96</sup> Cockburn conceives of each of us as a part of “a system of *social* beings, that is,

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discussed at all; the notion of founding morality upon an arbitrary will is carefully rejected; and the nature of God, or the divine understanding, and the new nature of man, all along supposed to be the true grounds of it...the author still agrees to that proposition; for strictly and properly speaking a law implies authority and sanctions; and though we say law of reason, and the law of nature, this is in a less proper sense, importing, that they are as effectual grounds of obligation, as if they were real laws, but they oblige us not as dependent, but as reasonable beings; in the same manner as the Supreme Being, who is subject to no laws, and accountable to non, obliges himself to do always what he perceives to be right and fit to be done.” (“A Defence,” 46-47n).

<sup>93</sup> For a treatment of Clarke’s ethics, see: Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study Volume II: From Suarez to Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 372-398; Remy Debes, “Moral Rationalism and Moral Realism,” *Routledge Companion to 18th Century Philosophy*, ed. Aaron Garrett (New York: Routledge, 2014), 500-534.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Clarke, “A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation,” *The Works of Samuel Clarke*, ed. Benjamin Hoadly (London: Thoemmes Press, 2002), 2.618.

<sup>95</sup> Clarke, “A Discourse,” 2.627.

<sup>96</sup> For Clarke’s discussions of equity, see: “A Discourse,” 2.620-2.641.

beings fitted to live together, to have mutual dependence.”<sup>97</sup> To act in a “fitting” manner is, for her, to act in a way that promotes the flourishing of this system.<sup>98</sup>

Cockburn maintains that *the fact* that certain conduct is fitting to our nature is sufficient to ground an obligation to act morally. One might say that *the fact* that some act is fitting cannot obligate us to act, because facts about fitness do not motivate us to act in any manner. When it comes to motivation, Cockburn argues that the fear of damnation provides one with the motivation to act morally: “*future rewards and punishments...[are]* considerations of great importance, and highly necessary to keep the generality of mankind to the practice of virtue.”<sup>99</sup> External sanction provides natural law with its necessary *force*.<sup>100</sup> Still, Cockburn’s places an emphasis on our possession of disinterested benevolence and on the “self-approving joy” that naturally flows from our acting in a way that is fitting with our nature.

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<sup>97</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles and Reasonings of Dr. Rutherford’s ‘Essay on the Nature and Obligations of Virtue’: In vindication of the contrary principles and reasonings, enforced in the writings of the late Dr. Samuel Clarke,” *Philosophical Writings*, 216.

<sup>98</sup> Cockburn penned “A Defence” four years prior to Clarke’s *Discourse*, so her source of this term is not Clarke. In later writings, Cockburn takes herself to be defending “*Dr. Clarke* and his followers” (“Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation; particularly the Translator of Archbishop King’s ‘Origin of Evil’, and the author of the ‘Divine Legation of Moses’,” *Philosophical Writings*, 116 cf. 117-118, 126, 128, 143; Cf. “Remarks upon the Principles”). Cockburn aligns herself with John Balguy (1686-1748), who defended Clarkean rationalism in his *The Foundation of Moral Goodness* (1728). Although Cockburn’s interpretation of Locke paved the way for the great empiricist ethical projects of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, she firmly situates herself amongst the rationalists.

<sup>99</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles,” 178.

<sup>100</sup> As Cockburn notes, “though *Dr. Clarke* and his followers maintain, that the *fitness of things*, and conscience or the *moral sense...have in themselves* an obligatory power, yet it must be allowed, and they as earnestly maintain, that the *will of God*, with the sanctions of his laws, can only enforce this obligation so as to extend to all times and all cases” (“Remarks upon some Writers,” 109). For Locke, a moral law possesses three features, “[first], it is the decree of a superior will, wherein the formal cause of a law appears to consist...Secondly, it lays down what is and what is not to be done, which is the proper function of a law. Thirdly, it binds men, for it contains in itself all that is requisite to create an obligation.” (“Essays,” 83).

Cockburn does not discuss benevolence in *A Defence*, though it looms large in her later writings. In *Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation; particularly the Translator of Archbishop King's 'Origin of Evil' (1743)*, she claims that John Gay, “argues very justly against Mr. *Hutcheson*...that...[there] is no proof, that the *moral sense and public affections* (in his language) are mere *instincts* implanted in us, since they are all resolvable into *reason*, and are undeniably cultivated and improved, by making a right use of our faculties.”<sup>101</sup> Like Gay, Cockburn claims that human beings are benevolent and that they *become* this way through a process of moral development:

“Mankind is a system of creatures, that continually need one another’s assistance, without which they could not long subsist. It is therefore necessary, that everyone...should contribute his part towards the good and preservation of the whole, and avoid whatever is detrimental to it. For this end, they are made capable of acquiring social or benevolent affections (probably have the seeds of them implanted in their nature) with a moral sense or conscience, that approves of virtuous actions, and disapproves the contrary.”<sup>102</sup>

It is unclear how to interpret Cockburn’s parenthetical comment, as she suggests that benevolence is not innate but its “seeds” are. Regardless, benevolence “guide[s]” individuals “to virtuous practice.”<sup>103</sup> Most do not conduct themselves on the basis of reflections about “the relations and fitness of things,” but are instead led to act morally by

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<sup>101</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon some Writers,” 113. I return to John Gay in the next chapter.

<sup>102</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon some Writers,” 114.

<sup>103</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles,” 152.

their sentiments, chief among them being benevolence.<sup>104</sup> Insofar as Cockburn conceives of a moral agent as someone who works to promote the good of humanity, it is easy to see why a benevolent disposition is crucial to attaining this goal. Still, this is not the end of the story. For Cockburn, reflective approval has a role to play here as well.

According to Cockburn, nothing is more “insupportable than to stand condemned in our own judgments; or more delightful, than the approbation of our own minds.”<sup>105</sup> She often returns to the idea that the pain we often feel after acting immorally comes from our awareness that we have failed to live up to our obligations: “the uneasiness we feel upon the practice of anything contrary to what moral sense approves, is a *consequence* of the obligation, not the *foundation* of it...self-condemnation manifestly presuppose[es] some *obligation*.”<sup>106</sup> The awareness that we should act in a way consistent with conscience distances ourselves from our tendencies to act immorally or from base motives, like a concern for receiving rewards or avoiding punishments. Failing to recognize the way in which we hold ourselves to standards is the chief problem that Cockburn identifies with her hedonist contemporaries.<sup>107</sup> As she points out, “I do not know what notions the partisans of that doctrine can have of virtue and moral goodness, whilst they talk of it as nothing but a regard of *interest*?”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles,” 152.

<sup>105</sup> Cockburn, “A Defence,” 77.

<sup>106</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon some Writers,” 109.

<sup>107</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon some Writers,” 116-118.

<sup>108</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon some Writers,” 136.

Cockburn's defense of Locke repackages his ideas in three ways.<sup>109</sup> First, Locke *suggests* that the content of morality is derived from human nature but Cockburn makes this view a cornerstone of her thought. Second, Cockburn argues that to act morally is to promote the good of other human beings. There is evidence that Locke thought similarly about the aim of morality, but he does not lay much emphasis on this point. Third, Cockburn gestures at self-approval as a basis for moral motivation, though she maintains that most of us require the promise of reward or the threat of punishment to act morally. Cockburn shifts Lockean ethics away from its law-like roots. This turn away from legalism is completed by Locke's student: Shaftesbury.

### **Shaftesbury's Two Standpoints on Human Nature**

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's (1671-1713)

*Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711) was, other than Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), the most reprinted text in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> In "Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law," Sheridan argues that while Cockburn attributes the position she presents in "A Defence" to Locke, there are "obstacles to this attribution. However far Cockburn succeeds in grounding natural law in 'the nature of God and Man,' her approach to the matter differed from Locke in its degree of anthropocentrism" (134). For Sheridan, "Locke's views on morality seem to vacillate between the conventionalism of his theory of mixed modes and a more robust theistic realism" (139). Cockburn claims that "theology cannot furnish an independent ground for moral knowledge. Rather, the moral character of God must be ascertained from reflection upon our own nature, and human nature must therefore be treated as a standard unto itself in any philosophical explanation of moral knowledge" (141). In this way, Sheridan maintains that Cockburn develops a distinctly "anthropomorphic" ethics which distances her from Locke. Interpreting Locke's ethics is tricky business (see n.7 above); there are scholars who have stressed this "anthropomorphic" side of Locke's work, including Rossiter, in "Hedonism and Natural Law," and Sheridan herself, in "Locke's Latitudinarian Sympathies." Nevertheless, I agree that a tension exists in Locke between his theistic rationalism and his human-nature based empiricism. By emphasizing the latter in "A Defence," Cockburn paves the way for a reading of Locke that exercised a great deal of influence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>110</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*, vol. I-III, ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), vii.

Shaftesbury's connection to Locke was substantial, as Locke was a close friend of the First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683). Locke was also the family physician, and helped oversee the health and education of the First Earl's son, the Second Earl (1652-1699), who suffered from a degenerative disease and was unable to be an active participant in politics. Because of the Second Earl's health, the Third Earl was raised in the First Earl's household from a very young age, and the curriculum of his education was written by Locke, as modeled on his experiences with the Second Earl. Although Locke left the family to travel on the European continent in 1674, he left an indelible mark on the Third Earl, who spent time with Locke as a young man in Holland, and with whom the Third Earl would continue to visit and correspond until his death.<sup>111</sup>

Throughout his work, Shaftesbury takes aim at the idea that eternal rewards and punishments are necessary to secure moral motivation:<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Shaftesbury spent time in Holland with Locke, and was made familiar with the members of Locke's philosophical circle there, which consisted of Jean Le Clerc, Pierre Bayle, and Philip Van Limborch. Shortly after Locke's death, Shaftesbury wrote to Le Clerc that he attributed to Locke "the absolute direction of my education, and to whom next my immediate parents, as I must own the greatest obligation, so I have ever preserved the highest gratitude and duty" [Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, ed. Benjamin Rand (New York: Macmillan co., 1900), 332]. Shaftesbury's relationship with Locke's thought was conflicted. In a letter to Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury noted that Locke had "struck at all the fundamentals, threw order and virtue out of the world" (*Life*, 419). And yet Shaftesbury also claimed that he respected Locke's work "on government, policy, trade, coin, education, toleration" (*Life*, 404). For more on the relationship between Locke and Shaftesbury, see: Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson*, 98-105.

<sup>112</sup> For more on the role of moral motivation in Shaftesbury, see: Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1967), 229-245; Gregory W. Trianosky, "On the Obligation to be Virtuous: Shaftesbury and the Question, Why be Moral?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16 (1978): 289-300; Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 176-206; Michael B. Gill, "Shaftesbury's Two Accounts of the Reason to be Virtuous," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38.4 (2000): 529-548; Simon Grote "Shaftesbury's Egoistic Hedonism" *Aufklärung* 22 (2010): 135-49.

“Thus a Person loving Life for Life’s sake, and Virtue not at all, may by the Promise or Hope of Life, and Fear of Death, or other Evil, be induc’d to practice Virtue, and even *endeavor* to be truly virtuous. Yet neither is *this very Endeavor* to be esteem’d *a Virtue*: For tho he may intend to be virtuous, he is not become so, for having only intended, or aim’d at it, thro’ love of the Reward. But as soon as he is come to have such Good for its own sake, as good and amiable in itself; then is he in some degree good and virtuous, and not till then.”<sup>113</sup>

In her remarks on Thomas Rutherford, Cockburn implores the reader to not confuse her view, which holds that there is an obligation to act morally separate from considerations of reward and punishment, with “the author of the *Characteristicks* [who] expresses against any regard to future retributions.”<sup>114</sup> She continues, “nobody, I am persuaded, can have a deeper sense, than I have, of God’s goodness and condescension in assisting our weaknesses by such assurances, and appointing, for our imperfect performances, the reward of an *exceeding weight of glory*.”<sup>115</sup> In a letter to her niece, Cockburn even takes aim at Shaftesbury, despite his ties to Locke. In her view, Shaftesbury naively thinks that human beings do not require religion to be moral: “instead of that, he proposed to bring the bulk of mankind to a love of virtue for its beauty, and excellencies, and to give them all his refined taste; he might as well...have proposed to make them all lords.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit,” *Characteristicks*, 38.

<sup>114</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles,” 218.

<sup>115</sup> Cockburn, “Remarks upon the Principles,” 218.

<sup>116</sup> Cockburn, “Ms. Cockburn to her Niece [Anne Hepburn], 12 June 1744,” *Philosophical Writings*, 233. Cockburn’s comment that Shaftesbury “proposed to make [men] all lords,” is important, and will come up in my discussion of Adam Smith. Smith claims that “polite dignity is the character that he [Shaftesbury] aimed at, and this seems to be best supported by a grand and

Shaftesbury's relationship with Christianity is ambiguous. In his earliest writing, a Preface to Benjamin Whichcote's (1609-1683) sermons, Shaftesbury distinguishes the spirit of Christianity from its political manifestations, choosing instead to identify it with *piety*.<sup>117</sup> A properly religious attitude is, for him, natural affection directed at the good of humanity and the adoration of God. Shaftesbury is confounded that someone can believe in a Supreme Being who entreats us to "act *after* His example" and yet maintain that carrying out this purpose produces no pleasure, sense of beauty, or contentment in us.<sup>118</sup> Other sects worry that by placing too much stress on our natural affections, "*the apparent Need of Sacred Revelation...[is] taken away*."<sup>119</sup> So, Shaftesbury, points out: "*they were forced, in a Manner, to wound VERTUE, and give way to the Imputation of being Mercenary, and of Acting in a slavish Spirit, in Ways of Religion, rather than*

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pompous diction that was the Stile he made choise of. This he carried so far from being grand, his stile is as pompous as in the most sublime subjects" [*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), i.146]. Ryan Hanley infers that "Shaftesbury is thus condemned by Smith for his penchant for both abstract moral theorizing characteristic of the moderns, and then also for his embrace of the convoluted prose style associated with that approach" ["Style and Sentiment: Smith and Swift," *Adam Smith Review* 4 (2008), 93.]. For a response to Hanley, see: Douglas J Den Uyl, "Das Shaftesbury Problem," *Adam Smith Review* 6 (2011): 209-223, along with Hanley's rebuttal, "Response to Douglas J Den Uyl's 'Das Shaftesbury Problem'," *Adam Smith Review* 6, 228-232.

<sup>117</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, "Preface," *Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot, in Two Parts*, ed. Shaftesbury (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1698). For more on Whichcote, see: J.B. Schneewind, "Voluntarism and the Foundations of Ethics," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 70.2 (1996): 25-41; Michael B. Gill, "The Religious Rationalism of Benjamin Whichcote," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27.2 (1999): 271-300; Aaron Garrett, "Seventeenth Century Moral Philosophy: Self-Help, Self-Knowledge, and the Devil's Mountain," *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 229-279.

<sup>118</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," x.

<sup>119</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," xi.

*admit a sort of Rival (in their Sense) to the Faith of Divine Revelation.*”<sup>120</sup> In both cases, he argues that the viability of true religion, founded in love, is threatened.

It is important to consider Shaftesbury’s decision to publish the sermons, and their connection with his larger project. Towards the end of the Preface, Shaftesbury quotes from Whichcote:

*“Whatsoever (says he) some have said; Man's Nature is not so untoward a Thing (unless it be abused) but that there is a secret Sympathy in Human Nature, with Vertue and Honesty; which gives a Man an Interest even in bad Men.—God, in infinite Wisdom, has so contrived; that, if an Intellectual Being sink it self into Sensuality, or any way defile, and pollute it self; then, Miseries and Torments should befall it, in this State—VERTUE, and VICE (says he) are the Foundations of Peace and Happiness, or Sorrow and Misery.— There is inherent Punishment belonging to all Vice; and no Power can divide or separate them. For, tho' God should not, in a positive Way, inflict Punishment; or any Instrument of God punish a Sinner; yet, he would punish Himself; his Misery and Unhappiness would arise from Himself.”*<sup>121</sup>

This defense of “*Natural Goodness*” makes Whichcote a “truly Christian philosopher” in Shaftesbury’s eyes.<sup>122</sup> Since all human beings possess this “seed” of humanity, Shaftesbury requires a story about how we can foster natural goodness in human beings. The sermons of Whichcote succeed in one respect: they put an exemplary person on

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<sup>120</sup> Shaftesbury, “Preface,” xi.

<sup>121</sup> Shaftesbury, “Preface,” xiii.

<sup>122</sup> Shaftesbury, “Preface,” xiii.

display and, by doing so, stir the audience's humane feelings. While Whichcote used the language of the "University," Shaftesbury makes use of "the Conversation of the fashionable world."<sup>123</sup> In his essay "Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author," he distinguishes his preferred manner of presentation with three "impolite" styles of writing: memoirs, religious confessionals, and philosophical treatises.<sup>124</sup> For Shaftesbury, memoirs are dishonest, religious confessionals are poorly written, and treatises are unconcerned with the moral cultivation of their readers.<sup>125</sup> He believes each of these literary forms to be insufficiently reflective.<sup>126</sup> Shaftesbury instead implores the author to instead "write with a mirror," or engage in dialogue with oneself and the audience; by doing so, he claims that those humane components of our nature will be made to shine.<sup>127</sup>

#### *Love, Enthusiasm, and 'The Moralists'*

Shaftesbury does not make use of the dialogic form in most of his writings; the essay for which he is most remembered, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit," is a

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<sup>123</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," xv.

<sup>124</sup> The language of "impolite" styles of writing comes from Michael B. Gill, "Shaftesbury on Politeness, Honesty, and the Reason to be Moral," *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 167-184.

<sup>125</sup> Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author," *Characteristicks*, vol. 1, 97-106.

<sup>126</sup> Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy," 100, 106-107.

<sup>127</sup> Shaftesbury illustrates this process as follows, "We might here, therefore, as in a *Looking-Glass*, discover our-selves, and see our minutest Features nicely delineated, and suted to our own Apprehension and Cognizance. No-one who was ever so little a-while an Inspector, cou'd fail of becoming acquainted with his own Heart. And, what was of singular note in these *magical Glasses*, it wou'd happen, that be a constant and long Inspection, the Partys accustom'd to the Pratice, wou'd acquire a peculiar *speculative Habit*; so as virtually to carry about with 'em a sort of *Pocket-Mirroure*, always ready, and in use. In this, there were *Two Faces* which wou'd naturally present themselves to our viuew: *One* of them, like the commanding Genius, the Leer and Chief above-mention'd; the *other* like the rude, undisciplin'd and headstrong Creature, whom we our-selves in our natural Capacity most exactly resembled. Whatever we were employ'd in, whatever we set about; if once we had acquired the habit of this *Mirroure*; we shou'd, by virtue of the double Reflection, distinguish our-selves into two different Partys. And in this *Dramatick Method*, the Work of *Self-Inspection* wou'd proceed with admirable Success" ("Soliloquy," 122).

treatise. Still, the piece that occupies a central place in the *Charateristicks*, “The Moralists; a Philosophical Rhapsody, is a dialogue”<sup>128</sup> In the work, we are presented with Theocles, a man who reveres the system of nature and its author and the natural goodness of human beings. He is tasked with convincing Philocles, a good man who possesses little faith in others, of the viability of a virtuous life, based in universal love. This account of virtue as love gives rise to a tension in Shaftesbury’s ethics between two perspectives: that of human beings, and that of the universe.<sup>129</sup>

“The Moralists” begins with Philocles writing to his friend Palemon. Philocles’ is concerned that Palemon’s views on human nature have been warped by his study of speculative subjects. Palemon laments the state of human beings: “Hapless Nature, thus to have err’d in they chief Workmanship! —When sprang this fatal Weakness? What Chance or Destiny shall we accuse?”<sup>130</sup> Yet, he is poetic in his reverence for nature: “The Verdue of the Field, the distant Prospects, the gilded Horizon, and purple Sky, form’d by

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<sup>128</sup> For more on the form of the dialogue itself, see: Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), 47-73; Shayda Hoover, “‘Voices and Accents’: Enthusiastic Characterization in Shaftesbury’s *The Moralists*,” *Eighteenth Century Life* 37 (2013), 72-96. For more on Shaftesbury’s use of dialogue, see: Cassirer, *Platonic Renaissance*, 157-202; Grean, *Shaftesbury’s Philosophy*; Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Patrick Müller, “Dwell with honesty & beauty & order’: The Paradox of Theodicy in Shaftesbury’s Thought,” *Aufklärung* 22 (2010): 201–231; Shayda Hoover, “‘Voices and Accents’”; Michael B. Gill, “Love of humanity in Shaftesbury’s *Moralists*,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24.6 (2016): 1117-35.

<sup>129</sup> A similar tension in Shaftesbury’s thought is explored by Müller, “honest & beauty & order”; Gill, “Love of Humanity”; Joseph Chavez, “Philosophy and Politeness, Moral Autonomy and Malleability in Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*,” *Theory and Practice in the Eighteenth Century: Writing between Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Alexander Dick and Christina Lupton (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 51–68.

<sup>130</sup> Shaftesbury, “*The Moralists*,” 109.

a setting Sun, had Charms in abundance.”<sup>131</sup> Philocles finds a tension in the admiration that Palemon expresses for nature and the pessimism he expresses about human beings:

“For now you began to talk with much Satisfaction of natural Things, and of all Orders of Beautys, MAN only excepted. Never did I hear a finer Description than you have made of the Order of the heavenly Luminarys, the Circle of the Planets, and their attendant *Satellites*. And you, who wou’d allow nothing to those fair earthly Luminarys in the Circles which just now we mov’d in.”<sup>132</sup>

Philocles then accuses Palemon of being a “*Man-hater*.”<sup>133</sup> Next to those perfections of the universe, Palemon sees nothing of worth in human beings; and yet, as Philocles notes, human beings are a part of this nature that Palemon is so quick to admire. He locates Palemon’s problem in his penchant for extremes and his adversity to doubt: “there is a certain way of Questioning and Doubting, which no-way suites the Genius of our Age. Men love to take party instantly. They can’t bear being kept in suspense. The Examination torments ‘em. They want to be rid of it, upon the easiest terms.”<sup>134</sup> The desire for solutions lead people to embrace simplistic views that promise access to the secrets of nature: “Every Sect has a *Recipe*. When you know it, you are Master of Nature; you solve all her *Phaenomena*: you see all her Designs, and can account for all her Operations...at least one wou’d imagine the Partizans of each modern Sect had this

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<sup>131</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 110.

<sup>132</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 112.

<sup>133</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 112.

<sup>134</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 107.

Conceit.”<sup>135</sup> Philocles suggests that Palemon take a note from the skeptical school, which stresses the importance of doubt and dialogue, and rejects dogmatism.

Philocles suggests that Palemon cultivate a “*Philosophical Enthusiasm*.”<sup>136</sup> In “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” Shaftesbury discusses the enthusiasm that he considers detrimental to philosophy and polite society. Human beings have a tendency to attach themselves to ideas. What distinguishes a good expression of this tendency from a bad one depends on whether that to which is appealed is either true or false.<sup>137</sup> The problem comes in distinguishing between truth and falsity. The solution that Shaftesbury offers is what he calls the “*Test of Ridicule*.”<sup>138</sup> For any idea we hold, we should be open to discussing it with our fellows and even to receiving a polite jabbing from them as well. He thinks that if we apply this test, the true will be distinguished from the false, since true and beautiful things are not easily ridiculed, while those associated with dogmatism and zealotry will be natural objects of ridicule. Here, Shaftesbury draws on the notion of “wit” to explicate what it means to engage in this good-natured “raillery.”<sup>139</sup> He thinks that the only way to contain enthusiasm is to have an open space for dialogue in which “We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 108.

<sup>136</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 119.

<sup>137</sup> Shaftesbury’s treatment of enthusiasm overlaps with that given by Henry More in his *Enthusiasms Triumphatus; or a Brief Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cures of Enthusiasm* (1656), a work of which Shaftesbury was fond. However, More is mainly concerned with giving a refutation of false enthusiasm, as opposed to providing the reader with a form of enthusiasm to which they ought to aspire. A similar strategy is taken by Locke in *Essay IV.xix*.

<sup>138</sup> Shaftesbury, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” *Characteristicks*, vol. 1, 8.

<sup>139</sup> Shaftesbury, “Enthusiasm,” 13.

<sup>140</sup> Shaftesbury, “Sensus Communis; An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour,” *Characteristicks*, vol. 1, 42.

Open conversation is important for curing what is most dangerous about the vulgar form of enthusiasm: its affective component. Ill-manners and melancholy are naturally part of enthusiasm and conversation undercuts these elements by modeling a politeness that is indicative of civil friendship. Shaftesbury claims that ridicule cultivates a sense of “good humour,” that is crucial for feeling the force of what he calls “*true Religion*.”<sup>141</sup> It does this by combatting violent emotions that are impediments to recognizing truths about the world. As Shaftesbury points out “we can never be fit to contemplate any thing above us, when we are in no condition to look into ourselves, and calmly examine the Temper of our own Mind and Passions.”<sup>142</sup> This returns us to Philocles’ concerns about Palemon, who had become as misanthrope; rigid in his principles and unwilling to engage in dialogue with Philocles, resorting instead to a kind of “Rant[ing].”<sup>143</sup> In “The Moralists,” Philocles outlines the “philosophical enthusiasm” that Theocles convinced him to adopt. Central to this enthusiasm is a cheerfulness based in an understanding of the system of nature and a friendship with one’s fellow beings.<sup>144</sup>

Philocles sketches the moral system taught to him by Theocles. Virtue is based in love, which is modeled on the experience of beauty.<sup>145</sup> One begins by appreciating objects in their particularity, coming to view them as an expression of a more fundamental beauty, where these objects as joined in a harmonious system from which

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<sup>141</sup> Shaftesbury, “Enthusiasm,” 15.

<sup>142</sup> Shaftesbury, “Enthusiasm,” 21.

<sup>143</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 110.

<sup>144</sup> The topic of cheerfulness in Shaftesbury’s writings remains underexplored. For an illuminating discussion of this subject, see: Lydia Amir, *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard* (Albany, NY: Suny Press), 11-88.

<sup>145</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 120. See: Leslie Brown, “The Idea of Life as a Work of Art in Scottish Enlightenment Discourse,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 24 (1995): 51–67.

their beauty is derived.<sup>146</sup> All the while, one feels a greater appreciation for the system and its constituent parts. This process works similarly with love. Love is an emotion directed selectively at those closest to us. As we come to understand the manner in which all human beings rely on one another, our scope of concern naturally extends beyond our own community to “*the Good of Mankind.*”<sup>147</sup> Disinterested love is the motivational underpinning of all virtuous conduct, according to Shaftesbury. There is no need for external rewards and punishments on this view. For him, one need only have a proper comprehension of nature, and one’s place in it, and love will follow.

To understand more about what is meant by “love” and how it connects to enthusiasm, we need to look a bit later in the dialogue, when Philocles is recounting a conversation between himself and Theocles. At this point, Philocles has yet to undergo his enthusiastic transition – he is still defending the view that “our real *Good* is PLEASURE.”<sup>148</sup> Philocles argues that there is a plurality of goods since there are endless sources of pleasure for individuals based on their dispositions. Theocles eventually brings Philocles around to the idea that naïve hedonism does not support his pluralism, as there is widespread agreement on what people find pleasing; and further, convergence on those activities that people find *most* pleasurable. Theocles, by seeking a truce, presses

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<sup>146</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 121.

<sup>147</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 121. As we become aware of the natural hierarchy in the system of nature, Shaftesbury claims that we begin to perceive the subordination of certain spheres of being to others as necessary: “Thus in the several Orders of terrestrial Forms, a *Resignation* is requir’d, a Sacrifice and mutual yielding of Natures one to another. The Vegetables by their Death sustain the Animals: and Animal Bodys dissolv’d, enrich the Earth and raise again the vegetable World. The numerous Insects are reduc’d by the superior Kinds of Birds and Beasts: and these again are check’d by Man; who in his turn submits to other Natures, and resigns his Form a Sacrifice in common to the rest of Things...all inferior Natures by subjected to *the superior Nature* of the World!” (“The Moralists,” 121-122).

<sup>148</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 128.

Philocles to admit that friendship is most pleasing: “Answer me, PHILOCLES, you who are such a Judge of *Beauty*, and have so good a *Taste* of Pleasure; is there anything you admire, so fair as *Friendship*, or any thing so charming as a *generous Action*?”<sup>149</sup> While he accepts this position, Theocles asks him to imagine “if all Life were in reality but one continu’d Friendship, and cou’d be made in such intire Act? Here surely wou’d be that *fix’d* and *constant* GOOD you sought.”<sup>150</sup>

Philocles refers to Theocles’ proposition as a “*Chimera*,” saying “I can conceive but very faintly how this high Strain of Friendship can be so manag’d as to fill a *Life*.”<sup>151</sup> For Philocles, an expression of love is always directed at some individual, not at humanity as a whole. We also generally experience love, for very few people (e.g., *some* of our family, friends, and partners). And this is no mistake. Love commits us to undertaking onerous acts, and the needs of the beloved can only be fulfilled by attending to them in their particularity. It is therefore impossible to satisfy the conditions required to properly say that *one loves everyone*. Theocles responds that Philocles’ skepticism about the ability to experience universal love derives from a failure to appreciate the extent of our *capacity* to love others, a failure which proceeds from a pessimistic view of human nature:

“Can you then out of *Good-breeding* merely, and from a Temper natural to you, rejoice to shew Civility, Courteousness, Obligingness, seek Objects of  
  
Compassion, and be pleas’d with every Occurrence where you have power to do

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<sup>149</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 135.

<sup>150</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 135.

<sup>151</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 135.

some service even to People unknown?...in the case of Strangers here at home; to help, assist, relieve all who require it in the most hospitable, kind, and friendly manner?...O PHILOCLES! how little do you know the Extent and Power of *Good-nature*, and to what an heroic pitch a Soul may rise, which knows the thorow Force of it; and distributing it rightly, frames in itself-an equal, just, and universal friendship.”<sup>152</sup>

Theocles denies that it is impossible for human beings to cultivate love for humanity. We might be inclined to agree with Philocles that this love is “too metaphysical an Object for me,” since “I cou’d love nothing of which I had not some sensible material Image.”<sup>153</sup>

*The Two Standpoints: Humanity and the Universe*

At this point, one might just get off the train. If Shaftesbury argues, by way of Theocles, that universal love is both the content of virtue and a sufficient motive to act morally, then his position is implausible. Even if we accept the former aspect of the view, how could such a love be experienced by human beings, who are fickle, partial creatures? The tension in Shaftesbury’s writings between the content of virtue and our motivational capacities is considered by Michael Gill.<sup>154</sup> While I think Gill is right about the tension, I do not find it to be the most worrying aspect of Shaftesbury’s view. The implausibility of both generating “universal love” by way of contemplating the system of nature and

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<sup>152</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 137.

<sup>153</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 137.

<sup>154</sup> Gill, “Love of Humanity.”

having this love motivate our conduct is manifest.<sup>155</sup> The deeper problem comes when we admit the possibility of cultivating universal love. I claim that *even if* we could develop such a love, doing so would be against our better judgment, and would, in fact, undermine our aim to base an ethics in our nature as sensitive, rational, and sociable beings.

One can either interact with humans in their particularity or as constituents of a system of nature, one cannot do both simultaneously. For example, when we love our friend, we do so in their particularity, which informs how we interact with and do good by them. Of course our friend shares much with their fellow beings, and we might appeal to this common humanity to chastise another for harming them, but our friend's status as a human being is not often on our minds when considering their value, which outstrips these considerations. To view our friend simply as a human being is to treat them from a perspective that obscures their particularity. Since love is the basis of virtue for Shaftesbury, and the source of moral motivation, to have love for our fellow beings is to love them in their universality. When we love our friend virtuously, we recognize their also occupying a place in the system of nature. To the extent that I have the proper appreciation for this system, I can love my friend as one of its expressions.

Consider the following exchange between Philocles and Theocles. Theocles claims that the requirement of love be "sensible" is unjustified since Philocles loved Palemon prior to meeting him: "I know that you admir'd and lov'd a Friend long ere you

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<sup>155</sup> One could argue that this tension only arises for Shaftesbury if you assume a broadly Lockean account of moral motivation. Perhaps Shaftesbury is a Platonist, whereby the *idea* of universal love is motivating for someone rightly positioned despite never producing a *feeling* in them. I sidestep these concerns by shifting my criticism to Shaftesbury's account of the content of virtue.

knew his Person. Or was it PALEMON's Character of no force, when it engag'd you in that long Correspondence which preceded your *late* personal Acquaintance?"<sup>156</sup> Philocles admits that he did in fact love Palemon but "was forc'd to form a kind of material Object, and had always such a certain Image of him, ready-drawn, in my Mind, whenever I thought of him."<sup>157</sup> For Philocles' admiration of Palemon's to rise to the level of love, he had to form an image of Palemon to which the admiration was directed. Theocles argues that this point can be extended to admirable people in history (e.g., "*the People of old Rome*") and even mankind.<sup>158</sup> One need only form an image of "the Romans" or of "humanity" to cultivate this love. But there is a difference between Philocles loving Palemon, or the "Roman people," or humanity.

There is still the problem of "forming an image" of humanity. How does Philocles suggest we do so? We only form an image of humanity *indirectly*; we first come to view nature as a unified whole; we then recognize that a "principle of union" is responsible for the constituent parts of nature hanging together; after which we form an image of this unifying principle to which our admiration and love is directed.<sup>159</sup> Insofar as human beings are components of nature, they are indirect objects of admiration and love. Theocles' choice image for the unifying principle of nature is a divine, benevolent being.<sup>160</sup> For Shaftesbury, enthusiasm is an ecstatic appreciation of and devotion to an object; what makes it "reasonable" is that it proceeds from a proper understanding of its

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<sup>156</sup> Shaftesbury, "The Moralists," 137-138.

<sup>157</sup> Shaftesbury, "The Moralists," 138.

<sup>158</sup> Shaftesbury, "The Moralists," 138.

<sup>159</sup> Shaftesbury, "The Moralists," 161.

<sup>160</sup> Shaftesbury, "The Moralists," 163

object. If one has the correct understanding of nature (i.e., a teleologically-structured system) then one's ecstatic appreciation of nature is thereby reasonable. This brand of enthusiasm is expressed by Theocles throughout "The Moralists," in his poetic descriptions of various aspects of nature.<sup>161</sup>

When one is hiking the White Mountains, it is easy to feel a degree of ecstasy directed at nature as a whole. We might even say that one's ecstatic appreciation for nature is praiseworthy, as it leads us to have a better sense of our own dependence and encourages modesty and compassion towards other beings. However, this point makes less sense when applied to humans. The enthusiasm presented by Theocles proceeds from a judgment of nature's perfection; a similar attitude would be unwarranted in the case of human beings, since it is directed at human beings *qua* constituents of a perfectly ordered system of nature. There are two problems, one of which concerns how Shaftesbury views the idea of perfection. Postlapsarian human beings are neither perfect nor harmonious – to attribute perfection to them is to falsify their nature. Consider the Lockean problem of diversity, of which Shaftesbury is equally concerned.<sup>162</sup> People are found everywhere to hold different beliefs, attitudes, commitments, and these differences bring them into conflict with one another. To the extent that we can find ways to help this situation, the solutions are hardly perfect and produce something far less than harmony.

One option, proposed by Hutcheson, is to argue that the diversity and conflict to which human beings are prone is not part of their nature, but external to it in some

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<sup>161</sup> See also: Patrick Müller, "Dwell with honesty & beauty & order"; Andrea Gaitti, "Stoic Influences on Shaftesbury's Theory of Beauty," *New Ages, New Opinions*, 61–76.

<sup>162</sup> Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson*.

fashion.<sup>163</sup> Shaftesbury holds a similar view. Human beings are perfect insofar as they are components of a perfect system; they are good to the extent that they work to ensure that it remains harmonious. In this way, as Theocles notes, the beauty and good that one attributes to trees and oceans is equivalent to the virtue we discuss in moral matters. The only difference between trees and human beings is that we have a choice in how we play a part in the system. It is notable that the enthusiasm we get in “The Moralists” consists of pronouncements about nature’s beauty. And yet, after one such pronouncement, Theocles notes that “we had better leave these unsociable Places, whither out Fancy has transported us, and return to our-selves here again, on our more conversable Woods, and temperate Climates.”<sup>164</sup> This comment signals a potential tension between the rapturous appreciation of nature and the demands of sociability.

The second problem with viewing one’s fellows as constituents of nature is that one attitudes towards them is improperly detached. While a detached attitude may be useful for correcting our violent passions and malicious tendencies, it is hardly conducive to love or fellow-feeling. Beyond making our friends and family feel unappreciated, this austere concern for nature drives a wedge between ourselves and others. Without the bond of affection, concerns of polite society begin to appear as little more than a two-

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<sup>163</sup> Francis Hutcheson, “Inaugural Lecture On the Social Nature of Man,” *Francis Hutcheson: Two Texts on Human Nature*, ed. Thomas Mautner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141-4

<sup>164</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 219. There’s an interesting exchange between Theocles and Philocles about the former talking with wood-nymphs (191-196). Theocles claims that it is amongst the wood-nymphs that one comes into contact with the “*sovereign Genius*” (193), or caretaker of the world. While one may be tempted to skip over these sections of the text—they are rather tedious, after all—these passages tell us much about the “reasonable enthusiasm” Shaftesbury thinks we ought to cultivate. Delving into this topic further would, however, take me too far afield of the chapter’s aim.

penny stake. The greater distance we put between ourselves and others, the more at home we feel in those “unsociable places” of which Theocles speaks. Eventually, we might be led into thinking that nature requires us to act in unsociable ways or even to deliberately undercut our connections to other people: connections forged by love and friendship (more on this in Chapter 3). Being virtuous, in this sense of the term, seems to be at odds with Shaftesbury’s intention to provide us with a moral theory based in our nature as sociable beings. At best, Shaftesbury leaves us with a fractured identity.

For Theocles, possessing “reasonable enthusiasm” gives us “Freedom from our Passions and low Interests, that we are reconcil’d to the goodly *Order* of the Universe; that we harmonize with *Nature*; and live in Friendship both with GOD and MAN.”<sup>165</sup> We are oriented towards the its conservation and friendship with our fellow beings. However, our “Passions and low Interests” (our selfish, self-deceptive, and factionalist tendencies) get in the way of our ability to have these natural relations towards others; by developing an appreciation of nature’s perfection, we decrease the extent to which these less savory motives have sway over our conduct. We can see how Shaftesbury’s view is properly distinguished from Locke’s or Cockburn’s. For them, we are naturally possessed of selfish, factionalist dispositions that can only be counteracted by way of external rewards or punishments, while Shaftesbury claims that virtue requires that one understand nature and one’s place in it; the love that proceeds from this understanding will be sufficient for us to pursue the happiness of others and to render our character beautiful in their eyes.

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<sup>165</sup> Shaftesbury, “The Moralists,” 242.

*The Sociable Stoic?*

There are two pictures of virtue that emerge here: one that is sociable, and grounded in a love for our fellow beings; the other, which is more Stoic, and grounded in our enthusiastic admiration of nature's system. Shaftesbury encourages the sociable interpretation of virtue throughout his writings. In the "Preface" to Whichcote's sermons, he uses parental affection and the affection that community members have for one another to flesh out what it means to be pious.<sup>166</sup> Further, in "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" and "Sensus Communis," he is concerned with the defense of civil liberty, hoping that harmful ideologies (e.g., false religion) will be triumphed over through the cultivation of cheerful sociability brought about by the spirit of free and open inquiry.<sup>167</sup> In "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," Shaftesbury uses the terms "Tenderness, Love, Sociableness, Compassion" in describing moral attitudes and in the "The Moralists," Theocles uses "friendship" to illustrate the relation that nature obliges us to cultivate with those around us.<sup>168</sup>

Still, Shaftesbury's Stoicism is often lurking behind his pronouncements of sociability. Consider the following from Shaftesbury's "Philosophical Regimen," where he is discussing that in which the highest degree of happiness consists:

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<sup>166</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," vii.

<sup>167</sup> For more on the political aspects and implications of Shaftesbury's thought, see: Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 91-101 123-153; Patrick Müller, "Hobbes, Locke and the Consequences: Shaftesbury's Moral Sense and Political Agitation in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 37 (2014) 315-330; Angela Taraborelli, "The Cosmopolitanism of Lord Shaftesbury," *New Ages, New opinions*, 185-200.

<sup>168</sup> Shaftesbury, "An Inquiry," 55.

“[In] liv[ing] disinterested and unconcerned, as being loose from all those ties and little mean regards which make us to depend so much on others...In the whole of life, he who is secure as to the great events and is concerned but for one thing (which if he will himself he need not miss), he, and he alone, is truly free; and with respect to things within, is becoming beautiful.”<sup>169</sup>

This theme comes up throughout the “Regimen.” He decries any concern for reputation, and stresses that seeking “*a character in the world*” is contrary to the cultivation of “*real character*”.<sup>170</sup> In managing one’s character, Shaftesbury claims that we should pay little mind to others: “that the world be either more or less virtuous is nothing to my affection or will, and therefore nothing to my good.”<sup>171</sup> He notes that *if* the aim of virtue were to impact the good of others, we would be “disturbed and afflicted with ill-success,” rendering “virtue its own torment and not its own reward.”<sup>172</sup> Shaftesbury claims that we have achieved the proper attitude regarding others “when thou no longer seekest for anything they seek, when thou no longer want anything from them...it is then only that thou canst truly love them, when thou expectest neither thy good nor ill from them.”<sup>173</sup> How do we consider these comments alongside Shaftesbury’s focus on sociability?

Passages like the one I have just quoted remind us that Stoicism runs deep in Shaftesbury’s thought. Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius are the figures most referenced in

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<sup>169</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 180.

<sup>170</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 191.

<sup>171</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 74.

<sup>172</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 75.

<sup>173</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 2.

the “Regimen.” The Stoics held that one should “act in accordance with one’s nature.”<sup>174</sup> Of course, much turns on how *one’s nature* is defined. The Stoics conceive of human beings as sensitive, social, and rational creatures: our propensity to feel pain allows us to successfully move about in the world, our sociability binds us to our fellow creatures through affection, and reason allows us to understand our place in the system of nature and to guide our conduct in light of what it requires of us.<sup>175</sup> The Stoics claim that our sociable affections are natural and that they oblige us to act in certain ways, but that they should be overridden in the service of pursuing those ends set by nature as a whole.<sup>176</sup> Through reason we gain access to nature’s intentions, but to what extent are our premonitions clouded by error?<sup>177</sup> How can I know that nature is telling me to suppress the affection I have for my child with Tay-Sachs disease, in light of the fact that he will surely die and that my emotional energy is best spent elsewhere?

The problem of knowing *when* to follow *which* aspects of one’s nature is present throughout Stoic thought and it plagues Shaftesbury as well. In the “Regimen,” he

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<sup>174</sup> See: F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 28-67; Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 105-126, 205-215; Malcom Schofield, “Stoic Ethics,” *Cambridge Companion to Stoicism*, ed. Brad Inwood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233-256; John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 107-34.

<sup>175</sup> For more on the Stoic conception of human nature and the nature of the passions, see: Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 18-41; Tad Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology,” *Cambridge Companion to Stoicism*, 257-294; Steven K. Strange, “The Stoics on the Voluntariness of the Passions,” *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Steven K Strange and Jack Zupko (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32-51.

<sup>176</sup> For more on the conflict between these two sets of concerns, see: Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 52-59; A.A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 142-175, 180-204; Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology.”

<sup>177</sup> On the danger of false impressions, and the attempt to guard against them, see: Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 182-215; Long, *Epictetus*, 207-229; R.J. Hankinson, “Stoic Epistemology,” *Cambridge Companion to Stoicism*, 59-82; Sellars, *Stoicism*, 68-74.

defines “natural affection” as that pertaining to a “rational creature, capable of knowing nature and of considering the good and interest of the whole.”<sup>178</sup> Once one comes to grips with the interest of all beings, “all other affections [are] to be subdued” (read: the “other affections” being those associated with sociability). Shaftesbury continues, “this is the province of the truly wise man...to learn how to submit all of his affections to the rule and government of the whole; how to accompany with his whole mind that supreme and perfect mind and reason of the universe.”<sup>179</sup> By learning to use nature as a guide, one separates oneself from the sensitive and sociable parts of one’s nature, and learns to embrace that divine aspect of oneself: reason. As Shaftesbury points out:

“If the interest of nature call, I forsake everything else and follow nature...without complain. In what way, therefore, shall I love my children or relations? As strong and affectionately as is possible...but so as that nature may be accused; so as that, whatever happens, I may still adhere to nature and accept and embrace whatsoever nature send. This is the foundation. This is all. Consider this, and it will be easy to find the true measure of all affection, and what discipline and rules must be followed...to affect as becomes a rational creature.”<sup>180</sup>

One is obliged to care for and promote the good of one’s children, loved ones, friends, colleagues, etc., but only to the extent that nature does not call one to pursue higher aims. It is unclear when one is called to forgo these more particular obligations because, as

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<sup>178</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 4.

<sup>179</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 6.

<sup>180</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 11.

Shaftesbury notes, they are conditioned on the “happiness, perfection, and establishment of the whole.”<sup>181</sup> Should one promote the good of our relations by minding the stability of the whole? Should we “love thy friends, relations, companions, but thy country more”?<sup>182</sup> Or should we love our relations wholeheartedly, only choosing to forgo this love in instances where continuing to do so would lead us to do violence to our nature?<sup>183</sup>

Even in “An Inquiry,” Shaftesbury claims that our different sources of partiality – “parental Kindness...Love of Fellowship and Company, Compassions, mutual Succour” – are “as *proper* and *natural* to him, as it is to any Organ, Part or Member of an Animal-Body, or mere Vegetable, to work in its known Course, and regular way of Growth.”<sup>184</sup> Still, virtue consists in having “his Inclinations and Affections, his Dispositions of Mind and Temper, suitable, and agreeing with the Good of his *Kind*, or of that *System* in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a PART.”<sup>185</sup> While the affections we feel towards those closest to us are natural, they are *less* natural than those we have for humanity. Shaftesbury begins “An Inquiry” by giving a teleological account of humans, where their various body parts and affections consort for the purposes of achieving some higher end.<sup>186</sup> Shaftesbury then goes on to examine the ways in which human beings are constituents of the human species, the system of the earth, the planetary system, and the system of the universe. Our love for our friend and family are important, but their

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<sup>181</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 12.

<sup>182</sup> Shaftesbury, *Life*, 11.

<sup>183</sup> See: Patrick Müller “Shaftesbury’s Philosophical Poetics,” *New Ages, New Opinions*, 239-260; Lori Branch, “Reading Shaftesbury’s Private Writings,” *New Ages, New Opinions*, 261-276; Christian Maurer and Laurent Jaffro, “Reading Shaftesbury’s Pathologia: An Illustration and Defence of the Stoic Account of the Emotions,” *History of European Ideas* 39 (2013): 207-220

<sup>184</sup> Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry,” 45.

<sup>185</sup> Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry,” 45.

<sup>186</sup> Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry,” 10.

significance is parasitic on the system of nature. It follows that, for Shaftesbury, we should only tend to these narrower considerations for the purposes of maintaining the stability of the whole, never losing sight of that in which true virtue consists.

Shaftesbury leaves us with this tension between the standpoint of humanity, which prioritizes the relations of polite society; and the universe, which shifts our focus away from these concerns in an attempt to adopt the perspective that God takes on creation. While Shaftesbury stakes his concerns with those of the universe, his picture of the moral life is often different. Shaftesbury never confronts that tension. Perhaps he found the tension irresolvable; that insofar as we are social and rational beings – bonded to our fellows through affection, yet driven to look beyond human concerns – we are pulled in two directions when considering how best to live. In the subsequent chapters of the dissertation, I explore two attempts to solve this tension. Next I examine how the tension between the standpoints of humanity and of the universe play out in Hutcheson’s writings, and I tie this tension back to my discussion of the problem of partiality.

### **Francis Hutcheson and the Problem of Partiality**

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) is the first major figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>187</sup> Raised in Ireland, Hutcheson attended the University of Glasgow from 1711-1716, where he studied theology. After completing his studies, Hutcheson returned

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<sup>187</sup> For more on the life and thought of Hutcheson, see: William Robert Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* [1900] (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); Daniel Carey, “Francis Hutcheson’s Philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment: Reception, Reputation, and Legacy,” *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century, Volume 1: Morals, Politics, Art, Religion*, ed. Aaron Garrett and James A. Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 36-76.

to Ireland to found an academy in Dublin. There he became acquainted with Robert Molesworth, a close friend and parliamentary ally of Shaftesbury, and the center of the Dublin-based philosophical group known as the “Molesworth circle.”<sup>188</sup> Through Molesworth, Hutcheson came to be acquainted with Shaftesbury’s work. It was also during this time, from 1716-1728, that Hutcheson published the two works for which he is most remembered, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustration on the Moral Sense* (1728). Hutcheson accepted a position as chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow in 1729, after the death of Gershom Carmichael left the seat vacant. His inaugural address to the university, “On the Social Nature of Man” (1730), was a defiant attempt to undercut the conservative Presbyterianism that held sway over much of Scotland at the time. As many have noted, Hutcheson’s project is Shaftesburian in that he attempts to construct an ethics based in our sociable affections.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> For Hutcheson’s connection to the Molesworth circle, see: M.A. Stewart, “John Smith and the Molesworth Circle,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 2 (1987): 89-102.

<sup>189</sup> The original title of Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry* was *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; In Two Treatises. In which the Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain’d and Defended, against the Author of the Fable of the Bees: and the Ideas of Moral Good and Evil are establish’d, according to the Sentiments of Antient Moralists. With an Attempt to introduce a Mathematical Calculation in Subjects of Morality* (1725). He shortened the title, and dropped the references to Shaftesbury and Mandeville, in the second edition. One of the major disagreements between Shaftesbury and Hutcheson concerns their metaethics. Shaftesbury seems to be a moral realist, insofar as he maintains that the content of morality is determined by the system of nature, while Hutcheson does *not* appear to be a moral realist, insofar as he claims that the content of morality is determined by our “moral sense.” For more on Shaftesbury’s connection to moral realism, see: Terence Irwin, “Shaftesbury’s place in the history of moral realism,” *Philosophical Studies* 182 (2015): 865–882. There is some controversy about the status of Hutcheson’s metaethics. On this, see: David Fate Norton, “Hutcheson and Moral Realism,” *Journal of History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 397-418; Kenneth Winkler, “Hutcheson Alleged Realism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 179-194; Kenneth Winkler, “Hutcheson and Hume on the Color of Virtue,” *Hume Studies* 22.1 (1996): 3-22.

*Moral Goodness and the Motive(s) to Virtue*

There is much to say about Hutcheson's writings. I focus here on how his attempt to manage the tension between the standpoints of humanity and the universe give rise to the problem of partiality. Hutcheson follows Shaftesbury in holding that "all virtue is allowed to consist in affections of love toward the Deity, and our fellow creatures, and in action suitable to those affections."<sup>190</sup> For him, the appeal to self-interest in the case of virtue is mistaken on two fronts. First, self-interest is insufficient to allow for love: "how ridiculous would it be to attempt, by all the rewards or threatenings in the world, to make one love a person whom one apprehended to be cruel, selfish, morose or ungrateful."<sup>191</sup> Second, this view is self-fulfilling. We are partial, fickle creatures; by accepting a theory according to which virtue is made possible only through external sanctions, we play into these unsavory aspects of our nature.<sup>192</sup> Hutcheson begins his advertisement to *An Inquiry* with the following quote from Horace: "For the wolf is wary and dreads the pit, the hawk the suspect snare, the pike the covered hook. The good hate vice because they love virtue, but you will avoid crime only for fear of punishment. You are prepared to commit sacrilege if you believe you can get away with it."<sup>193</sup>

For Hutcheson, we make attributions of moral goodness on account of our "moral sense," a basic sensory faculty that all human beings possess innately. He compares it to our "sense of beauty," claiming that we are naturally determined to take pleasure in

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<sup>190</sup> Francis Hutcheson, "Reflections on the Common Systems of Morality," *Two Texts*, 97.

<sup>191</sup> Hutcheson, "Reflections," *Two Texts*, 98.

<sup>192</sup> As Hutcheson notes, "we should find self-love apt to grow too strong by bad habits" ("Reflections," 101).

<sup>193</sup> Hutcheson, "Reflections," *Two Texts*, 96 n.4.

objects that show uniformity amidst variety (i.e., “form”).<sup>194</sup> In the same manner, Hutcheson argues that we are naturally determined to approve of conduct produced by certain motives and to admire the individuals who possess these motives, regardless of the impact their actions have on our self-interest.<sup>195</sup> Importantly, while the concept of moral goodness refers to admirable motives, Hutcheson defines these motives as “some Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation.”<sup>196</sup> The motive that produces an action is not separate but is “some Quality” in it, the possession of which renders the action moral. We gain access to the admirability of the motives by attending to the actions in which they inhere, which our moral sense allows us to do – without the moral sense, we could conceive of the actions as naturally good (i.e., advantageous) but not as morally good.<sup>197</sup>

Consider a cash-strapped college student who befriends an older, wealthy individual in hopes that the latter will ease some of their financial burdens. Let us say that the college student’s plan goes as expected – their company brings new meaning to the older individual’s life and the latter, in turn, helps the student pay some of their bills. There is *natural* goodness being produced by this exchange but there is no sense in which we view their conduct as admirable. But it is one thing to recognize an action as virtuous and another to be motivated to act virtuously. Locke and Cockburn see the gap between *what makes an action good* and *what it takes for this judgment to motivate us to act as*

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<sup>194</sup> Francis Hutcheson, “An Inquiry into Virtue or Moral Good,” *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008) 28-9.

<sup>195</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 89.

<sup>196</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 85.

<sup>197</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 89.

large. Hutcheson is more optimistic, claiming that admirable motives play a role in us promoting happiness, chief among them being honor, shame, benevolence, and piety. Because of the number of sources of virtuous at our disposal, Hutcheson does not see the gap between our judgments of goodness and our ability to act on them as large<sup>198</sup>

But the problem comes when we look more closely at Hutcheson's account.

Honor and shame are unstable sources of virtue, while the most concrete experiences of benevolence (parental affection) are ineliminably exclusive and particular. Neither of these motives seem especially well suited to support a motivationally efficacious desire for the general happiness. Hutcheson appears to end up in the same place as Shaftesbury, having to argue that we possess an unlikely form of love for humanity. Of course, this is an even larger problem for Hutcheson, as he cannot appeal to the view that moral ideas are intrinsically motivating. To the extent that Hutcheson recognizes this as a problem he appeals instead to piety and the importance of the love of God to account for virtuous conduct. While he is able to account for the motivational component of virtue, however, Hutcheson shifts the focus of concern away from human beings to God and reproduces the two-standpoint problem that we initially encountered in Shaftesbury. Before discussing piety, it is important to see how Hutcheson comes to rely on these ideas by seeing how honor, shame, and benevolence fall short of securing virtue.

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<sup>198</sup> For more on Hutcheson's account of moral motivation, see: Darwall, *British Moralists*, 207-243, Gill, *British Moralists*, 141-167, and John D. Bishop, "Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57.2 (1996): 277-295; Simon Grote, "Hutcheson's Divergence from Shaftesbury," *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 4.2 (2006): 159-172; Dale Dorsey, "Hutcheson's Deceptive Hedonism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48.4 (2010): 445-467.

Hutcheson is ambivalent about honor and shame. He observes that we all “feel the Desire of the *good Opinions* of others, and Aversion to their *Censures* or *Condemnation*.”<sup>199</sup> Our experience of honor and shame is predicated on our possessing a moral sense: “Now were there no moral Sense...sub-jected to the uneasiness of Shame; or how it could ever happen, that a Man, who is secure from Punishment for any Action, should ever be uneasy at its being known to all the World.”<sup>200</sup> He concludes that the pleasures of honor are selfish but that the idea itself “presupposes a Sense of something amiable besides Advantage...a Sense of Excellence in a publick Spirit.”<sup>201</sup> Honor or shame presuppose some external standard that one is either living up to or failing to meet.<sup>202</sup> Hutcheson considers the phenomenon of false honor (i.e., merely *appearing* virtuous to others) but stresses that the pleasure received from it is too unstable to be fully enjoyed.<sup>203</sup> Nevertheless, the desire for honor is not enough to secure approval in the eyes of others, though it is crucial for regulating our own conduct in light of the moral sense. As Hutcheson notes, “if we do not discern a benevolent Intention in the Application [of

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<sup>199</sup> Hutcheson, “An Essay,” 78.

<sup>200</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 151.

<sup>201</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 153. Cf. Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria, with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, ed. Luigi Turco (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 42.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 37-39. Hutcheson, “An Essay,” 101. Cf. Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 42-43. Here he notes that “there’s a natural sense {of honour and fame}, founded indeed upon our moral sense, or presupposing it, but distinct from it and all other senses, seems manifest from that natural <motion of the soul that is called shame or> modesty, which discovers itself by the very countenance in blushing; which nature has plainly designed as a guardian not only to moral virtue, but to all decency in our whole deportment, and a watchful check upon all the motions of the lower appetites.”

<sup>203</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 156. Cf. Hutcheson, “An Essay,” 126; Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 62.

an action]...they shall never meet with those endearing Sentiments of Esteem and Love, which our nature determines us to appropriate to Benevolence, or Virtue.”<sup>204</sup>

The moral sense approves of conduct on the basis of it proceeding from admirable motives, though the “true spring of virtue” lies in benevolence.<sup>205</sup> The most concrete form of benevolence is the affection that parents have for their children: “an honest Farmer will tell you, that he studies the Preservation and Happiness of his Children, and loves them without any design to himself.”<sup>206</sup> This form of natural affection is also found in familial relations more generally. More important for Hutcheson are what he refers to as the “publick affections,” which consist of “a bond of benevolence” that extend beyond family life.<sup>207</sup> Though he is not clear about the process by which our affections extend beyond their natural sphere of influence, Hutcheson thinks it is obvious that we *do* possess a degree of disinterested concern for people, including our “neighbours,” “acquaintance[s],” those with whom we are “bound by an intercourse of mutual offices,” and even “all our Countrymen.”<sup>208</sup> He admits that the further our benevolence extends, the less it exercises influence over our minds, but claims that benevolence can nevertheless be “extended to Mankind, where there is no interfering Interest, which from Self-Love may obstruct it.”<sup>209</sup> Our chief duty is to strengthen these bonds of benevolence by distancing ourselves from the selfish and factionalist tendencies of our nature.

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<sup>204</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 155.

<sup>205</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 112.

<sup>206</sup> Hutcheson, “An Inquiry,” 112. Cf. 148-9; Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 81.

<sup>207</sup> Hutcheson, “An Inquiry,” 114. Cf. Hutcheson, “An Essay,” 120-23; Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 82.

<sup>208</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 81.

<sup>209</sup> Hutcheson “An Inquiry,” 114.

*Piety and Love of God*

Piety helps decrease these unseemly aspects of our nature. Hutcheson does not discuss piety in his earlier writings but it crops up in *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (1747), when he examines our duties to God. Here, Hutcheson notes that piety consists in “just opinions...concerning God, and then in...worship suited to them.”<sup>210</sup> His primary concern is with the affection we are meant to feel on account of contemplating God’s “divine Goodness and moral Perfection.”<sup>211</sup> The moral sense allows us to distinguish that which is good from that which is merely advantageous; however, as imperfect creatures, we are unreliable when it comes to guiding our conduct in light of what is good.<sup>212</sup> In reflecting on our moral sense, we are “lead...[back] to the Deity: as they are derived from him, they powerfully draw us back to him again.”<sup>213</sup> Hutcheson claims there is “a constant endeavor to imitate the Deity, and cultivate in ourselves all such affection as make us resemble him; with a steady purposes of exerting all our powers in acting well that part which God and nature has assigned us.”<sup>214</sup>

Let us bring together some of these themes: Hutcheson supposes the existence of a perfect Deity who is responsible for all creation. This Deity has placed in us a “moral sense,” which allows us to conceive of conduct as not only advantageous and disadvantageous but as admirable or deplorable. We recognize the authority of this moral sense, as it connects us to the Deity; therefore we seek to guide our conduct in

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<sup>210</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 76.

<sup>211</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 77.

<sup>212</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 78.

<sup>213</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 78.

<sup>214</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 77.

accordance with that of which it approves. Nevertheless, we are aware of our tendency to fall short of virtue and feel shame on account of doing so; we wish to be seen as worthy in the eyes of our fellows, and so the idea of virtue is never far from our minds. We possess the seeds of virtue in the concern that we have for our dependents and our family. The challenge we face is expanding this concern beyond its natural limits to comply with the approval of the moral sense, experiencing benevolence for our neighbors and even for humanity. Hutcheson thinks that the most reliable way of carrying out this task is to cultivate our love for the Deity.

At this point, we are presented with the tension between the standpoint of humanity and that of the universe. By impressing on our minds the Deity's "perfection of wisdom, goodness, and love to his creatures," we become abler to live up to those expectations of virtue. In identifying with that divine aspect of our nature, we come to have a "generous contempt of any other thing," whether it be "bodily pleasures," the search for "speculative knowledge"; "glory"; or anything "related to this mortal state," which is "fleeting, unstable, corruptible."<sup>215</sup> We thereby turn away from the bonds of benevolence and begin to view others with a cool, disinterested concern. There are definite advantages to extending our affection; we decrease, or eliminate, the extent to which the ill-natured passions (e.g., anger, hatred, envy) exercise influence over us; we also combat, "Tyranny, Faction, a Neglect of Justice, a Corruption of Manners," and other inconveniences that flow from a false sense of allegiance to party.<sup>216</sup> It is one thing to possess disinterested concern for humanity, and another to strengthen this concern to

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<sup>215</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 88-89.

<sup>216</sup> Hutcheson "An Inquiry," 115.

such a degree that it becomes our principle of action. By strengthening our general benevolence, we thereby threaten to swamp the more humane aspects of our nature.

In *A Short Introduction*, Hutcheson claims that we must not “{from any airy views of more heroic extensive offices,} check or weaken the tender natural affections, which are great sources of pleasure in life, and of the greatest necessity.”<sup>217</sup> By identifying with the divine in our nature, we may undermine the integrity of our relationships with others.<sup>218</sup> Few of us can promote the general good, and are better served by “contribut[ing] something toward the advantage of [their] kinsman, [their] family, or [their] neighbors” than we are extending our concern beyond its natural limits.<sup>219</sup> Nevertheless, Hutcheson argues that “we should chiefly fortify the most extensive affections, the love of moral excellence, and the steady purpose of conformity to the divine will.”<sup>220</sup> And so, in the same paragraph, Hutcheson implores us to both attend most closely to the objects of our natural affections *and* to make sure that we guide our actions in light of the divine will: “while these nobler affections have the control of all the rest, the strengthening the tender affections in the several narrower attachment of life will rather tend to compleat the beauty of a moral character, and the harmony of life.”<sup>221</sup> Does general benevolence play a role in shaping our conduct, or rather is general benevolence best left to the Deity?

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<sup>217</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 83.

<sup>218</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 82.

<sup>219</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 82.

<sup>220</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 83.

<sup>221</sup> Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction*, 83.

Hutcheson does not address these questions. Like Shaftesbury, he leaves us with a tension between the standpoints of humanity and that of the universe. Which affections should we cultivate to the point that they determine our conduct: those associated with our nature as sociable beings, or those tied to the perfection of the Deity? Prioritizing one aspect of our nature over the rest will result in us adopting a different practical identity or form of life more generally. Nevertheless, Hutcheson tries to establish a moral system that makes room for both the sociable and divine parts of our nature. Is it possible to accomplish this task? Can we accommodate our concrete relations in a moral theory that aims to correct for selfishness and factionalism, and to coordinate our interests in a way that promotes universal happiness? This is the problem of partiality.

### **Rethinking the Project of Ethics**

In this chapter, I have traced the development of the problem of partiality from its origin in Locke, through the work of Cockburn, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson. I have also hoped to add something of import to the scholarship in modern ethics. I have also tried to cast light on Cockburn as a transitional figure.<sup>222</sup> While she not widely read by her peers, Cockburn's development of Locke's moral project is the first attempt to make good on the moral science that is only gestured at in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. I have also provided an interpretation of Shaftesbury's moral theory that treats the *Characteristicks* as a whole, and does not see treat "Inquiry" as the Archimedean point of his philosophy (a trend that he would have found troubling).

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<sup>222</sup> See: my paper, "Catharine Trotter Cockburn's Democratization of Moral Virtue"

Beyond making certain interpretive shifts in the scholarly understanding of modern moral philosophy, I hoped to have cast light on the problem of partiality as a philosophical issue, and not one of merely historical interest. The problem of partiality is a product of a shift in how we view the aim of ethics. We are left with the legacy of the problem of partiality because we too are largely suspicious of theologically-based natural law theories; we balk at casuistry, reject any neat demarcation of the duties of our moral lives, and claim that an account of practical judgment is part of any moral theory worth its salt. We also claim that virtue requires being moved by the observation that certain actions are fitting, or even good, separate from considerations of punishment, divine or otherwise. We are still tasked with making good on the Lockean vision.

Through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the focus of ethics becomes less about enumerating duties or laying down principles of action, and more about the cultivation of norms of observation and judgment and of the proper arrangement of the affects. For Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, once we internalize norms of propriety about seeing, feeling, and judging, we begin to appreciate and to be motivated by considerations of virtue. We might understand this transition between Locke and Shaftesbury in terms of the collapse of natural law and the triumph of virtue ethics. However, this way of interpreting the development of British moral philosophy overlooks the disagreements between figures like Smith, Hutcheson, and Cockburn. When considering the problem of partiality, figures differ about how to do right by our sociable natures while not falling into factionalism. In what follows, I revisit the chapter and bring out three elements of my discussion of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that are important for understanding the later

chapters: Shaftesbury's discussion of enthusiasm, his comments on writing ethics, and Hutcheson's focus on perception as a vehicle of virtue.

On a standard interpretation of Locke's moral philosophy, he argues that morality has its basis in natural law, the content of which is fixed by the will of God. While all human beings recognize their obligation to act in accordance with natural law, their motivation to comply with this obligation is largely external, deriving from the threat of eternal damnation. Cockburn argues that critics, like the author of the *Remarks*, who interpret Locke in this manner fail to understand his writings – or at least the implication of the Lockean moral science. For her, while Locke claims that morality is based in natural law, its content is determined by our distinctively human nature. The fact that we are rational and social beings fixes certain conduct as key to our happiness. Short of altering human nature, God has no hand in creating moral norms, which, for Cockburn, consist in duties to promote the good of others. That said, Cockburn maintains that external sanctions are necessary to secure our compliance with the moral law, lest our selfishness and natural partiality be allowed to dictate our actions.

Shaftesbury agrees with Cockburn that morality is based in human nature. For him, the proper moral attitude is a "reasonable enthusiasm," which consists in a universal love directed at others and gratitude directed at nature. For him, sanctions are detrimental to the cultivation of virtue – love is sufficient to motivate virtuous conduct. But Shaftesbury wavers here. We should care for those around us and tend to the duties associated with our station; Shaftesbury also claims that we should determine our conduct on the basis of nature, acting to support the good of its component parts. The result is a

two-standpoint problem. We see this problem come to fruition in Hutcheson's work. For him, to be virtuous is to be motivated by our sociable sentiments. However, these sentiments direct us to care for those close to us and to attend to our positional duties, which can reinforce factionalist tendencies. Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's attempt to correct for our partiality by turning our attention away from workaday sociability, to the loftier ends of universal love are deemed unsatisfactory by later figures on two fronts: the aim of cultivating this sagely attitude seems an impossible and unworthy goal, and the attempt to do so undercuts the project of basing morality in human nature.

Before continuing to the next chapter – where I discuss these criticisms in further detail and present a proposed solution to the problem of partiality, offered in the work of John Gay and David Hume – I will examine the *philosophical significance* of the preceding narrative. Scholars note that there is a shift in how Shaftesbury and Hutcheson view ethics, particularly with relation to considerations of autonomy.<sup>223</sup> Locke, as we have seen, argues that sanctions play a central role in any reasonable account of moral obligation. I have argued that we already see this general shift towards internal sources of obligation in the writings of Cockburn. Still, it is only in Shaftesbury's work where we get a full-throated repudiation of external sanction as a friend of virtue, and a rejection of natural law more generally. Shaftesbury argues that Locke's moral theory ignores the classical Stoic virtues of self-control and self-determination, but his disagreements with Locke run much deeper, to the account of human nature and the aim of ethics more generally.

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<sup>223</sup> This emphasis on autonomy can be found in the work of Schneewind and Darwall, among others interested in how 18<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy laid the foundation for Kant's work.

Consider how our view of ethics shifts when sanctions no longer play a role in moral obligation. For Locke and Cockburn, we lose what is necessary to secure our compliance with what is fitting. Instead, we are put in contact with what is fitting, with the expectation that some action being fitting is enough for us to both recognize our obligation, and for this recognition to give rise to action. We are left without a mediator, who guarantees our compliance with virtue on account of making it worth our while. Responsibility is thrown back on us, providing the conditions for autonomy but removing the certainty of divine sanction. We alter the connection to our duties through this process of coming to see ourselves as no longer requiring the censure of others to move us along. Virtue is no longer seen as originating outside of us but as being issued from within *our nature*.

While Locke and Cockburn see our relations as being governed by non-overlapping dictates that can be discovered through reason, Shaftesbury leaves us with uncertainty. On the one hand, for Shaftesbury, we are individuals, daughters, friends, lovers, etc.; on the other hand, we are a part of the system of nature. Our duties with regard to other particular individuals are of secondary importance in light of this larger allegiance. Certainly, as human beings, we often do right by nature through tending to our familial and social relations but this need not be the case, according to Shaftesbury. The bonds that we have to others in these contexts can often lead to faction, which can threaten the stability of our communities and result in the worst in humanity. For Shaftesbury, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are capable of great and beautiful things; we should not allow ourselves to be weighed down by narrower

concerns. We should keep one foot in the realm of our concrete relations while always reaching beyond, in an attempt to become an exemplar of beauty and virtue

The result of Shaftesbury's advice, however, is great psychological tension. We are placed in a situation where we are forced to determine which relations to prioritize in which contexts, without the help of external standards. Once we no longer have the assistance of natural law and are suspicious of the link between sanctions and virtue, we are left with our feeble reason and the always unfolding complications of moral life. Given the fact that we occupy distinct stations, we have to find some way to conduct ourselves. For Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, familial relations, along with those relations of love and friendship, are particularly important for understanding virtue; the problem is how to square our fidelity to these relations with our obligation to do right by humanity and by nature. We might worry that we are left feeling pulled apart by these conflicting considerations. Being virtuous no longer requires learning our system of duties and how to do right by them in particular situations, or even in reminding ourselves that our future happiness depends on us being dutiful. Instead, it seems that virtue consists in being able to skillfully navigate this fundamental tension in our moral lives.

Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's reaction to this tension shapes how the problem of partiality is viewed by subsequent figures. There are two aspects of Shaftesbury's thought that are of particular interest to later figures: his examination of enthusiasm and his views on ethical writing. The greatest enemy of virtue, for Shaftesbury, is the enthusiast – one who proceeds with self-certainty about their own moral intuitions. Enthusiasm is corrosive to sociability; it leads us look inward and deadens responsiveness to the

interests and concerns of others. Given the complexities of moral life, enthusiasm is not only dangerous but false, for Shaftesbury, since the content of virtue is not determined through by books or memorizing doctrine. To counter enthusiasm, we should cultivate an attitude of openness which, for Shaftesbury, means being of good humor, which allows one to treat one's views as provisional, and as being forged alongside others who are well-natured and sincere about finding a way to live well, together.

Part of combatting enthusiasm comes in how we write and talk about ethics, for Shaftesbury. He distinguishes polite writing, which concerns virtue and matters of sociability, from the impolite writing of treatises, memoirs, and religious confessionals. While the latter three each have their faults, Shaftesbury is most concerned about the lack of genuine reflection that takes part in these works. We can see this criticism most clearly with the treatise. In a treatise on morals – take Pufendorf's *On the Duty of Man and Citizen* – where the author demonstrates the existence of natural law, illustrates our knowledge of its contents, enumerates our moral duties, and categorizes them based of their object (whether ourselves, others, or God). We are met with Pufendorf's positions and his arguments for them in this work; we are not presented with the thought process that goes into the formation of his views. We are not invited in *Man and Citizen* to, say, think through the permissibility of suicide with Pufendorf. Shaftesbury finds this approach to morals problematic, since it invites the reader to become a convert, who then takes it as their aim to defend and to further the teachings of the master.

Shaftesbury experiments with forms of writing throughout the *Characteristicks* in an attempt to get his audience to think though moral matters alongside him. These

experiments are not always successful, as Shaftesbury's style is often counterproductive, pushing the audience away from the discussion as opposed to bringing them into the fold (one of the major criticisms lodged at him by Smith).<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, Shaftesbury's aim is to cultivate curiosity, openness, and fidelity to the system of nature. As his focus is on this positive project, along with the ground clearing work of showing that human beings are capable of more than merely narrow or selfish concerns, Shaftesbury overlooks the problematic implications of his moral theory. Chief among these implications is that we are left without resources to weigh the duties we have to others – in other words, he overlooks the problem of partiality. Still, Shaftesbury's concerns about enthusiasm and ethical writing had lasting influence. The idea that the aim of moral writing should be edificatory continued in the British moralist tradition after Shaftesbury. Each of the subsequent figures treated in this dissertation seek to maintain this openness while also giving us the means to navigate, as opposed to merely revel in, the complexities of moral life.

With regard to Hutcheson, the aspect of his thought which most finds its home in subsequent figures in the British Moralism tradition is his focus on perception as a vehicle for virtue. What I mean is the idea that the virtuous person has cultivated a kind of responsiveness to different aspects of conduct and character. Hutcheson puts this responsiveness in terms of perception, which is illustrated best in his idea of the moral sense. With this idea, he is trying to cast Shaftesbury's ideas in a manner that is consistent with the Lockean moral science. Shaftesbury focuses a great deal on the

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<sup>224</sup> I discuss this point further in Chapter Three.

development of character, or certain affective and cognitive dispositions that enable one to be in tune with what is required of one by the system of nature. Having a virtuous character involves being able to see certain ways of acting as commendable or problematic. Hutcheson makes sense of these capacities in the most straightforward way possible – by identifying them with a sense on par with sight, thereby giving an account of how we can “see” things as virtuous or vicious.

Later figures become suspicious about drawing too close a parallel between our moral sense and vision, a capacity that seems only tangentially connected to our ability to immediately apprehend certain traits or conduct as virtuous or vicious. For Hume, Smith, and even Butler, the analogy of taste more accurately captures our experience of moral judgment, particularly the idea that being virtuous means being responsive to different features of our moral life. When someone acts maliciously to another, we register the viciousness of the malice by feeling disgust, or resentment on behalf of the object of malice. Figures like Smith argue that our manner of thinking about malice is an abstraction from how we register it, affectively speaking. In some ways, this shift away from vision to taste is more in line with Shaftesbury’s manner of thinking about moral agency. For Shaftesbury, it is crucial that we work to cultivate certain affective dispositions so that we can then *see* the world in the right way. We can see this focus in how he treats the phenomenon of enthusiasm, as a set of problematic ways of feeling about oneself in relation to others, and even to the world more generally.

We are presented with a problem. We are tasked with finding a means to weigh our duties towards others that does right by our natural partiality towards our friends,

family, loved ones in a manner that does not give way to factionalism. As we no longer have the tools of natural law to give us with a series of rules that we can learn to apply in particular circumstances, we must turn inward, and generate proper norms for judgment, which will require the cultivation of intellectual and affective virtues. The hope is that by engendering superior skills of sensitivity and discernment, individuals will be able to responsibly navigate the complexities of moral life. How we accomplish this task is a matter of great controversy – one that will occupy us for the rest of this dissertation.

## A TASTE FOR WHAT IS USEFUL: JOHN GAY AND DAVID HUME

For many British moralists, the aim of moral philosophy is to correct selfishness and factionalism. We have seen how this aim comes into conflict with certain aspects of human nature. For Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, our commitment to morality is explained by the bonds we share with others. However, these bonds are forged from love and benevolence, which are inconsistently felt. Though we may entertain a degree of concern for individuals neither near nor dear, such concern can hardly rise to the level of love, and can have little impact on what we value or the way that we conduct ourselves.

Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's attempts to circumvent this problem by suggesting we use universal love as our moral standard, and that we shape ourselves in light of this standard, distances us from that which makes us most human. We are thereby tasked with finding a way to do right by our natural partialities in a way that does not give way to factionalism.

In this chapter, I examine the work of John Gay and David Hume. Gay claims that utility is the correct moral standard, while Hume settles on the broader term, *usefulness*, which refers to an action or trait's conduciveness to generally agreed upon ends. He appeals to usefulness in an attempt to find a broadly consequentialist principle that is both impartial and context-dependent, in a manner that is sensitive to the complexities of moral life, while also being removed from the hedonic associations of "utility." Gay and Hume then treat the concept of "use" in different ways. For Gay, utility is a deliberative principle based in the weighing of pleasures and pains; for Hume, usefulness is a justificatory principle that forms the basis of moral conversation. When we speak of morals, we refer to conduct and characters as generally beneficial or detrimental to

ourselves, others, institutions, etc. In this way, Hume argues, the language of usefulness gives us the means to consider how the common good is impacted by the conduct of others and ourselves.

Importantly, appealing to usefulness does not require subjugating our own identity to the collective interest. Hume does not solve the problem of partiality by ridding us of our concerns for those near and dear. To do so would be to return us to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who require that we cultivate a form of love that, as I argued in chapter 1 (and as Hume agrees) is unsustainable. While there are notable differences between Hume, Butler, and Smith (see Chapter 3), each wish to do right by commonsense morality. Hume is hardly a revisionist. He instead seeks to confront the problem of partiality head on, building a moral theory that justifies innocuous partial attachments while filtering out those factionalist tendencies inimical to morality. Hume thereby presents a compelling account of how we come to see ourselves, our conduct, and one another from a shared perspective.

But Hume and Gay owe us an account of how we come to see the moral standard as authoritative. The mere fact that action or character is approved of or disapproved of by others is insufficient to motivate action unless one is already disposed to take these judgments seriously. For Gay, association is sufficient to explain this development – we associate our good with the good of others and begin to see them as intertwined. The account that Hume provides goes beyond association, drawing on the discussions of taste and delicacy. He offers a view of moral authority that draws on a broad and sophisticated set of cognitive and affective aspects of human beings that goes beyond the merely

passive process of association. In doing so, he presents us with an innovative and complete theory of agency that can address the problem of partiality.

I have divided the chapter into five parts. First, I examine John Gay's thought, where we are first presented with the principle of utility as the proper moral standard, which serves as a bridge from Locke's to Hume's work. Second, I discuss Hume's accounts of sympathy, moral language, and utility, which are the basis of his ideas about a shared moral perspective, or the common point of view. Third, I discuss Michael Gill's interpretation of Hume as a moral pluralist, which serves as an objection to my reading. Fourth, I reconstruct Hume's reasoning for why we treat the common point of view as authoritative, drawing on his ideas about delicacy, taste, and pride. I end by considering a criticism of Hume's proposed solution to the problem of partiality.

### **Making Good on Locke's Moral Science**

Not much is known about John Gay (1699-1745): he served as a fellow at Cambridge from 1724-1734 and then as a vicar in Bedfordshire until his death.<sup>225</sup> Other than the essay, "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality," which was prefixed to Edmund Law's translation of William King's *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, Gay did not publish anything.<sup>226</sup> His essay is an attempt to

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<sup>225</sup> Johnathan Harris, "Gay, John (1699-1745)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/10474](http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/article/10474)

<sup>226</sup> John Gay, "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality," *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, William King, trans. and ed. by Edmund Law (London: W. Thurlbourn, 1731), xi-xxxiii. Because of the lack of attention paid to Gay in recent years, there has been little archival work to determine if the "Preliminary Dissertation" is the only work that can be rightfully attributed to Gay. There are two anonymous texts (presumably written by the same author) published in the decades after the "Preliminary Dissertation" that bear strong thematic resemblance to it. See: "An Introduction towards an Essay on the origin of the Passion

clarify the project of Locke’s ethics by expanding on a few of Locke’s key theses.<sup>227</sup> The result is not what Locke intended – Gay breaks from the natural law tradition by arguing that universal happiness is the criterion of virtue, and that agents should use their own reason to determine how best to promote the happiness of both themselves and their fellows.<sup>228</sup>

### *Fixing a Moral Standard*

The first task of Gay’s “Preliminary Dissertation” is to establish the criterion of virtue. There are two steps to his argument, both of which rely heavily on Locke’s discussion of morality in the *Essay*. Much of what Gay says draws on Locke’s theses about moral ideas, moral epistemology, and moral motivation; however, he uses them for

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[1741],” rpt., Maria Heider, *Studien über David Hartley, 1705-1757* (Bergische Gladbach, 1913), 27-42; “An Inquiry into the Origin of the Human Appetites and Affections [1747]” *Four Early Works on Motivation*, ed. Paul McReynolds (Gainsville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), 281-476. For more on this, see: David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 140-143.

<sup>227</sup> According to William Paley, Edmund Law is to have said about Gay that “no man knew the Bible or the works of Locke better” (William Paley, “A short memoir of the Life of Edmund Law,” *The Works of William Paley, D.D.*, vol. 5, ed. Rev. Mr. Stephenson (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1830), 339).

<sup>228</sup> Many scholars find Gay’s essay to be a significant in the history of ethics, but little work has been done on it, and this work is cursory. See: J.E. Crimmins, *Secular Utilitarianism: Social Science and the Critique of Religion in the Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 68-72; Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism*, trans. Mary Morris (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), 7, 11, 22-23; Colin Heydt, “Utilitarianism before Bentham,” *Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*, ed. Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25-30; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Volume II: From Suarez to Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 870-71; Christian Maurer, “Self-Interest and Sociability,” *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, 304-05. Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 405-10; Jacqueline Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy, and Society in Hume’s Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63-64. A notable exception is Ernest Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1901), 69-83. For more on Gay’s legacy, see my “John Gay and the Birth of Utilitarianism.”

the purposes of constructing his own theory. The first step to build this theory comes in Gay's adoption of the Lockean thesis that moral ideas are mixed modes. To say that moral ideas (e.g., murder, theft) are mixed modes is to say that they are fabrications of the mind. Gay states this position even more clearly than Locke: "the Ideas...about which Morality is chiefly conversant *viz.* that they are all *mixed Modes*, or compound ideas put together, having at first no Archetype or Original existing; and afterwards no other than that which exists in other Men's minds."<sup>229</sup> The artificiality of moral concepts leads to confusion and conflict in moral discourse, since people do not agree on how to use particular terms. For example, what is seen as "murder" by one may be seen by another as an instance of justified killing. In this way, Gay, following Locke, thinks the way we talk about morality is not a proper guide for how we ought to conduct ourselves.<sup>230</sup>

What, then, constitutes a proper guide for conduct? To settle on a criterion, Gay suggests that we must, first, determine what we are *obligated* to do as rational beings. Following Locke, he assumes a hedonistic account of obligation.<sup>231</sup> Gay notes that an agent is obligated to perform an action "when there is such a relation between an Agent and an action that the Agent cannot be happy without doing or omitting that action, then

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<sup>229</sup> Gay, "Preliminary Dissertation," xii.

<sup>230</sup> I discuss the topic of mixed modes further in Chapter 1, in my examination of Locke.

<sup>231</sup> A related term is "interested obligation." The language of interested obligation comes from Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 177-8. One may find it suspicious that Gay draws on the concept of interested obligation to defend his view that happiness is the criterion of virtue. Two things *can* be said in Gay's favor. First, his position on the nature of obligation is fairly traditional. The idea that there is a distinctly "moral" species of obligation is (to a large extent) a later development in the history of moral philosophy. Second, Gay's general strategy at this point of the argument is to provide a framework to arbitrate the disputes between the other moralists. By drawing on the concept of interested obligation – as opposed to something more metaphysically loaded – he can more easily get everyone on the same page, so to speak.

the agent is said to be *obliged* to do or omit that action.”<sup>232</sup> When it comes to the criterion of virtue, we are obligated to recognize that criterion which, when we comply, secures our happiness. There are three standards, each of which has its own sanctions: societal norms (with its sanction of social censure), the laws of government (with its sanction of punishment), and divine law (with its sanction of eternal hellfire).<sup>233</sup> Since our happiness is not completely in the hands of our legislators or fellow humans, Gay thinks the first two kinds of sanction fall short of the standard of ensuring our unhappiness if we do not act properly. The only power upon which our happiness is completely dependent is God, and so complying with divine law will secure the possibility of our happiness.<sup>234</sup>

Because God is the source of moral obligation, his will determines the content of morality as well. Gay’s defense of this thesis places him in the voluntarist camp. We are left with the question of “what that Will of God...directs me to do?”<sup>235</sup> For Gay, God is a “being infinitely happy in himself from all eternity...[and] could have no other design in creating mankind than *their* happiness; and therefore he wills their happiness.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xviii.

<sup>233</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xviii. Locke thinks it is actually quite difficult to consider the possibility of eternal damnation; however, it would be wise of us to reflect on it when we are motivated to act in a vicious manner: “The Rewards and Punishments of another Life, which the Almighty has established, as the Enforcements of his Law, are of weight enough to determine the Choice, against whatever Pleasure or Pain this Life can shew, when the eternal State is considered but in its bare possibility, which no Body can make doubt of...a virtuous Life, with the certain expectation of everlasting Bliss, which may come, is to be preferred to a vicious one, with the fear of that dreadful state of Misery, which ‘tis very possible may overtake the guilty; or at best the terrible uncertain hope of Annihilation” (*Essay II.xxi*).

<sup>234</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxi.

<sup>235</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xix.

<sup>236</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xix. The language of “fitness” comes from Samuel Clarke, who argued that an action is right only insofar as it is “fitting.” See Clarke, *Discourse Concerning the Unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Religion*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: James and John Knapton, 1732). Clarke is seen as the arch-moral

Because God wills the happiness of his creation, and one is obligated to act in accordance with the will of God, it follows that one is obliged to promote the happiness of mankind as well. Gay refers to the happiness of mankind as the “criterion of virtue, but *once removed*.”<sup>237</sup> While the will of God is the source of obligation, our happiness is the criterion for virtuous action. When discharging one’s duty, Gay claims that there is a “fitness” between an action and its consequences: “some things and actions are apt to produce pleasure, others pain...some are for the good of Mankind, others tend to the detriment of it: therefore those are to be chosen which tend to the good of Mankind; the others to be avoided.”<sup>238</sup> An agent must use her reason to foresee the extent to which her action may promote the happiness of others and to act accordingly.

Gay encapsulates the criterion of virtue in the following formulation: virtue is “conformity to a rule of life, directing the actions of all other creatures with respect to each other’s happiness; to which conformity everyone in all cases is obliged.”<sup>239</sup> When it comes to defining the relevant “rule of life,” God commands us to simply be “a means of the happiness of mankind.”<sup>240</sup> Gay is not specific about what promoting the happiness of

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rationalist of the early modern period, and is often a target of ridicule by later figures like Hutcheson and Hume. Importantly, Gay considered Clarke’s work significant enough to incorporate the language of “fittingness” into his ethical theory. Gay’s issue with Clarke is not that he defined rightness in terms of fittingness, but that Clarke did not specify what it meant for something to be “fitting.” This issue will come up again in the next chapter of the dissertation, where I discuss Butler and Smith.

<sup>237</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xix.

<sup>238</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xix-xx.

<sup>239</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xvii.

<sup>240</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiv. The fact that Gay defines ethical matters in terms of other-regarding actions is significant, as it breaks from the natural law conception of morality, which carves out a distinct realm of duties to ourselves.

mankind entails, though it is revealed by the “*relations of things*”<sup>241</sup> We get in touch with what is good for society by “*perceive*[ing] the inconveniences of some things and actions when they happen” or we “*forsee*[ing] them [the inconveniences] by contemplating the nature of the things and actions.”<sup>242</sup> Over time we come to appreciate those actions which are conducive to happiness. The knowledge we possess here is empirical, which explains why Gay eschews specific recommendations as to how to promote happiness. He instead provides a structure by which to approach these questions, and is optimistic about our foresight about which actions will produce happiness based on our knowledge of human nature.<sup>243</sup>

#### *Psychological Association and Moral Commitment*

Gay provides us with a moral standard: universal happiness. He then explains how we come to view ourselves as *obligated* to act in accordance with this moral standard. Since God’s will is the source of all moral obligation, we might think that human beings act benevolently out of recognition that God obligates them to do so.<sup>244</sup> But as Gay points out, “the generality of Mankind do approve of virtue...without being able to give any reason for their approbation; and also, that some pursue it without knowing that it tends to their own happiness; nay even when it appears to be inconsistent with and destructive

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<sup>241</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xix-x.

<sup>242</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xx.

<sup>243</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xx.

<sup>244</sup> For a version of this view, see: George Berkeley, “Passive Obedience; or, the Christian Doctrine of Not Resisting the Supreme Power, Proved and Vindicated, Upon the Principles of the Law of Nature, in a Discourse Delivered at the College-Chapel,” *The Works of George Berkeley, D.D. Bishop of Cloyne*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Priestly (London: J.F. Dover, 1820), 251-292. For the important differences between Berkeley and Gay, see my “John Gay and the Birth of Utilitarianism.” Also see: Heydt, “Utilitarianism before Bentham”; Albee, *A History*.

of their happiness.”<sup>245</sup> Since most people unreflectively approve of virtue, Gay requires an explanation as to why this is the case.<sup>246</sup> Hutcheson explains this phenomenon by claiming that we innately possess benevolent motives that drive us to promote the good of others and we approve of actions that promote universal happiness via our moral sense.<sup>247</sup> Gay thinks we lack evidence for the existence of a moral sense and innately benevolent motives.<sup>248</sup> Nevertheless, he holds that Hutcheson is right to claim that we often approve of other people’s happiness for its own sake. The attempt to explain this phenomenon leads him to develop an innovative moral psychology that draws on some brief comments that Locke makes about “the association of ideas.”<sup>249</sup>

According to Gay, all human activity is aimed at achieving pleasure and avoiding pain.<sup>250</sup> He claims that we use the term “good” to refer to objects that produce pleasure and the term “bad” to refer to objects that produce pain.<sup>251</sup> With each perception of an

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<sup>245</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiii. See also: Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 85-86, 89, 101-102, 112-115, etc.

<sup>246</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxix.

<sup>247</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiii. It is important to distinguish moral approval from moral motivation; though Gay draws a distinction between them, he often treats the two in tandem. Hutcheson is more careful to treat these topics in different sections of the *Inquiry*. He starts from the observation that we draw a distinction between “moral good” and “natural good” (i.e., pleasure, advantage, or interest) and infers that we possess some inner sense that allows to distinguish the two species of good (89). The quality that this moral sense picks up on is benevolence, defined as a universal love for others (112). We morally? approve of other people insofar as they are beneficent. What explains our ability to act benevolently, for Hutcheson, is that we possess a “natural affection” for the good of others. This affection can be overridden by a but Hutcheson thinks that without it, we would be unable to act benevolently. Gay’s essay is meant to undercut both of these claims – that we require a moral sense to approve of benevolence and that we need to posit natural affection to explain the possibility of benevolent action.

<sup>248</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiv.

<sup>249</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxxiii.

<sup>250</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiii.

<sup>251</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxii. Gay adopts this idea from Hobbes and Locke. See: Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 47-50; Locke, *Essay*, II.xx.

object as good or bad, there is a corresponding passion: love, in the case of goodness; hatred, in the case of badness.<sup>252</sup> Love or hatred is followed by an affection of desire or aversion, which compels us to either seek the object or shun it.<sup>253</sup> Gay maintains that the majority of passions we recognize as “implanted in our nature originally” are modifications of love and hate.<sup>254</sup> Consider benevolence. Gay argues that each person is naturally indifferent to the happiness of others.<sup>255</sup> Only because our happiness is dependent on others can we come to care about their happiness.<sup>256</sup> What makes association friendly to morality is that we are dependent on others for our happiness, which creates links between people that are reinforced through association.<sup>257</sup>

How does the process of association work? First, we perceive an object as conducive to our happiness. Second, we feel pleasure at the thought of its conduciveness to our happiness. Third, the perception of the object and the pleasure accompanying this perception become so connected that they are experienced as continuous with one another.<sup>258</sup> This last step, which connects the idea and sensation in such a way that the mind experiences them as one, is what Gay refers to as association. Consider Gay’s example of our desire for money.<sup>259</sup> One perceives “the great many advantages from being possessed of money, and from thence conceive a pleasure in having it, thence

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<sup>252</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxiii.

<sup>253</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxiii.

<sup>254</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxiii.

<sup>255</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xiv.

<sup>256</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxiii-xiv.

<sup>257</sup> The example Gay gives of how this process works is envy (“Preliminary Dissertation,” xxxii-xxxiii).

<sup>258</sup> Gay explains how this process works on “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx-xxxi.

<sup>259</sup> John Stuart Mill uses this same argument in illustrating his “proof” of the principle of utility. See: “Utilitarianism,” *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume X: Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society*, ed. J.M. Robson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 235-39.

desire it, thence discover to obtain it, thence receive an actual pleasure in obtaining it, thence desire to preserve the possession of it.”<sup>260</sup> Over time, “the intermediate steps between money and happiness” are dropped and “that which was at first pursued only as a *means*, be to them a real *end*.”<sup>261</sup> Association brings with it a kind of motivation. Because we associate money with increased pleasure, we are motivated to seek money not simply as a means to our happiness but as its own end.<sup>262</sup> Gay stresses, if you run the desire for money “to the fountainhead,” you will see it comes from its propensity to add to your happiness but you do not experience it as such because of association.<sup>263</sup>

Gay thinks it is a fact about humans that we are susceptible to the pains and pleasures of others.<sup>264</sup> If we know that our happiness conflicts with another’s happiness, our happiness will be lessened, and so we seek to have our happiness coincide with that of others.<sup>265</sup> Through association, the idea of other people’s happiness becomes conjoined with the idea of our own happiness so much that the thought of one brings with it the

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<sup>260</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxxi.

<sup>261</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxxi.

<sup>262</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxxi.

<sup>263</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx. Gay’s discussion of “resting places” is important. We naturally construct principles of conduct based on prior experience, and these principles direct us to objects conducive to our happiness. We use these principles as “resting places” in our deliberations so that we can make decisions quickly, without having to consider each variable that goes into acting a particular way. That said, Gay notes that this “*habitual* knowledge” is a form of prejudice that is rarely examined and is difficult to root out (“Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx). He thinks the prejudice of habitual knowledge leads philosophers like Hutcheson to believe in a moral sense (“Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx).

<sup>264</sup> Gay stresses this point on xxviii. An equally (if not more) important aspect of our dependence on others is our desire to be esteemed or loved (“Preliminary Dissertation,” xxv; xxvii-xxviii).

<sup>265</sup> Towards the end of the essay, Gay mentions our propensity to imitate others (“Preliminary Dissertation,” xxxiii). Our imitative capacity helps explain social cohesion.

thought of the other.<sup>266</sup> The pleasure of the contemplation of our own happiness is extended to the happiness of others and *vice versa*. We cannot pursue our own happiness without regard to the happiness of others, and so our deliberations about what to do inevitably involve a concern for their happiness as well. What starts as a means-to-an-end becomes an end-in-itself, as the means and end become solidified in our thought.<sup>267</sup> Gay seems to assume that we are constituted in this manner to sustain cognitive and motivational economy.<sup>268</sup> There is no need to reason about whether a particular instance of promoting the general happiness would be good for us. We simply do so.

Gay is introduced to associationism through reading Locke, who discusses what he calls the “association of ideas.”<sup>269</sup> Gay’s use of association is distinctive on three fronts. First, Locke introduces association to explain how custom is responsible for some ideas that we possess, but is not interested in the mechanism; by contrast, Gay provides the mechanism by using the language of sensations and ideas, thereby making sense of association within the Lockean framework. Second, Locke is concerned with association

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<sup>266</sup> “We first perceive or imagine some real Good, i.e., fitness to promote our happiness in those things which we love and approve of. Hence...we annex pleasure to those things. Hence those things and pleasure are so tied together and associated in our minds, that one cannot present itself but the other will also occur” (Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx-xxxii).

<sup>267</sup> Acting on behalf of others becomes an “acquired” principle of action (Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx).

<sup>268</sup> Gay, “Preliminary Dissertation,” xxx. Hutcheson makes a similar point about the moral sense—noting that God gives us the moral sense to help us determine which actions are benevolent more quickly than we would otherwise: “Notwithstanding the might Reason we boast of above other Animals, its Processes are too slow, too full of doubt and hesitation, to serve us in every Exigency, either for our own Preservation, without the external Senses, or to direct our Actions for the Good of the Whole, without this moral Sense” (*Inquiry*, 180).

<sup>269</sup> Locke does return to the topic of association again in his later work, “Of the Conduct of the Understanding,” *Some Thoughts*, 218-19. And here association seems to play a larger role in his psychology, insofar as it’s conceived as a “disease of the mind as hard to cure as any” (218). For more on this topic, see: Kathryn Tabb, “Locke on Enthusiasm and the Association of Ideas,” *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 9 (forthcoming).

in knowledge acquisition, whereas Gay extends association to the moral sphere, showing how it leads to the development of previously non-existent motives.<sup>270</sup> Third, Locke is suspicious of association and claims that “irreconcilable opposition between different sects of philosophy and religion,” results from “wrong and unnatural combinations of ideas” to which association gives rise.<sup>271</sup> For Gay, association explains how we come to care for another person’s happiness despite only being naturally concerned for our own.

### *Looking Forward to Hume*

What can we take away from Gay’s attempt to confront the problem of partiality? He recognizes that our moral ideas are artificial: they are words we use to carve up our social reality, which track our interests as sensitive and social creatures. These concepts do not provide us with a standard by which we can know how to act; we need a rule to which we can all agree, and that tells us which conduct to pursue and which to avoid. Gay argues that we tend to act for the good of others and to approve of this fact. He explains this fact by association, which accounts for our developing a robust motivational base from a minimalist psychology. In this way, Gay sketches us a potential solution to the problem of partiality. Given the problem, we should see utility as the only standard by which to conduct ourselves; a standard to which we can commit via straightforward

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<sup>270</sup> Locke *Essay* II.xxxiii.17. Locke also notes that “by this one easy and unheeded miscarriage of the understanding, sandy and loose foundations become infallible principles, and will not suffer themselves to be touched or questions: such unnatural connections become by custom as natural to the mind, as sun and light. Fire and warmth go together, and so seem to carry with them as natural an evidence as self-evident truths” (218). He is suspicious that teachers often exacerbate this problem: “teachers are conscious themselves of the falsehood or weakness of the tenets they profess, since they will not suffer the ground whereon they are built to be examined” (218). See: Sheridan, Locke: *A Guide for the Perplexed*, 30-32.

<sup>271</sup> Locke, *Essay* II.xxxiii.18.

means. As the standard of utility will not require us to suppress our nature, we are left with little conflict between our concern for our near and dear and the loftier aims of morality.

There is overlap in how Cockburn and Gay both carry out the project of a moral science. Cockburn gives reason a large role in her moral theory, especially when it comes to determining the relations of fitness that make up the content of virtue. Gay appeals as well to ideas of *fittingness* and the *relations* between things when trying to make sense of why certain actions are virtuous or vicious – though he argues that these ideas are encapsulated in utility. Gay likewise thinks that reason is crucial in determining which actions are to be carried out, given that the criterion of virtue is context-dependent and highly sensitive to the complexities of moral life. Both Gay and Cockburn also give God a secondary role in their theory, in terms of providing the grounds of obligation (in the case of Gay) or a motive for virtue (in the case of Cockburn). For both, human nature, or at least facts about human beings and their context play a larger role in shaping the normative content of virtue.

What separates these two thinkers is Gay's claims that the criterion of virtue is a result of human artifice. He recognizes that there is no solution to be had regarding what is to be considered murder, theft, etc. without the creation of a common standard to which we can all appeal. Cockburn is optimistic about our ability to agree about relations of fitness, and to conduct ourselves in light of this agreement, with the occasional threat of divine punishment. However, Gay finds reasons for skepticism in the nature of moral ideas as mixed modes. Each group of people is convinced that their conceptions of

martial, familial, or parental duty are intuitively correct, and yet their views are incompatible with one another. These differences in their conceptions of duty, Gay claims, give rise to factionalism, only further reinforcing their conflicting moral ideas. This concern is central to the problem of partiality, where our dispositions to do best by those closest to us collide with our loftier aim of living well alongside others. The power of Locke's view, and of Gay's attempt to make good on the Lockean moral science, comes in Gay's aim of fixing a moral standard that is agreeable to all regardless of their moral ideas.

Provided that we can fix the correct standard, we should be able to provide a solution to the problem of partiality. One shortcoming of Gay's is its being light on detail. Many have considered happiness promotion as the end of morality, though many disagree on both what leads us to be happy and that in which happiness consists. Although the definition of happiness is context-dependent, there will still be disagreements about which actions produce the best outcomes. If there are concerns about people being unduly influenced by their moral ideas, we should be equally worried about their ability to weigh evidence fairly, even provided their agreement with a shared moral standard. Gay does not consider the norms of judgment that are required to be in place to create competent moral agents. His appeal to the principles of association to explain our sense of moral obligation also reinforces the idea that being moral comes easy, or is at least a largely passive process. In the attempt to provide a solution to the problem of partiality, Gay seems to oversimplify our moral lives.

Still, Gay manages to give us a way of thinking about how to solve the problem of partiality. He provides us with a moral standard that arbitrates between our disparate interests and manages our tendency to be partial and prone to faction, while also showing how we all become committed to this standard by way of basic psychological principles. With Hume, however, we get a more sophisticated version of the theory. Hume agrees that moral terms are artificial, and that we require a standard to provide steadiness to our natural approval and disapproval. Central to his own account is what he calls the *common point of view*, based in a particular construal of moral language, association, and sympathy. The norms that govern that common point of view concern usefulness. And yet, Hume's views about this moral standard, and the manner by which we become committed to it, gives us more with which to work. I argue that Hume's view is the culmination of the attempt to build a Lockean moral science, and the first fleshed out solution the problem of partiality offered by the British Moralists. I turn now to Hume.

### **Modeling Impartiality: David Hume**

John Gay argues that utility is the moral standard required to solve the problem of partiality, and claims that the principles of association can account for our seeing this standard as authoritative. While Gay's view is elegant, there is a problem: it is *because* God wills the happiness of mankind, and our happiness is dependent on him, that we are obligated to recognize utility as the proper moral standard.<sup>272</sup> Hume argues that the proper normative standard is *usefulness*. While "utility" has strictly hedonic associations

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<sup>272</sup> For more on this subject, see: Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity: Hume's Moral Atheism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

– that is, concerning the balance of pleasures and pains – Hume means for “usefulness” to be a broader term, referring to something’s conduciveness to generally agreed upon ends. In the course of his argument to establish this standard, Hume develops the idea of a distinctively *moral language*, whereby we offer our approbation and disapprobation from a common point of view, as opposed to our own particular perspective. From a moral perspective, we speak about matters that are mutually beneficial, allowing us to cope productively with our natural partialities.

Like Gay, however, Hume runs into the problem of explaining how we come to see ourselves as committed to a moral standard that challenges our natural tendencies.

The solution that Hume proposes builds on Locke’s and Gay’s insights about psychological association.<sup>273</sup> Hume uses association to make sense of our naturally

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<sup>273</sup>Both Gay and Hume make use of psychological association, in a moral context, to explain how we come to possess new motives for action, and they are the first in the British moralist tradition to do so. Gay’s “Preliminary Dissertation” was published in 1731, appended to a popular work on natural religion, eight years prior to Hume’s publishing the first two parts of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This does not necessarily mean that Hume read Gay; after all, the mere fact that it was published during the period in which Hume was shaping his early philosophical views is not enough to establish a line of influence. Nevertheless, we have cause for concern when it comes to Hume’s self-reporting about the inspiration for his ideas. For example, Hume claims to be the inventor of associationism, which we know to be false, since Locke and Berkeley use the concept, and he notes their mutual impact on his work. Interestingly, other scholars have noted the similarities between Gay’s and Hume’s discussion of association, and some have gone so far as to provide evidence of influence. Ernest Mossner gives two pieces of evidence that Hume read Gay (*The Life of David Hume*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). First, Mossner notes, Hume *did* have access to William King’s *De Origine Mali*, because he cites it a number of times in his “Early Memoranda.” And second, Hume’s references to Bayle in the “Early Memoranda” are taken from editorial notes that Edmund Law made in his 1731 translation of King’s work (to which Gay’s essay was affixed). As Mossner points out: “Scrutiny of Hume’s five notes on ‘King’ indicates that he was using the 1731 translation and was, therefore, exposing himself to the ideas of Law and Gay, as well as King. This fact is of importance, for example, because Gay’s short dissertation is the earliest known reconciliation of ethical utilitarianism with psychological associationism, two doctrines that were to be employed by Hume himself” (80). While this evidence is not definitive, some scholars have seen Mossner’s case for there being a non-coincidental relation between Hume and Gay as persuasive. See: Albee, *A History*; Halévy,

sympathetic capacities, through which we enter into and take on the passions of others. Our sympathy compels us to attend to others; through practice and time, this attention becomes what Hume refers to as “delicacy.” The delicate person is able to make fine-grained observations about conduct and characters – an ability that is developed in conversation with others about matters of mutual interest. A fidelity to the moral perspective is forged here. The more we engage with others, and the more delicate we become, the more our identity is tied up with the common point of view. We develop an identity as someone who wishes to be praiseworthy in the eyes of others. Hume argues that through this sophisticated process, we develop a commitment to the moral perspective that allows us to provide a solution to the problem of partiality.

### *The Moral Perspective*

Sympathy is an associative mechanism that accounts for our ability to take on and enter into the sentiments of other sentient beings.<sup>274</sup> At the most basic level, sympathy allows us to experience another person’s pleasure or pain as our own. Say we see a colleague crying at his desk. We form the belief “Oliver is crying at his desk,” which

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*Philosophical Radicalism*; Jacqueline Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy, and Society in Hume’s Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>274</sup> See: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 316-24. He introduces sympathy to explain what he calls the “secondary” cause of pride and humility, which lies “in the opinions of others”: “our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others” (316). For more on the mechanism of sympathy, see: Páll Árdal, *Passion and Value in ‘Hume’s Treatise’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 41-79; Gerald J. Postema, “‘Cemented with Diseased Qualities’: Sympathy and Comparison in Hume’s Moral Psychology,” *Hume Studies* 31.2 (2005): 249-298; Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 41-68; Rico Vitz, “The Nature and Functions of Sympathy in Hume’s Philosophy,” *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, ed. Paul Russell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 312-332.

leads us to infer that Oliver is sad. The idea of Oliver being sad produces a degree of sadness in us, though not to the extent that he is currently experiencing. This transition from the *idea* of Oliver's sadness to the *impression* or feeling of sadness – mediated through the idea of ourselves, which lessens the degree to which the sadness overtakes us – is what Hume refers to as the mechanism of sympathy.<sup>275</sup> Witnessing someone in pain produces a pain in ourselves which was previously non-existent. Sympathy can sometimes be blocked. I may believe that homeless people are lazy; if I see a homeless person in peril, I may feel contempt at the sight of his suffering.<sup>276</sup> Hume does not think it is possible to block all instances of sympathy since there is no way to close oneself off completely: we naturally “reflect each other's emotions.”<sup>277</sup>

Hume stresses that many of our emotions require other people to share in them in order for them to persist: “Let all the powers and elements of nature conspire to serve and obey one man: Let the sun rise and set at his command: The seas and rivers roll as he pleases, and the earth furnish spontaneously whatever may be useful or agreeable to him: He will still be miserable, till you give him one person at least, with whom he may share

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<sup>275</sup> As Hume puts it, “the idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection” (*A Treatise*, 317).

<sup>276</sup> For Hume's discussion of contempt, and its relation to respect, see: *A Treatise*, 389-93. Hume often uses the language of contempt and shame to describe the experience of witnessing people in poverty. See: *A Treatise*, 307, 362, 393, 579. The role of contempt is underexplored in Humean philosophy. For some useful discussion of this passion, see: Christopher J. Finlay, *Hume's Social Philosophy: Human Nature and Commercial Sociability in 'A Treatise of Human Nature'* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 105-123; Amy M. Schmitter, “Family Trees: Sympathy, Comparison, and the Proliferation of the Passions in Hume and his Predecessors,” *Emotion & Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 255-278; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, 87-108.

<sup>277</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 365.

his happiness, and whose esteem and friendship he may enjoy.”<sup>278</sup> It is our dependence on the presence and recognition of others that Hume says constitutes our “most ardent desire of society,” or our desire to be in concord with others.<sup>279</sup> We rely on one another for emotional recognition. Our sympathetic capacities, which make us susceptible to the pain and pleasures of others, make it so that we are simply stuck with each other on account of our mutual emotional dependence. Unlike Gay, Hume does not think that this mutual dependence leads to a blending of the idea of our own happiness with that of others; instead, it leads to the development of previously non-existent norms with which we learn to comply on account of our sensitivity to this fact of mutual dependence.<sup>280</sup>

But the story does not end here. “’Tis true,” Hume notes, “there is no human and indeed no sensible creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours,” but the measure to which we are sensible to the happiness or misery of another is dependent on how much we identify with the sensible creature in question.<sup>281</sup> As he stresses, “an *Englishman in Italy* is a friend: A *European in China*; and perhaps a man wou’d be belov’d as such, were we

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<sup>278</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 363.

<sup>279</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 363.

<sup>280</sup> The one instance where the blending of our happiness with that of others may be totalizing is the family. In other instances, however, this blending will be necessarily incomplete. There are three species of norms, for Hume: those which relate to our material needs (i.e., justice), those required for the maintenance of institutions (i.e., allegiance), and those related to our emotional dependence (i.e., manners and politeness). Most character traits that Hume deems “virtuous” concern one or more of these three categories. For more on the specific virtues in Hume, see: Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s ‘Treatise’* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 198-219; Rachel Cohon, *Hume’s Morality: Feeling and Fabrication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96-125; 239-267; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, 87-108; Annette C. Baier, “Kinds of Virtue Theorist: A Response to Christine Swanton,” *Hume on Motivation and Virtue: New Essays*, ed. Charles R. Pigden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 249-258; Christine Swanton, “Reply to Baier,” 259-263.

<sup>281</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 481.

to meet him in the moon. But this proceeds only from the relation to ourselves; which in these cases gathers force by being confined to a few persons.”<sup>282</sup> Our maximal sensitivity is confined to few: “a man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers, where every thing is equal.”<sup>283</sup> The happiness of others impacts us to the degree that they *resemble* us – the greater resemblance, the more vivid their emotions will be, as we can tie them back to ourselves.<sup>284</sup> The problem is that “our common measures of duty...always follows the common and natural course of our passions,” the implication being that we will only take ourselves to have duties to those closest to us.<sup>285</sup>

If every person judged a trait to be virtuous on the basis of “his own peculiar point of view,” our mutual judgments would be in “continual fluctuation,” and we would never be able to “converse together on any reasonable terms.”<sup>286</sup> Hume notes that in order to “prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view.”<sup>287</sup> Scholars have come to refer to this

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<sup>282</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 482.

<sup>283</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 483-84.

<sup>284</sup> As Hume points out, “Nature has preserv’d a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which...we may not find a parallel in ourselves. The case is same with the fabric of the mind, as with that of the body. However, the parts may differ in shape or size, their structure and composition are in general the same. There is a very remarkable resemblance, which preserves itself amidst all their variety; and this resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure...the stronger the relation betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of the conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person” (*A Treatise*, 318).

<sup>285</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 484.

<sup>286</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 581.

<sup>287</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 581-82.

standard as the “common point of view.”<sup>288</sup> Hume thinks of this perspective as a reflective standard we use to correct our immediate sentiments of praise and blame. He gives a visual-aesthetic standard to illustrate the process: “external beauty is determin’d merely by pleasure’ and ‘tis evident, a beautiful countenance cannot give so much pleasure, when seen at the distance of twenty paces, as when it is brought nearer to us. We say not, however, that it appears to us less beautiful: Because we know what effect it will have in such a position, and by that reflexion we correct its momentary appearance.”<sup>289</sup> Because we know that the ideal distance for determining the beauty of a face is closer than twenty paces, we discount any judgments that we make prior to traversing the necessary distance to achieve that more ideal perspective.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> For some discussions on this point see: Henning Jenson, “Hume on Moral Agreement,” *Mind* 86 (1977): 497-513; J.L. Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 120-29; Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 179; Geoffrey Sayre McCord, “On why Hume’s general point of view isn’t ideal—and shouldn’t be,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994): 202-28; Christine Korsgaard, “The General Point of View: Love and Moral Approval in Hume’s Ethics,” *Hume Studies* 25.1 (1999): 3-41; Kate Abramson, “Correcting Our Sentiments about Hume’s Moral Point of View,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37.3 (1999): 333-336; Charlotte Brown, “Is the General Point of View the Moral Point of View?,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 197-203; Louis E. Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101-138; Cohon, *Feeling and Fabrication*, 126-158; Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 99-109.

<sup>289</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 582.

<sup>290</sup> For more on aesthetic and moral judgment, see: Peter Kivy, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967): 57–66; Peter Jones “Hume’s Aesthetics Reassessed,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1976): 48–62; Jeffrey Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards of Taste,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 129–42; Mary Mothersill, “Hume and the Paradox of Taste,” *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 269-286; Ted Gracyk, “Rethinking Hume’s Standard of Taste,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 169–182; James Shelley, “Hume and the Nature of Taste,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 29–38; Peter Railton, “Aesthetic Value, Moral Value, and the Ambitions of Naturalism,” *Aesthetics and Ethics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 59–105; Michelle Mason, “Moral Prejudice and Aesthetic Deformity: Rereading Hume’s ‘Of the Standard of Taste’,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001): 59–71; Jerrold Levinson, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art*

Likewise, Hume thinks that reflection helps moderate our snap judgments of praise or blame about someone's traits which aren't made from the appropriate ideal. As in the visual case, where we recognize that we require a standard of measurement to meaningfully talk about the size of objects, we recognize that we require a standard for the propriety of character traits to converse with others about moral matters. Like in the visual case, just because we adopt a standard does not mean that we will cease from making snap judgments: as Hume notes, "our passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgment," as they are "more stubborn and inalterable."<sup>291</sup> The fact that, say, envy is an improper sentiment will not keep us from experiencing it, or even from feeling that it is justified.<sup>292</sup> However, we will know that our envy is out of step with the standard that reflection has suggested we adopt. When we consider something to be in accordance with the adopted standard, our judgment takes the form of a "calm passion," which exercises *some* defeasible influence over us.<sup>293</sup> Our feeling that our envy

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*Criticism* 60 (2002): 227–238; Jacqueline Taylor, "Hume on Beauty and Virtue," *A Companion to Hume*, 273–92; Ted Gracyk, "Delicacy in Hume's Aesthetic Theory," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 9 (2011): 1–16; Peter Kivy, "Remarks on the Varieties of Prejudice in Hume's Essay on Taste," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 9 (2011): 111–15; Elisa Galgut, "Hume's Aesthetic Standard," *Hume Studies* 38 (2012): 183–200; Tina Baceski, "Hume on Art Critics, Wise Men, and the Virtues of Taste," *Hume Studies* 39 (2013): 233–56.

<sup>291</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 582.

<sup>292</sup> See n.173 below.

<sup>293</sup> For more on the calm passions, see: Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 93–108; James Fieser, "Hume's Classification of the Passions and its Precursors," *Hume Studies* 18.1 (1992): 1–17; Jane L. McIntyre, "Hume's 'New and Extraordinary' Account of the Passions," *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, ed. Saul L. Traiger (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 199–215; Lilli Alanen, "The Powers and Mechanisms of the Passions," *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, 179–198; Jane L. McIntyre, "Strength of Mind: Prospects and Problems for a Humean Account," *Synthese* 152.3 (2006): 393–401; Rachel Cohon, "Indirect Passions," *A Companion to Hume*, 159–184; Stephen Buckle, "Hume on the Passions," *Philosophy* 87.2 (2012): 189–213; Amy M. Schmitter, "Passions, Affections, Sentiments: Taxonomy and Terminology," *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, 197–225; James A. Harris, "The

is improper may not successfully counteract the violent reaction of the envy, but we will feel its impropriety as long as we can reflect on and adopt the requisite standard.

I have not yet said anything about the content of this standard – only that reflection leads us to adopt a common standard; that this standard can be used to cast doubt on our snap judgments; and that the judgments do not erase the possibility of experiencing sentiments that are improper for the perspective of any standard that we adopt. At this point, the visual metaphor loses its power. Consider the following quote: “all sentiments of blame or praise are variable...but these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain’d in one point of view.”<sup>294</sup> But Hume is not thinking of the common point of view as a heuristic attempt to attain cognitive distance on a situation – despite his using the language of “coolness” and “reflexion,” which imply that he is enjoining us to step back from our initial judgments of praise and blame and consider the traits of others in a more steady frame of mind.<sup>295</sup> Reflection, itself, does not give us a standard by which to judge traits as virtuous or vicious. Through reflection, we can adopt a common moral standard that expands our concerns beyond certain self-interested or parochial interests; however, short of fixing the content of this standard, we are left with empty appeals to “generality,” “commonality,” and “impartiality.”

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Government of the Passions,” *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, 270-289; Jason McCullough, “Constancy and the Calm Passions in Hume’s Treatise,” PhD dissertation, Boston University, 2015; Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, “Strength of Mind and the Calm and Violent Passions,” *Res Philosophica* 92.3 (2015): 547–67.

<sup>294</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 582.

<sup>295</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 583.

So in what does the standard of morality consist, according to Hume? “Virtue” is a term that we use to describe objects of which we tend to approve, while “vice” is a term used to refer to objects that often receive our disapproval.<sup>296</sup> Hume claims that our approvals and disapprovals (i.e. our ideas of virtue and vice) are directed at particular character traits that individuals possess and that explain their behavioral patterns.<sup>297</sup> He begins by observing that we attribute thick descriptions to our fellows – honorable, shameful, etc. – and afford them the relevant praise or blame. On what basis do we approve and disapprove of these characters; or, what standard is involved in us ascribing virtue and vice to others? Part of what is involved, Hume notes, is pleasure when contemplating honorable conduct, and love for the person who possesses it.<sup>298</sup> But, as a scientist of human nature, he seeks the explanatory grounds of attributions of virtue and vice, and settles on four. A trait receives approval *if* it is useful to the one who possesses it; agreeable to the person who possesses it; useful to others; or agreeable to others.<sup>299</sup>

While agreeableness and usefulness possess equal weight in *explaining* why we approve of certain traits, the case is different with moral judgments, where usefulness plays a larger role. Usefulness is in many ways the operative concept of Hume’s later

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<sup>296</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 471; 574-75.

<sup>297</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 574-75

<sup>298</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 575. For more on the role of character in Hume’s account of moral evaluation, see: William Davie, “Hume on Morality, Action, and Character” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2.3 (1985): 337-348; Jane L. McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7.2 (1990): 193-206; Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 174-197; Paul Russell, *Freedom & Moral Sentiment: Hume’s Way of Naturalizing Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 87-136; Jacqueline Taylor, “Virtue and the Evaluation of Character,” *The Blackwell Guide to Hume’s ‘Treatise’*, 276-298; Erin Frykholm, “The Ontology of Character Traits in Hume,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 42 (2012): 82-97; Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, 43-108.

<sup>299</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 587; 590.

ethics.<sup>300</sup> The aim of Hume's second *Enquiry* is to discover the source of our approbation for those "social virtues," benevolence and justice. These virtues form the basis of our lives together. Hume argues that our moral judgments are shaped most by what is useful or harmful to society, noting that "those whose habits and conduct are hurtful to society" are objects of the "strongest sentiment of disgust and hatred."<sup>301</sup> Nevertheless, according to Hume, philosophers do not often admit considerations of usefulness "into their systems of ethics," because it is difficult to understand how we come to approve of character traits in terms of their general usefulness.<sup>302</sup> For usefulness to be linked to moral approval, Hume points out that "the social virtue must, therefore, be allowed to have a natural beauty and amiableness, which, at first, antecedent to all precept or education, recommends them to the esteem of uninstructed mankind, and engages their affections."<sup>303</sup> Explaining this link leads Hume to invoke the "common point of view."

### *Language and Moral Content*

As reflective beings we adopt a "method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, *of correcting our language*, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable

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<sup>300</sup> See: Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism*, 91-112; M.A. Martin, "Utility and Morality: Adam Smith's Critique of Hume," *Hume Studies* 16.2 (1990): 107-120; James Moore, "Utility and Humanity: The Quest for *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson, and Hume," *Utilitas* 14 (2002): 356-386; Frederick Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29-57; Russell Hardin, *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 155-172; James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143-97; Julia Driver, "Hume's Sentimentalist Account of Moral Judgment," *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hume*, ed. Alan Bailey and Dan O' Brien (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 279-287.

<sup>301</sup> Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P.H. Niddich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 213.

<sup>302</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 213.

<sup>303</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 214.

[emphasis mine].”<sup>304</sup> He is clearer about this emphasis on language in the second *Enquiry*. When I approve or disapprove of some character trait, I often do so from my own perspective. For Hume, I use the language of *self-love*: “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.”<sup>305</sup> But, he claims, “the more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain,” the more we recognize that “...every man's interest is peculiar to himself, and the aversions and desires, which result from it, cannot be supposed to affect others in a like degree.”<sup>306</sup> We require a language that is distinct from self-love: “general language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community.”<sup>307</sup> We develop a *moral* language, which allows us to reflect on the value of character traits from this shared perspective enshrined in the language.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 582.

<sup>305</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 228.

<sup>306</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 228.

<sup>307</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 228.

<sup>308</sup> For this interpretation of Hume’s moral point of view, I rely heavily on the second *Enquiry*, as opposed to the *Treatise*. It is not until the second *Enquiry* where Hume begins to associate the moral perspective with a language. I will set aside questions about the relationship between the *Treatise* and second *Enquiry*, though Hume’s preference for the latter is well-documented. Language and conversation play a central role in Hume’s account of how moral norms are forged and sustained over time. For some important discussion of moral language in Hume, see: Jenson, “Hume on Moral Agreement”; Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 190-212; Baier, *A Progress of the Sentiments*, 190-94, 229-31; Jacqueline Taylor, “Hume’s Later Moral Philosophy,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 311-340; Jacqueline Taylor, “Hume on Pride and the Other Indirect Passions,” *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, 295-311.

From the perspective of self-love, we view individuals as they relate to us; from the perspective of morality, we consider individuals as possessors of certain character traits that are useful or harmful. Annette Baier distinguishes between the stance one takes as a moral evaluator and that which a lover takes regarding her beloved (read: any example where there is affection or familiarity between the two parties in question will suffice). When asked about the character of one's lover, Hume notes that "he will tell you, that he is at a loss for words to describe her charms."<sup>309</sup> In contrast to this lack of description, Baier says "the moral evaluator cannot be at a loss for words to describe what she approves—so must be able to 'give you the character for' what she approves in you. From the moral viewpoint, particular repeated and repeatable 'characters' have been singled out for notice, and a special language evolved for referring to them."<sup>310</sup> Baier goes on to quote what I take to be the clearest expression of Hume's idea that the common point of view is linguistic: in our attempt to evaluate characters, we "invent a peculiar set of terms, in order to express those universal sentiments of censure or approbation, which arise from humanity, or from views of general usefulness and its contrary. Virtue and Vice become then known: morals are recognized."<sup>311</sup>

Let me unpack this claim. To be concerned for humanity is to take an interest in characters which are useful for it. Likewise, no one is concerned with bare usefulness; something is always useful *for* some individual or group. When it comes to discussing the shape of moral language, Hume maintains that the "peculiar set of terms" we invent are

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<sup>309</sup> David Hume, "The Sceptic," *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 162. Quoted in Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 191.

<sup>310</sup> Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 91.

<sup>311</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 274. Quoted in Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 191.

meant to reflect views about the “general usefulness and its contrary.” Although we value a great many different things, moral evaluation is always done via reference to its usefulness or harmfulness. Take Hume’s example of a benevolent person.<sup>312</sup> He thinks it is important to dispel the idea that we approve of benevolence because it makes us feel good. We approve of a benevolent person to the extent that “happiness and satisfaction, [is] derived to society from his intercourse and good offices.”<sup>313</sup> As Hume argues, “the happiness of mankind, the order of society, the harmony of families, the mutual support of friends” exercise “dominion over the breasts of men” and therefore “the circumstances of *utility*, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions.”<sup>314</sup>

Hume claims that we invent a “set of terms” to express “those universal sentiments of censure or approbation” – through this process “Virtue and Vice then becomes known” and “morals are recognized.” What comes first, the “set of terms” or the “universal sentiments”? Hume distinguishes between the approval that we express when using “the language of self-love” and the approval we convey from the common point of view. Hume draws a distinction between terms like “enemy, rival, antagonist, and adversary,” which express a partial evaluation, and others like “vicious, odious, or depraved” that convey something more objective about the person at which the

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<sup>312</sup> Benevolence is certainly a virtue, according to Hume, though a fraught one. See: Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 109-147; T. A. Roberts, *The Concept of Benevolence: Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Baier, *A Progress of the Sentiments*, 113-14; Rico Vitz, “Hume and the Limits of Benevolence,” *Hume Studies* 28.2 (2002): 271-296; Rico Vitz, “Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume’s Moral Psychology,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42.3 (2004): 261-275; Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, 181-194.

<sup>313</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 178.

<sup>314</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 181-82.

evaluation is directed. When someone uses these terms, they “speak another language, and express sentiments in which he expects all his audience are to concur with him.”<sup>315</sup> It is *after* we have shared terms that can make moral evaluations; or, evaluations that are understood and concurred with by our fellows. It does not make much sense to say that “universal sentiments” exist prior to the “set of terms” they are meant to express. It is only by learning to use the moral language that we begin to develop moral sentiments, properly speaking.<sup>316</sup>

The moral language allows us to render evaluations about characters that can be shared by our fellows. I cannot reasonably expect someone else to view *my* adversary as their adversary as well, but if my adversary displays certain distasteful character traits (i.e., a propensity to talk over others) I presume that others can share in the evaluation of my adversary, on that count at least. It is possible, for example, that I attach more significance to the phenomenon of talking over others (potentially because my adversary

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<sup>315</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 182; 231.

<sup>316</sup> There are significant connections here between Hume’s linguistic analysis of the moral perspective and Locke’s account of language. Exploring this point in greater detail would go the purposes of this chapter. Since Hume is commonly aligned with sentimentalism, it’s easy to forget that not *every* sentiment or passion qualifies as a “moral sentiment” on his picture. Moral sentiments are those sentiments which are involved in judgments about a person’s character (either oneself or another), when that character is considered from a more general perspective than one’s own. This is where Hume’s examples of “enemy, rival, antagonist, adversary,” and “vicious, odious, and depraved” are helpful in understanding his point. Initially, one might think that the difference between judging another to be a “rival” and judging them to be “odious,” on the grounds that the sentiment involved in the former determination is “calmer” than that which is involved in the latter. However, to call someone “odious” is a significant charge, and the affective component of such a judgment is rather strong – involving the passion of disgust. When one refers to another person as odious, the expectation is that other people (and perhaps even the odious person himself) can understand, affirm, and partake in this judgment. The sentiment involved here may be quite strong since when one feels the odiousness of another person, one imagines that one is feeling on behalf of the community. Regardless, this sentiment is considered “moral” because it was produced by contemplating the character of another from a general perspective, and it can be tested by the ability of others to enter into this sentiment.

engages in it) but all parties to the evaluation will agree that it is not a laudable trait, even if it is not a particularly vicious one. Hume admits that there will be differences in how one *feels* when rendering an evaluation of another person's character, though he does not think that these differences in feeling present much of a concern. The point of a moral language is to find common ground in how certain traits are spoken about. It may be that violations of politeness bother me more than they do other people – the strength of my evaluation will not be determined by the extent to which others share in my feeling of disapprobation but in the recognition that some action is, in fact, impolite. Importantly, Hume does think that we begin to “feel” these moral distinctions more as we further identify ourselves with the common point of view, which I discuss more in the next section.

Gay uses association to explain how we come to be concerned for the happiness of others despite only naturally caring for our own happiness. The process works as follows: I approve of my happiness; I recognize that I depend on others to attain my happiness; by association, I begin to see the happiness of others as not only a means to achieving my own happiness but as inextricable to it; I approve of other's happiness like I approve of my own. After this judgment is rendered, Gay then has a story to tell about how it motivates us to act. Hume thinks of moral principles in the same manner. We are naturally concerned for our own happiness – via relations of contiguity and resemblance – and we build sympathetic bonds with those around us, but when it comes to rendering evaluations of character that are distinct from our particular interests, we have no considerable feelings. It is only by conversing with others that we widen our scope of

concern and develop norms to help coordinate our conduct. Throughout *A Treatise*, Hume stresses that it is the associative mechanism of sympathy that is responsible for any feelings that become attached to these moral evaluations – all while recognizing that said affection will be “calm” and easily overridden by other considerations.

For Gay and Hume, we develop norms that reflect our common interests and form a minimal attachment to moral norms via our capacity to sympathize with others. What is distinctive about Hume’s account is the way in which he couches the concept of usefulness in a model of conversation and justification and requires that we become competent in the moral language to engage in proper deliberation. Hume offers us a standard of virtue but also a procedure for resolving moral disputes. By appealing to the idea of conduct or characters being beneficial or detrimental, we give ourselves the tools to productively disagree with one another about matters of mutual interest. We are forced to take others seriously. When deliberating from a moral perspective, the views and sentiments of others are the evidence required to determine if an action is the proper object of approbation or disapprobation. It is not enough to speak to our own perspective – we must try to speak for the common interest if we are to enjoy the fruits of living well together.

### **Humean Moral Pluralism?**

In *Humean Moral Pluralism*, Michael Gill argues that Hume is a moral pluralist, a view according to which “there is a multiplicity of different moral ends...[which] can come into conflict with each other and...there is no invariable ordering principle for

resolving all such conflicts.”<sup>317</sup> Gill’s interpretation challenges my reading of Hume, particularly my claim that Hume follows Gay in holding that norms of usefulness regulate other value considerations. In this section, I canvass Gill’s reasons for reading Hume as a moral pluralist and respond. I argue that, while Hume recognizes that human beings value different ends, objects, activities, etc., and that weighing these values can be rather difficult, he does not maintain that “there is no invariable ordering principle for resolving all such conflicts” of value. When occupying the common point of view, from which we make moral judgments, Hume thinks it is *a matter of fact* that we bestow greater approval on those traits and behaviors that are useful than those we find merely agreeable; further, agreeable traits, if harmful, meet collective disapproval.<sup>318</sup>

Gill attempts to establish that Hume is a “moral multiplist,” placing him alongside Samuel Clarke and Joseph Butler.<sup>319</sup> While Hutcheson claims that “moral judgments

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<sup>317</sup> Michael Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>318</sup> There is some controversy about the extent to which Hume is a moral theorist in our sense of the term – in that he attempts to not only *explain* our moral judgments, but also to give us some guidance about what to do or how to deliberate. Throughout his book, Gill seems to suggest that he views Hume as a kind of moral anthropologist, who attempts to give “the best causal explanation of our activity of moral judgment” (*Humean Moral Pluralism*, 4), without entering into many of the controversies that moral philosophers often find themselves embroiled. However, Gill’s main focus seems to be on Hume’s general disinterest in “conceptual metaethics” (*Humean Moral Pluralism*, 4). While I agree with Gill that metaethics is a minor concern for Hume, I do think that Hume has substantive things to say about how we should deliberate and what sort of character we should cultivate. On these matters, Hume gives a great deal of weight to considerations of utility. For more on this scholarly debate, see: Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory*, 5-6; Stephen Darwall, “Hume and the Invention of Utilitarianism,” *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 61; Robert Shaver, “Hume’s Moral Theory?” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 12 (1995): 317-31; Roger Crisp, “Hume on Virtue, Utility, and Morality,” *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, ed. Sebastian Gardiner (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 159-78.

<sup>319</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 6-19. Gill’s inclusion of Samuel Clarke here as a “moral multiplist” is important, since his role in the development of moral philosophy during this period is often understated.

track only our thoughts about general benevolence,” Clarke, Butler, and Hume maintain that the values of “justice, veracity, friendship, gratitude,” are not reducible to matters of benevolence.<sup>320</sup> Hume is, of course, *less* multiplist than Clarke or Butler since he only recognizes four grounds of approval in his works: X is useful to oneself; X is useful to others; X is agreeable to oneself; X is agreeable to others. Gill therefore overstates his case when he says that “Hume’s catalogue of the virtues is thus closer to Clarke’s and Butler’s pictures of the content of morality than to Hutcheson’s monistic picture.”<sup>321</sup> For Hume, we approve of gratitude, but our approval is *not* based in the idea that this value is intrinsically good – it is approved of insofar as it is either useful or agreeable.

The next step in Gill’s argument is establishing Hume’s “conflict multiplism,” distinguishing him from Clarke and Butler, who argue that there are multiple, non-reducible moral values that never come into conflict.<sup>322</sup> Agreeableness and usefulness can often push against one another. Gill takes the example of pride, which is agreeable to its possessor but disagreeable to others.<sup>323</sup> However, pride is agreeable to others if displayed in a moderate fashion; a well-placed and temperate degree of pride is an object of moral approval for Hume.<sup>324</sup> Second, Gill is unclear about the level at which the approval and disapproval is operating. Hume follows Hutcheson and Malebranche in claiming that the passions approve of themselves – the prideful person will approve of his passion when in

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<sup>320</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 20.

<sup>321</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 23.

<sup>322</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 15.

<sup>323</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*. See: 24 and 28, for Gill’s discussion of pride; 30 and 42, for his discussion of military glory.

<sup>324</sup> As Hume notes, “the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride” (*A Treatise*, 600).

its grip.<sup>325</sup> But this is different from *moral* approval, which is rendered from the common point of view.<sup>326</sup> Even though an observer can surely admit that an individual's pride feels good to that person, it does not follow that the observer approves of this pride.

Gill recognizes two paths open for the conflict multiplist. One could argue that when values come into conflict, there is a hierarchy of values that help us determine which value will win out. He refers to this position as "ordered multiplism."<sup>327</sup> One could also hold that there is no hierarchy of values to help adjudicate these conflicts between values. He refers to this position as pluralism.<sup>328</sup> For Gill, Hume is a pluralist, but he recognizes the possibility of reading him otherwise. Gill considers a place where Hume notes that commonsense places usefulness over other kinds of value:

"In all determinations of morality, this circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view; and wherever disputes arise, either in philosophy or common

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<sup>325</sup> Nicolas Malebranche notably claims that "the passions all seek their own justification; they unceasingly represent to the soul the object agitating it in the way most likely to maintain and increase the agitation...false judgments and the passions unceasingly contribute to each other's preservation" (*The Search after truth*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 397; Hutcheson follows Malebranche in maintaining that "all the Passions, and Affections justify themselves; or, we approve our being affected in a certain manner on certain Occasions, and condemn a Person who is otherwise affected. So the Sorrowful, the Angry, the Jealous, the Compassionate, think it reasonable they should be so upon the several Occasions which move these Passions; but we should not therefore say that Sorrow, Anger, Jealousy, or Pity are pleasant, and that we chuse to be in these Passions because of the concomitant Pleasure" (*An Inquiry*, 110-11). In a letter to Hutcheson, Hume notes that "You seem here to embrace Dr Butler's Opinion in his Sermons on Human Nature; that our moral Sense has an Authority distinct from its Force and Durableness, and that because we always think it *ought* to prevail. But this is nothing but an Instinct or Principle, *which approves of itself upon reflection; and that is common to all of them* [emphasis mine]" (*The Letters of David Hume*, vol. 1, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (New York: Oxford University Press), 47. I credit Aino Lahdenranta for drawing my attention to this aspect of Hume's moral psychology. See: Eleonore Le Jalle, "Hume, Malebranche, and the Self-Justification of the Passions," *Hume Studies* 38.2 (2014): 201-20.

<sup>326</sup> See section III of this paper, where I make this argument.

<sup>327</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 38.

<sup>328</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 37.

life, concerning the bounds of duty, the question cannot, by any means, be decided with greater certainty, than by ascertaining, on any side, the true interests of mankind. If any false opinion, embraced from appearances, has been found to prevail; as soon as farther experience and sounder reasoning have given us juster notions of human affairs; we retract our first sentiment and adjust anew the boundaries of moral good and evil. (*E* 81; see also 78, 82).<sup>329</sup>

Hume stresses that our sentiments may approve of certain traits in an immediate manner, and that these approvals may be at odds with more considered judgments of usefulness. When these conflicts arise, we favor usefulness and adjust our intuitive judgments to match our considered ones. I defended this position earlier in the chapter, when I was examining the development of moral language, and the primacy of usefulness. Gill admits this passage from Hume:

“Moral good and evil are certainly distinguish’d by our *sentiments*, not by *reason*: But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflexions on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. My opinion is, that both these causes are intermix’d in our judgments of morals; after the same manner as they are in our decisions concerning most kinds of external beauty: Tho’ I am also of opinion, that reflexions on the tendencies of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty (*T* 3.3.1.27).<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 42.

<sup>330</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 45.

While usefulness and agreeableness both impact what we morally approve, usefulness has a larger impact on approval. Take the example of helping your friend do his logic homework. This decision is agreeable: your friend needs assistance, you are in a position to help him, and so your doing so expresses a great deal of humanity. However, let us say that helping your friend feels like a chore and that he does not appear to be getting any better at logic. We might think your agreeable action has bad consequences for both him and yourself, insofar as it teaches him undue dependence on you and leads you to resent him. At this point, it becomes clear that we disapprove of you helping your friend, despite its original agreeableness.

If I am right about Hume, Gill argues that the non-consequentialist objection would follow. As he points out, John Balguy (1686-1748) first voices this objection against Hutcheson, saying that “Is virtue no otherwise good or amiable, then as it conduces to public or private advantage? Is there no absolute goodness in it? Are all its perfections *relative* and instrumental?”<sup>331</sup> If Hume holds that goodness is determined on the basis of its outcome, then it follows that there are no intrinsically good or bad actions. This option is a problem, according to Gill, because if it is true, then Hume doesn’t allow for non-consequentialist ends in his moral theory. Everything is subject to trade-offs in deliberation, and every action can be justified, provided that it produces the right sorts of outcomes. Gill gives the following example to illustrate the absurdity of this position.

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<sup>331</sup> John Balguy, “The Foundation of Moral Goodness,” *British Moralists, 1650-1800*, vol. 1, ed. D.D. Raphael (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 402. Quoted in: Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 56.

“An artist, call her Jane, has a desire to produce a beautiful object herself, say a painting. Jane also has the desire that the world contain as many beautiful objects as possible, regardless of who produces them. From her possessing those two desires, can you infer that Jane will prefer not to create a painting she wants to create if she believes that by doing so she can spur two other people to produce two beautiful paintings? No. The satisfaction Jane receives from producing a beautiful painting herself is quite different from...the pleasure she receives from observing a beautiful painting produced by someone else.”<sup>332</sup>

While Jane may value two beautiful paintings produced by two other people, she will feel differently about them if their production means sacrificing a beautiful painting she might herself produce. This point ties in with what Gill says about the non-fungibility of Humean pleasures.<sup>333</sup> The approval that comes along with producing a work of art is *qualitatively* different than observing two beautiful works of art: “Hume’s account of the motivational influences of the indirect and moral passions implies that self-approval has a deliberative weight of a different kind from the deliberative weight of approval of others.”<sup>334</sup> In other words, no interpersonal trade-offs can take place when it comes to value.

But Gill assumes that Jane’s desire to produce a work of art is greater than her desire that the world possess beautiful objects. Jane might identify with this loftier goal and possess a greater desire to see it through. Tough questions arise in this instance.

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<sup>332</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 59.

<sup>333</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 61.

<sup>334</sup> Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 63.

Should one place a greater weight on one's own artistic cultivation than on promoting the production of beautiful objects generally? How does one best promote the production of beautiful objects? Can one help accomplish this goal by cultivating one's own talents? Perhaps by identifying with the common point of view, and making a judgment about what policy of conduct will best promote the production of beautiful objects, Jane decides that she should take half the time she spends on her own painting and put it towards teaching underprivileged, artistically-inclined students to paint. Hume would likely commend Jane's decision here, claiming that it expresses a degree of humanity not present in the person who merely pursues their own talents at the first sight of conflict between their cultivation and the promotion of the general good.<sup>335</sup>

I have provided some reasons for thinking that Gill's pluralist interpretation of Hume misses the mark on two fronts. First, Gill overstates Hume's potential multiplism. Hume is concerned with two sources of value: usefulness and agreeableness. Second, though Hume notes that agreeableness plays a role in determining what we value, when it comes to conflicts between agreeableness and usefulness, usefulness exercises greater influence in what we ultimately see as morally praiseworthy. Gill does an admirable job making the case for Humean pluralist metaethics and normative ethics – my worry is that in his attempt to make Hume's view plausible, Gill dethrones usefulness as the standard

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<sup>335</sup> The Humean moral pluralist is able to recognize the value in Jane's decision no matter which she chooses, either producing a painting herself or working to ensure that others can do so. Either way, a value of some significance is being expressed. Still, I argue that Hume would give the following analysis of the cases. While Jane (-qua cultivating her talents) is hardly blameworthy, her decision strikes us as merely agreeable. We feel a sense of delight when considering Jane's decision to spend her nights working in the attic on a new landscape series. We might even be inclined to pick up a brush ourselves. Still, Jane is hardly praiseworthy, especially considering the humanity that would be conveyed by her decision to teach underprivileged students how to paint. Given the two options the latter decision would be of greater moral value, all things considered.

of moral approval. Hume is not a utilitarian in Gay's sense, or in the sense of how Bentham later uses this term. Still, Hume's moral theory is consequentialist insofar as he deems the standard of mutual benefit to be authoritative. Only by appealing to mutual benefit and detriment can we avoid factionalism and the conflict of moral attitudes. But how does one come to recognize the authority of usefulness? I turn next to Hume's account of moral authority.

### **The Authority of Impartiality**

Humans are sympathetic creatures – we are affected by the pleasures and pains of others, and can, with effort, come to adopt their point of view. This fact, alongside our mutual dependence and the necessity of our coordination with others to achieve shared ends, accounts for the development of a shared moral language. This language allows us to converse about character traits and conduct that are useful from the common point of view. But Hume runs into a problem. When I judge a trait to be useful – say, fortitude in face of uncertainty – my judgment is constituted by a calm affection of approval.<sup>336</sup> But calm affections are easily overridden by passions, since the latter are more closely tied to the production of desires, which are responsible for our conduct.<sup>337</sup> For calm approval to have an impact on action, Hume must explain how we come to view such approvals as *authoritative* and how this judgment of their authority is tied to motivation. I argue that Hume's explanation takes the form of an account of moral *responsiveness*. There are two aspects to responsiveness: delicate taste and due pride. I treat each of them in turn.

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<sup>336</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 228-29, 239, 259; *A Treatise*, 276; Hume, "Of the Passions," sect. 5-6.

<sup>337</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 213n1, 271; Hume, *A Treatise* 413-22, 455-70, 574-91; Hume, "Of the Passions," sect. 5-6.

Scholars draw on Hume's concept of taste to make sense of his account of moral judgment but it does not often appear in discussions about his view of moral obligation.<sup>338</sup> Hume conceives of moral norms as arising from conversation with others about matters of shared interest. In this way, the content of morality is shaped by what is important to us. Hume argues that there is never a genuine conflict between what is in our own self-interest and the interest of everyone, and so he is less concerned to explain why acting morally concords with enlightened self-interest.<sup>339</sup> While he is not as interested in *this* sense of moral obligation, Hume is drawn to the idea of moral responsiveness: our capacity to take in and respond to moral considerations. The authority of moral norms concerns our sensitivity to their demands. Moral success concerns our being able to appreciate the importance of these norms. As Hume points out, the failure to recognize moral distinctions "proceed from bad education, want of capacity, or a perverse and unpliant disposition."<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> To be fair, "taste" does not appear in Hume's discussion of moral obligation in the second *Enquiry*. He does treat the concept in section VII, "Of Qualities Immediately Agreeable to Ourselves," in a discussion of "the great charm of poetry": "the very sensibility to these beauties, or a delicacy of taste, is itself a beauty in any character; as conveying the purest, the most durable, and most innocent of all enjoyments" (259). Hume claims that poetry is in large part successful because it expresses passions that are easy for an audience to enter into, via sympathy.

<sup>339</sup> Hume thinks it is obvious to any right thinking person that acting morally is conducive to self-interest; it is therefore not the job of philosophers to convince anyone of this fact: "That the virtues are immediately useful or agreeable to the person possessed of them, are desirable in a view to self-interest, it would surely be superfluous to prove. Moralists, indeed, may spare themselves all the pain which they often take in recommending these duties. To what purpose collect arguments to evince that temperance is advantageous, and excesses of pleasure hurtful. When it appears that these excesses are only denominated such, because they are hurtful" (*Enquires*, 280. See also: 281-83).

<sup>340</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 280.

*Delicacy and Moral Refinement*

The first aspect of moral responsiveness is delicacy. While the concept of “delicacy” crops up often in Hume’s works, he does not discuss it directly in either the *Treatise* or second *Enquiry*. It does, however, receive a fuller treatment in his essays, “The Standard of Taste” and “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion.” In “Of Delicacy,” Hume distinguishes between two forms of delicacy: of passion and of taste. He notes: “some People are subject to a certain *delicacy of passion*, which...gives them a lively joy upon every event, as well as piercing grief, when they meet with misfortunes and adversity.”<sup>341</sup> Delicacy of passion is an increased susceptibility to the violent passions. A person who is quick to anger after being slighted, or who is apt to cry when hearing a piece of music, is said by Hume to have “delicate passions.” What makes a passion “violent” is not its felt intensity, but its tendency to incite bodily movements.<sup>342</sup> The person who possesses a delicacy of passion is prone to being moved by their passions.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” *Essays*, 3. The editor notes that “when Hume speaks here of a ‘delicacy of passion,’ he means a disposition to be affected strongly by the violent passions in the face of prosperity or misfortune, favors or injuries, honors or slights, and other accidents of life that lie beyond our control. What he here calls ‘taste’ – the sense of beauty and deformity in actions or objects – is also a passion, broadly speaking, but a normally calm one. A delicacy of taste is a keen sensitivity to beauty and deformity in actions, books, works of art, companions and such” (3-4n1). Hume also address the “delicacy of taste” in “The Standard of Taste,” *Essays*, 226-51.

<sup>342</sup> A differing, and prominent, interpretation of the distinction between calm and violent passions is found in Elizabeth S. Radcliffe’s recent work *Hume, Passion, and Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 147-51. She notes that, “Hume defines the division between calm and violent passions in terms of the internal upheaval with which the passion is felt...violent passions...are known by their internal feeling, and are clearly identified as passions” (147). According to Radcliffe, Hume departs from Hutcheson in identifying “violence” with bodily motion. Because of the role the violent passions play in Hume’s discussion in “Of the influencing motives of the will,” I think that the claim to Hume distinctiveness is overstated.

<sup>343</sup> As Hume notes, “a passion is a violent and sensible emotion of the mind, when any good or evil is presented, or any object, which, by the original formation of our faculties, is fitted to excite an appetite” (*A Treatise*, 437). Hume stresses that “a calm passion may easily be chang’d into a

Hume contrasts a delicacy of passion with a “delicacy of taste,” or a sensitivity to “beauty and deformity of every kind, as that does to prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries.”<sup>344</sup> In “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume notes that the person of delicate taste is one whose “organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: this we call delicacy of taste.”<sup>345</sup> Drawing the analogy with our sense of taste, Hume notes that “a good palate is not tried by strong flavors; but by a mixture of small ingredients, where we are still sensible of each part, notwithstanding its minuteness and its confusion with the rest.”<sup>346</sup> A savant can make “quick and acute” judgments of objects without deliberation.<sup>347</sup> As he notes, “when objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination the sentiment, which attends them, is obscured and confused...but allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice.”<sup>348</sup>

In the process of cultivating their taste, Hume argues that the delicate person develops a set of epistemic virtues that contribute to their impartiality.<sup>349</sup> This suggestion has led scholars to work to construct a Humean notion of a “true judge,” or the ideal critic.<sup>350</sup> Hume’s virtues of taste are not principally about a lack of bias, though being

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violent one, either by a change of temper, or of the circumstances and situation of the object, as by the borrowing of force from any attendant passion, by custom, or by exciting the imagination” (438). What makes a passion violent, as opposed to calm, then is simply its tight connection with desire or appetite, which exercises influence over the will (413-18).

<sup>344</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” 4.

<sup>345</sup> Hume, “The Standard of Taste,” 235.

<sup>346</sup> Hume, “The Standard of Taste,” 236.

<sup>347</sup> Hume, “The Standard of Taste,” 236.

<sup>348</sup> Hume, “The Standard of Taste,” 237.

<sup>349</sup> Hume, “The Standard of Taste,” 238.

<sup>350</sup> For good examples of this literature, see: Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards of Taste,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 129–42; Stephanie Ross, “Humean Critics: Real or

unbiased is necessary for a judge. The virtues of taste are those which contribute to one's fruitfully conversing with others, which allow one to refine their powers of observation and discernment. In this manner, the true judge is not only unbiased but sociable; they offer up provisional judgments of matters, knowing that they will be further refined by their fellows.<sup>351</sup> Consider the following judgment: "Gerald is an unsociable sod: he pollutes the air around him with his unyielding cynicism." Someone may remind me that Gerald's mother died last year and, while my description of his conduct is accurate, my characterization of his motives is not. This acquaintance is not excusing Gerald's behavior but providing further information so that I can make a reasonable judgment of him in light of this new evidence – a lesson that I can extend to other cases.

With the ability to make fine-grained judgments, and an openness to competing descriptions, the critic enjoys a broader scope of pleasures and pains than do most. Hume notes that a delicate taste "enlarges the sphere both of our happiness and misery and makes us sensible to pains as well as pleasure, which escape the rest of mankind."<sup>352</sup> He gives two examples of enlarging, one aesthetic and one moral. First, when a delicate person is presented with "a poem or picture...the delicacy of his feeling makes him be sensibly touched with every part of it; nor are the masterly strokes perceived with more exquisite relish and satisfaction, than the negligences or absurdities with disgust and

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Ideal?," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 20–28; Galgut, "Hume's Aesthetic Standard"; Baceski, "Hume on Art Critics"; James Shelley, "Hume and the Verdict of True Judges," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71.2 (2013): 145–53.

<sup>351</sup> I would argue, further, that the lack of bias the true judge exhibits is based in their being properly sociable. Discussing this topic further goes beyond the aims of the chapter.

<sup>352</sup> Hume, "Delicacy," 5.

uneasiness.”<sup>353</sup> Second, for the delicate person, “a polite and judicious conversation affords him the highest entertainment; rudeness or impertinence...a punishment to him.”<sup>354</sup> They find poorly constructed poems and unamiable company offensive, while the coarse person prefers ruder ways of spending their time. A problem with the coarse person’s indifference is he is not skeptical of his passions – he naturalizes them.

Take the example of someone who uses their free time to watch *Bachelor in Paradise* as opposed to developing a skill (gardening, martial arts, etc.). When receiving criticism from their fellows, this person may insist that they *prefer* watching television to other activities; people prefer different things and should not be criticized for their preferences. Hume responds that this person is giving their desires the veneer of authority. It is only because of the unrefined state of their character that this person finds developing a skill less preferable to spending their time in idleness. This point seems elitist on its face; however, the argument runs similarly regardless of one’s preferences. Hume does not seek to provide us with a hierarchy of preferences in his writings, though he argues that certain activities are preferable to delicate persons. What concerns Hume is the self-certainty that individuals display about their own intuitions and preferences *prior* to any self-cultivation. Without a delicate taste, we lack the desire to become more than whatever we currently are and we despise the suggestion that we should wish to be so.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” 5.

<sup>354</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” 5.

<sup>355</sup> He quotes Ovid’s *Epistulae ex Ponto* [Letter from Pontus] immediately afterwards: “Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes, Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros [A Faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character and permits it not to be so cruel]” (2.9.47-48). Hume pursues this topic further in “Of Refinement in the Arts.” Here, he claims that “besides the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an

By cultivating a delicate taste, we learn to *attend* to the objects under consideration, focusing not on how it relates to our particular interests, desires, or aims, but on the features of the object itself. With this outward-facing focus on the objects, we recognize that the descriptions that we offer are provisional, and open to discussion with similarly-minded people. After all, one cannot decisively describe an object, whether a piece of music, a painting, or a person. Part of the descriptive process, for Hume, is comparative. Through experience we learn to describe objects and compare them with other objects, both like and unlike. Comparisons reveal new facets of an object and give us a new appreciation of the ways in which its features are unique or derivative. We are often made aware of these comparisons by discussing these matters with our fellows who have different experiences from our own. Over time, we come to see the joint judgments of delicate people as authoritative; we no longer take our own view to be paramount.

Because we distance ourselves from our own judgments in becoming delicate, Hume claims that we are less disposed to the influence of violent passions. We thereby begin to make the transition from delicacy of passion to delicacy of taste. As he notes, taste “improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions; at the same time that it renders the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions.”<sup>356</sup> How is this transition possible? As we saw previously, the “rougher and more boisterous

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increase of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment. Thus industry, knowledge, and humanity, are linked together by an indissoluble chain” (*Essays*, 271). Hume sees no conflict between refinement and authenticity; there is a sense in which, for him, the self becomes realized through its engagement in the polite arts, the pleasures of conversation, and projects of mutual interest with others. Hume’s position reflects that of Shaftesbury: see, Michael B. Gill, “Shaftesbury on Politeness, Honesty, and Virtue,” *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 167-184.

<sup>356</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” 6.

emotions” are associated with our own particular perspective – we *feel* very strongly when it comes to considering how an object impacts us. When we are considering something more abstract, like the joint judgments of delicate individuals, we feel, but in a tender way. Over time, our identity is tied up with the experience of more tender sentiments. This transformation is seen most clearly in the context of aesthetics. With art, Hume claims, “nothing is so improving to the temper as the study of the beauties, either of poetry, eloquence, music, or painting...the emotions which they excite are soft and tender.”<sup>357</sup>

Hume argues that the transition from violent passions to tender sentiments happens also in the context of morals. On the face of it, this view is difficult to establish. Consider the case of an immoral aesthete like Hannibal Lecter, who shows an appreciation for the finer things in life along with enjoying the suffering of his fellows. Further, consider the character, A, from *Either/Or*, whose aestheticism leads him to experience ambivalence about ultimate values. While one could dismiss the case of Lecter as an aberration, this seems too easy. The salient point about Lecter, which connects him to A, is the ambivalence, bordering on indifference, that results from their cultivated aesthetic distance. We often associate the moral perspective as an attached, concerned, concrete interest for our fellow beings. This degree of attachment seems to be at odds with the aesthetic perspective. Even worse, morality seems to require that we take the interests of others to be significant on an intuitive level. We cannot accept a high-

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<sup>357</sup> Hume, “Delicacy,” 6-7.

minded ambivalence when it comes to persons, lest we end up undercutting the authority of those norms sanctioned by the common point of view.

The full response to this criticism cannot be offered until we consider the roles played by pride and conversation in establishing moral responsiveness. For now, it is enough to stress that, for Hume, delicacy consists not only in our distancing from violent passions but the cultivation of new sets of sentiments, produced by the perspective shift provided by delicacy. Judgments about another's conduct is based one's particular expectations. We might think, "how did this particular action impact me, or comport with my aims?" Because we are attached to our aims and desires more so than those of others, our response when another's action conflicts with our own can be quite extreme. We might feel that anyone who acts in a manner discordant with our interests is our enemy or is otherwise not someone with whom we can identify. The problem is not that we make these judgments – after all, we ought not identify with malicious souls – but that we do so flippantly. When we begin to attend to conduct or characters, keeping our focus on matters of mutual interest, our correlative passions are less violent and determinative.

The passions that we experience when judging others from the common point of view are calm, measured, and provisional. Considerations of mutual interest are complicated; we cannot easily settle the degree to which some action or trait is useful or detrimental. These matters are complex, taking a great deal of time and experience to be properly managed. As "delicate" individuals, we are aware of these difficulties and conduct ourselves with the necessary caution, which is reflected in the passions that we experience. It is not enough for our passions to be calm, however, they must also be

informed by the conceptual distinctions found in the moral language, and grounded in a concern for the mutual interest. While Hannibal Lecter can successfully make fine-grained distinctions about characters and conduct, the basis for his distinctions are not found in the common interest but his own desires and preferences. In his manner, Lecter has a great understanding of his own nature but very little about those who lie outside of himself, since he expresses little concern for anything, or anyone, that cannot be incorporated into a preexisting set of desires, preferences, and aims.

Cultivating delicacy requires the presence of other people. To be delicate in morals is to perceive with clarity and discernment the character and conduct of others, and to consider the ways in which they are either beneficial or detrimental to the moral community. But one cannot render proper judgments without experience, which is only amassed over time in conversation with similarly oriented individuals. The model for conversation is found in polite society, where one reflects on “human affairs, and the Duties of common Life, and to the Observation and Blemishes or Perfections of the particular Objects, that surround them.”<sup>358</sup> Moral education begins with reading history and learning about the deeds of others, but we only become moral agents when we begin to use our capacities in concert with others to discuss the duties of common life. By learning to make our case, and to receive feedback, we come to appreciate how to properly judge characters. I turn now to consider the matter of conversation, and the way in which this moral responsiveness can only be developed alongside others.

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<sup>358</sup> Hume, “Of Essay Writing,” *Essays*, 533-4.

*The World of Conversation*

We begin to see how this account of delicacy conduces to our responsiveness to norms legitimized from the moral perspective. If we conceive of the latter perspective as structured by the coordination of our shared interests, then moral deliberation is best modeled by the practice of polite conversation. Hume is unclear about how these conversations are meant to proceed. While he does not give us examples of these conversations taking place, he gives us an idea of how one might engage with others in this conversational context. Hume does so by providing us with a sketch of a person who engages in social life, tending to their duties, cultivating their degree of personal merit, and contributing to the well-being of the society of which they are a part.<sup>359</sup>

Throughout Hume's writings, he draws a distinction between the academy and polite society. Hume most clearly draws the distinction between polite society and the academy in "Of Essay-Writing."<sup>360</sup> He claims that the world of learning, concerns itself

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<sup>359</sup> Consider Hume's discussion of Cleanthes in *Enquires*, 269-70. Cleanthes is the model of "personal merit," a concept that Hume seeks to unfold in the second *Enquiry*. Among the positive qualities that Cleanthes is said to possess, Hume notes that he is, first, "*fair and kind*" in his treatment of others; second, that his education and hard work will secure him the "greatest honours and advancement"; third, that he possesses "wit and good manners"; and fourth, that he possesses a "cheerfulness...[that] runs through the whole tenor of his life, and preserves a perpetual serenity on his countenance, and tranquility in his soul."

<sup>360</sup> "Of Essay Writing" appeared only in the second edition of the *Essays* (1742), suggesting that Hume in some way disavowed its contents. That said, there are a number of reasons the essay could have been removed subsequent editions. Hume removed three unrelated essays for the third edition – "Of Essay Writing," "Of Moral Prejudices," and "Of the Middle Station of Life" – and replaced them with "Of National Characters," "Of the Original Contract," and "Of Passive Obedience," all of which were interventions in contemporary debates. Removing the former three pieces suggests nothing more than that he wished to make room for the latter essays, which would be of public interest. Further, there is little in "Of Essay Writing" that Hume does not say elsewhere. Take the problem at the center of the essay: the disconnect between the world of the learned and the world of conversation. This is a theme throughout Hume's work, and what led him to write the *Essays*, *Enquires*, and the *History*, to bridge the gap between polite society and

with “difficult Operations of the Mind, which require Leisure and Solitude”; while polite society, or the conversable world, involves “gentle Exercises of the Understanding, to obvious Reflections on human Affairs, and the Duties of common Life.”<sup>361</sup> Hume argues that reflecting on the duties of common life “require the Company and Conversation of our Fellow-Creatures.”<sup>362</sup> We cannot have a proper investigation of morality without the input of others who offer their sincere engagement. By conversing with others, Hume argues that we “bring Mankind together in Society, where every one displays his Thoughts and Observations in the best Manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives Information, as well as Pleasure.”<sup>363</sup> The conversable world is therefore the cradle of our sociability and humanity.

Hume sees himself as the mediator between the “college and cells” and polite society. He is also a proponent of what he calls the *l’Art de Vivre*, or “the art of society and conversation.”<sup>364</sup> While the rules of justice must be observed for society to exist, a *community* cannot come to exist without conversation and politeness. Through conversation, we learn to correct the natural vices of our nature. As Hume notes, “thus, as

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the scholarly world. This theme also runs throughout the work of many of Hume’s major influences, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Kames, etc.

<sup>361</sup> Hume, “Of Essay Writing,” 533. Hume’s comments about “Colleges and Cells” (534) mirror Shaftesbury’s own in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols., ed. Douglas Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 105. For Shaftesbury, conversation forges connections between people, combats ill-will, and gives content to our ideas of the good. Kames speaks of “the delicate pleasures of conversation, in communicating opinions, sentiments, and desires” and says of women, “the female sex have risen, in a slow but steady progress, to higher and higher degrees of estimation. Conversation is their talent, and a display of delicate sentiments: the gentleness of their manners and winning behaviour, captivate every sensible heart” (Lord Kames, *Sketches on the History of Man*, 3 vols., ed. James A. Harris (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997), I.41, I.116).

<sup>362</sup> Hume, “Of Essay Writing,” 534.

<sup>363</sup> Hume, “Of Essay Writing,” 534.

<sup>364</sup> Hume, “Of Civil Liberty,” 90-1.

we are commonly proud and selfish, and apt to assume the preference above others, a polite man learns to behave with deference towards his companions, and to yield the superiority to them in all the common incidents of society.”<sup>365</sup> He returns to this point throughout the *Essays*, noting that “arts of conversation . . . leads us to resign our own inclinations to those of our companion, and to curb and conceal that presumption and arrogance, so natural to the human mind.”<sup>366</sup> Similar to sympathy, conversation takes us outside of ourselves, forcing us to confront those more distasteful parts of ourselves and to engage with others on mutual footing with hopes of receiving their approval.

Consider the case of the zealot, who presumes to speak for humanity when he speaks only for the party to which he belongs. The zealot uses the words “odious,” “vicious,” fully expecting to “move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony.”<sup>367</sup> However, his principles and partial sentiments cannot be endorsed by the *party* of humankind.<sup>368</sup> The zealot’s delusion can be illustrated by the following four-step descent into disorder: first, the zealot presumes that his own sentiments are shared by everyone; second, this self-assurance closes him off to the need to rely on others to form reasonable judgments; third, the zealot becomes unresponsive to the sentiments of humanity; fourth, acts of cruelty follow. To halt this descent, we must remove all obstacles for conversation and cultivate the desire in others to engage with their fellows about matters of mutual importance.

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<sup>365</sup> Hume, “Rise and Progress,” 132.

<sup>366</sup> Hume, “Rise and Progress,” 126.

<sup>367</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 222.

<sup>368</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 224.

By shielding ourselves from malice, hatred, and the coolness of indifference, we become less prone to the fiery rhetoric of enthusiasts or to the gloom of the superstitious.<sup>369</sup> We choose to speak from a perspective that can be equally adopted by others in polite society. What obstructs one's ability to switch perspectives is righteousness stemming from challenging the moral principle that one has adopted.<sup>370</sup> Delicacy and conversation undercut this threat on two fronts. First, delicacy gives us access to a set of passions that undermine zealotry; these passions initially lack vivacity, but gradually become entrenched. Second, conversation reminds us that the moral project is undertaken with others: norms are provisionally adopted and justified from a common point of view. There is a worry that Hume cannot account for the entrenching of our calm sentiments, that they will always be overridden by violent passions. Still, all that he needs for the argument to work is the possibility that we can develop a disposition to be calm. We will then be disposed to look to our fellows, who will reinforce the authority of our calm sentiments and help remind us of our larger commitments.

At this point, we can return to the examples of Hannibal Lecter and A (from *Either/Or*). In both cases these figures are closed off, intentionally or not, to sincere commerce with their fellows. Though they are adept at drawing distinctions between characters and conduct, the basis on which these distinctions are made is problematic, being founded in their own particular set of interests. To the extent that Lecter or A recognize the existence of a common moral language that we use to offer our descriptions and judgments, they do not experience it as authoritative. This fact is attributable to their

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<sup>369</sup> Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," *Essays*, 74.

<sup>370</sup> Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," 247.

not conversing with others. Were they to allow themselves to interact with others on an equal footing, treating their own ideas as provisional and the joint verdict of well-meaning delicate people as paramount, the unsociability to which they are both prone would lose its allure. Of course, Lecter has the problem of being naturally malicious but, as I pointed out above, we are setting aside this fact for the sake of argument. Under the sway of his fellows, A would *at the very least* no longer be able to look himself in the mirror without feeling as if he had mistaken his own childishness for profundity.

*A Due Sense of Pride*

While the delicacy of taste is central to Hume's understanding of our moral responsiveness, the story does not end here. To be responsive to moral considerations, we must see ourselves as invested in the social order that is regulated by these norms of usefulness. While moral responsiveness requires an attunedness to considerations of usefulness, it also requires that we identify with the moral scheme to which we are receptive, lest we experience it as an intrusion on our agency. As sensitive, imaginative, and sympathetic creatures, we are responsive to a great many things, not all of which we see as compatible with our ends. For Hume, the process of identification with the moral point of view is completed by way of our sense of pride, or our desiring to maintain a particular status in the eyes of others and ourselves. This status is tied to fulfilling our duties as sociable beings and to our being worthy of love and respect.

In the *Treatise*, Hume defines pride as a self-directed pleasure.<sup>371</sup> Along with humility, pride plays a central role in his account of the passions.<sup>372</sup> Particularly interesting is how pride relates to what Hume refers to as “love of fame.”<sup>373</sup> We wish to have a positive view of ourselves, and because we are sympathetic creatures, we wish others to share in this judgment. As Hume notes, “our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance.”<sup>374</sup> We are concerned about how we appear to others, and are easily influenced by the opinions that others have of us. Because of this sensitivity to the judgments of others, we desire to appear praiseworthy in their eyes by regulating our conduct in accordance with shared standards.<sup>375</sup>

“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...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. The animal conveniences and

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<sup>371</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 277-79. He puts it somewhat differently in “Of the Passions,” saying that “Pride is a certain satisfaction in ourselves, on account of some accomplishment or possession, which we enjoy” (2.1).

<sup>372</sup> Pride is a central passion for Hume. For more on its role in his moral theory, see: Annette Baier, “Master Passions,” *Explaining Emotions*, ed. A.O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 403-23; Lorraine Besser-Jones, “Hume on Pride-in-Virtue: A Reliable Motive?” *Hume Studies* 36.2 (Nov. 2010): 171-92. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 130-58.

<sup>373</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 316-24.

<sup>374</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 316. Hume even notes that the other causes of pride, “virtue, beauty and riches, have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others” (316).

<sup>375</sup> “Here is the most perfect morality with which we are acquainted: here is displayed the force of many sympathies. Our moral sentiment is itself a feeling chiefly of that nature, and our regard to a character with others seems to arise only from a care of preserving a character with ourselves; and in order to attain this end, we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgement on the correspondent approbation of mankind” (Hume, *Enquires*, 276).

pleasures sink gradually in their value; while every inward beauty and moral grace is studiously acquired, and the mind is accomplished in every perfection, which can adorn or embellish a rational creature.”<sup>376</sup>

By learning to conduct ourselves in a praiseworthy manner, we gain a kind of respect for virtue, and begin to see vice and anything contributing to it as, in some sense, beneath us. We feel shame at the very thought of acting in a way contrary to the norms approved of from the common point of view. Through this process we then cultivate an identity as someone who has what Hume calls *personal merit*.<sup>377</sup> We aspire to be someone who is praiseworthy in light of the norms of justice and politeness.

Still, there can be reasonable disagreement about which actions are properly just or polite, even given agreement about the authority of the norms themselves, or even about much of their content. Hume does not expect there to be complete consensus about the application of norms of justice or politeness – such is not the role of the moral language. Rather, through the mechanism of sympathy and our interactions with one another in civil society, the language and its rules of application begin to more consistently track characters and conduct in a way that allows for meaningful agreement between people. Given that people are sincerely engaged in conversation with their fellows about matters of mutual interest, disagreement does not undermine the validity of

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<sup>376</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 276.

<sup>377</sup> Personal merit is the central concept of Hume’s later moral philosophy. In the second *Enquiry*, he aims to “discover the true origin of morals” by “analyz[ing] that complication of mental qualities, which form what, in common life, we call Personal Merit: we shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to a person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners” (*Enquires*, 173-74).

the moral language but allows for further consensus and the progress of sentiments. In this way, Hume provides us with a model of moral conversation that allows for reasonable, productive disagreement between people about the mutual interest while still forming the basis of a sophisticated account of moral identity.

Why does our pride help us cultivate a practical identity consistent with the sociable virtues? Why does it not cause us push back against any blame that we receive or feel contempt for those who try to censure us? Hume notes that pride is associated with traits like “courage, intrepidity, ambition, love of glory.”<sup>378</sup> But individuals who are possessed of such traits are not typically sensitive to the praise and blame of others – they often consider themselves to be above such matters, and choose to conduct themselves on the basis of internal principles. Many of the characters of history with whom we find ourselves fascinated, and whose deeds we contemplate, are seen as praiseworthy precisely because of their not having to rely on others.<sup>379</sup> These individuals are often seen as having traits that fall under the “heroic” or “military” virtues.<sup>380</sup> But if we approve of individuals who possess a pride that makes them *less sensitive* to the praise and blame of

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<sup>378</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 599.

<sup>379</sup> Consider Hume’s example of Alexander the Great, whose pride leads him to ignore the advice, and also the well-being, of others: “Go, says Alexander the Great to his soldiers, when they refus’d to follow him to the Indies, go tell your countrymen, that you left Alexander compleating the conquest of the world. This passage was always particularly admir’d by the prince of Conde, as we learn from St. Evremond. ‘Alexander,’ said that prince, ‘abandon’d by his soldiers, among barbarians, not yet fully subdu’d, felt in himself such a dignity and right of empire, that he cou’d not believe it possible any one cou’d refuse to obey him. Whether in Europe or in Asia, among the Greeks or Persians, all was indifferent to him: Wherever he found men, he fancied he had found subjects’” (*A Treatise*, 599).

<sup>380</sup> Hume expresses ambivalence about military virtue, saying that: “heroism, military glory, is much admir’d by the generality mankind. They consider it as the most sublime kind of merit. Men of cool reflexion are not so sanguine in their praises of it” (*A Treatise*, 600-602). See also: *Enquires*, 249; 259; 337.

others, how can we say that it is connected to our responsiveness to the dictates of morality? At best, it would seem that pride does not play an essential role in this process, but is only sometimes related, while at other times it is absent.

Though human beings are disposed to have what Hume calls an “over-weaning conceit” of themselves, he distinguishes this from a due pride, which he thinks is necessary for personal merit: “tho’ an over-weaning conceit of our own merit be vicious and disagreeable, nothing can be more laudable, than to have a value for ourselves, where we really have qualities that are valuable.”<sup>381</sup> The difference between “over-weaning conceit” and a due “value for ourselves” turns on the extent to which we possess those traits seen as valuable from the common point of view. Though Hume is not wholly consistent with his terminology, we might think of over-weaning conceit as vanity; on this construal, vanity is blameworthy whereas pride is praiseworthy.<sup>382</sup> From our own perspective, pride “makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us a confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes.”<sup>383</sup> Although someone may be possessed of qualities that are admirable, it is pride that “acquaints” us with these qualities and gives us occasion to “know our own force.”<sup>384</sup> He argues that it is this awareness of our abilities, provided they are worthy of merit, that gives us the necessary “boldness” and “good opinion of ourselves” to move confidently through the world.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 596.

<sup>382</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 597.

<sup>383</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 597.

<sup>384</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 597.

<sup>385</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 597.

Hume stresses that people are often suspicious of “self-applause,” since it is seen as a sign of vanity.<sup>386</sup> In response, we develop and adopt rules of polite conversation to govern our expressions of pride. By learning to express our pride in a tenor that is agreeable to others, we experience it differently and see certain manifestations of pride as merited and others as unmerited. Those merited expressions of pride are met with praise by others.<sup>387</sup> One might respond: just because we learn to express our pride differently does *not* mean we come to feel differently. We may choose to moderate our pride in light of prudence. Still, other people revel in our merit, provided it is expressed in the right way.<sup>388</sup> Also, not every person is expected to moderate their pride in the same way. The degree to which it is appropriate to express our pride depends on our “rank and station in the world, whether it be fix’d by our birth, fortune, employments, talents, or reputation.”<sup>389</sup> And this makes decent enough sense: it would be improper to express a great deal of pride on account of occupying a station that fortune secured for us. Our awareness of this fact should naturally shape our idea of what we see as a reasonable degree of pride to express.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> “That impertinent, and almost universal propensity of men, to over-value themselves, has given us such a prejudice against self-applause, that we are apt to condemn it, by a general rule, wherever we meet with it; and ‘tis with some difficulty we give a privilege to men of sense, even their most secret thoughts” (Hume, *A Treatise*, 598).

<sup>387</sup> “The world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride, which secretly animates our conduct, without breaking into such indecent expressions of vanity, as may offend the vanity of others” (*A Treatise*, 600).

<sup>388</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 599.

<sup>389</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 599.

<sup>390</sup> I don’t want to make too much of this point. After all, Hume does not distinguish between merit and demerit on the basis of agential responsibility. See: Hume, “Of Some Verbal Disputes,” *Enquires*, 312-23.

Because “the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride,” we seek to become worthy of esteem.<sup>391</sup> We wish to not only be *seen* as good by others, but to be able to see ourselves as honorable. We can see how pride ties into matters of delicacy. To be of a delicate nature is to be sensitive to moral distinctions and to consider them as authoritative over our conduct. This enables us to engage in productive conversations with our fellows and to negotiate our interests for the purposes of living well together. Our pride makes us conscious about how we appear to others, brings home their praise and blame to us, and compels us to conduct ourselves in a manner so as to receive the former and to avoid the latter.<sup>392</sup> We are conscious of the possibility of unmerited praise, and approve of those traits constitutive of personal merit, so we wish to be seen in a positive light and to form ourselves in a way as to be the object of merited praise. It is also true that a life possessed of personal merit, which involves conducting ourselves in a manner consistent with both the rules of justice and politeness, is the happiest one.

I have completed my interpretation of Hume. I discussed how sympathy opens us to the emotions of others, and how our interdependence leads us to adopt a language to regulate our conduct for the purposes of living together. Our sympathy and commerce with others results in the development of a moral language that tracks the interests of a group while still allowing for diversity, historically and culturally. By speaking this language, we learn to take on a perspective different from our own and consider actions

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<sup>391</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 600.

<sup>392</sup> “‘Tis necessary to fell the sentiment and passion of pride in conformity to it, and to regulate our actions accordingly. And shou’d it be said, that prudence may suffice to regulate our actions in this particular, without any real pride, I wou’d observe, that here the object of prudence is to conform our actions to the general usage and custom” (Hume, *A Treatise*, 599).

and characters in terms of their being either beneficial or detrimental, generally speaking. In this way, usefulness serves as the moral standard that overcomes the problems found in Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's thought. In this section, I considered the authority that this standard exercises over us. Hume thinks of agents as responsive to the demands of morality, provided they are delicate and moderately prideful. His account of moral authority is found in this story of how we develop these latter features.

### **Delicacy, Contempt, and Partiality**

In this chapter, I have examined the writings of Gay and Hume as they pertain to the problem of partiality. Gay extends the empiricist aspects of Locke's method to ethics, a topic on which scholars have often found Locke's views wanting. One subject on which Gay differs from Locke nowhere considers the potential of people's motives to be shaped positively through association, so that they learn to act in a reliably moral fashion. Gay argues that people come to recognize that their own happiness is tied up with the universal happiness; once these ideas are fused in thought through association, people learn to guide their conduct in light of this happiness. In other words, people naturally become utilitarians, according to Gay. The story is more complicated for Hume, and involves pride and the capacity of taste. However, the lesson is largely the same: human nature is to a large degree malleable. If people are guided by the right standard, usefulness, they can learn to overcome their partial tendencies with a little effort, at least in a great many cases.

We end up back at the problem of partiality. Just because a person's motives are malleable does not mean that they are either as malleable as Hume assumes or that this

malleability, if possible, is even desirable. Given that there is a natural limit to how much we can extend our concern or love, any moral theory that requires universal benevolence will run afoul of our psychology. Even given time, and an optimistic reading of how significant a change we can make to our motivational scheme, either through the means of association or by way of discussion and the cultivation of delicacy, there is still a question of whether this change would have unfortunate consequences. Consider the delicate person whose family largely consists of vulgar individuals. This person's high-minded contempt would likely override any bonds of affection that would otherwise lead him to appreciate his family, even given their faults. Unless his family were to consist of mostly cruel people, we might judge this person to be heartless and moralistic.

The delicate person seems exceedingly arrogant, not being able to bear the presence of those not similarly fashioned. As Hume notes, "polite and judicious conversation affords him [the delicate person] the highest entertainment; rudeness or impertinence is as great a punishment to him."<sup>393</sup> Being presented with coarseness, either in affection or conduct, this person is filled with "disgust and uneasiness."<sup>394</sup> Uneasiness and disgust are repelling passions for Hume. When we feel them, our aim is to remove ourselves from their presence. If we are threatened by the coarse person, our uneasiness may give rise to contempt or malice, and lead us to desire their destruction. Hume presents the delicate person as sociable, as someone who takes joy in being surrounded by and conversing with their fellows. But when we consider the passions that the delicate person feels for those unlike himself, we can see that Hume's story is more complicated.

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<sup>393</sup> Hume, "Delicacy," 5.

<sup>394</sup> Hume, "Delicacy," 5.

The delicate person desires company and concord but only insofar as they can partake in similar passions and conduct.

Few people are delicate, according to Hume, though he holds out hope that no person is incapable of developing this capacity. Delicate persons will band together to form a faction of their own. In the previous chapter, I discussed Cockburn's criticism of Shaftesbury as an aloof elitist whose ethical writings had little to offer common people. Though Hume is hardly an aristocrat, his delicate person may as well be. If conversation is a significant component to our commitment to morality, and those most delicate do not wish to be with others not like themselves, there is a two-fold worry. First, coarse persons will not have the opportunity to develop properly; second, delicate persons will become increasingly insular and self-certain, which breeds zealotry and enthusiasm. If Hume's invocation of the common point of view is meant to combat faction and its offspring, his appeal to delicacy and refinement to ensure that we are committed to the moral perspective appears to undo the work he does by putting the moral standard into place.

In the next chapter, we consider a different solution to the problem of partiality, as presented by Joseph Butler and Adam Smith. These figures place greater faith in our natural moral responses. For Gay and Hume, we should be suspicious of our workaday commonsense moral intuitions. This distrust is a legacy of Locke's writings. For him, our moral ideas are fabrications, being the result of custom and the principles of association. Because these ideas are not grounded in facts about reason, the world, or even ourselves, there is substantive disagreement about moral matters. The only hope for agreement we have, for Locke, is to find an external standard to which we can all assent. Gay and Hume

share this view and spend a great deal of time in their writings trying to account for the ability to cultivate dispositions that can block our otherwise partialist tendencies. Hume thereby leaves us with a picture of the moral agent that is not all that different than Shaftesbury's enthusiast, who is inoculated from the dangers of faction and malice, but who considers himself to be above much of the business of common life.

Butler and Smith are dubious of this account of moral agency. They argue that the suspicion Gay and Hume have regarding our local, partialist sentiments is without justification. For Butler and Smith, our local sentiments provide us with the only evidence we have regarding how to conduct ourselves. It is these very sentiments, whether love, pity, or benevolence, that form the basis of our connections to others and underwrite our commitment to our duties to ourselves, to others, and to God. Absent the evidence provided to us by these local sentiments, we are left without a sense of what is proper or even why facts about propriety and merit matter. Gay and Hume thereby strip away the authority of our partial sentiments, and seek to replace them with more refined and idealized attitudes. Butler and Smith restore the standing of local our sentiments in ethics. In doing so, they also provide a more adequate solution to the problem of partiality. Not all expressions of partiality are virtuous. But we cannot find a proper criterion for determining the reasonable scope and limits of partiality if we do not allow for our local sentiments to have the authority befitting of our frame.

## AN ETHICS OF PARTIALITY: JOSEPH BUTLER AND ADAM SMITH

In Chapter II I discussed one potential solution to the problem of partiality, as presented by Gay and Hume. For both, we make room for reasonable partiality by showing how commitments to our near and dear motivate us to act for the common good. The account of our growth from beings with minimal other-regard into moral agents – that is, persons who treat justice and politeness as authoritative over their conduct – is complicated. Gay and Hume, give a powerful impartialist response to the problem of partiality. In this chapter, I turn to an alternative, partialist solution to the problem of partiality, found in the writings of Joseph Butler and Adam Smith.

Butler and Smith see impartiality as functioning within the scope of a fundamentally partial moral theory. For them, our duties are to be understood in terms of the relations we bear to those in our “little department.”<sup>395</sup> Our sentiments – compassion, resentment, shame, etc. – guide us in discharging these duties. While Gay and Hume argue that our sentiments are trustworthy insofar as they motivate us to act in accordance with moral norms, Smith and Butler consider them to be normatively action-guiding. Butler and Smith are certainly concerned about impartiality, but they think about it less in terms of principles in light of which we ought to regulate our conduct and more in terms of practices of self-regulation that ensure that self-deception does not lead us astray. A central concern for Butler and Smith is not that love will cause us to act immorally but

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<sup>395</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), VII.ii.1.44.

that we will allow our commitment to an impartial moral principle to silence our natural sentiments.

I have divided this chapter into six parts. First, I examine Butler's views about the passions, conscience, and of our duties to our near and dear. Second, I discuss his concerns about self-deception and its connection to the injunction to love God. I argue that there is a fundamental tension in Butler's theory between two seemingly authoritative moral standards: one that is provided by our sentiments and the other by God. Butler's view ends up being a version of Christian Stoicism. Third, I turn to Smith's critique of Stoicism. Fourth, I explore Smith's account of reasonable partiality. I argue that Smith is a skeptical moralist, who holds that morality consists of non-overlapping spheres of duty governed by sentiments that cannot be captured by any one principle. Fifth, I consider how Smith views the relation between nature and philosophy. I end with a discussion of Smith's method, and how he conceives of the nature of ethics.

### **The Supremacy of Our Passions**

Joseph Butler (1692-1752) was best known in his time for publishing two works: *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726/1729) and *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736).<sup>396</sup> In the *Analogy*, Butler establishes the reasonableness of belief on the basis of probabilistic reasoning about the natural world and the structure of our moral natures. The *Analogy* is most remembered for its two appendices: "Of Personal Identity," which provides an

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<sup>396</sup> For a great background on the composition and contents of the *Fifteen Sermons*, see: Bob Tennant, *Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler's Philosophy and Ministry* (New York: Boydell, 2011), 38-75.

argument against Locke's account of personal identity, and "A Dissertation Upon the Nature of Virtue," a truncated version of his ethical theory, which also includes a notable critique of act-utilitarianism. Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* cover a variety of topics, including conscience, self-deception, resentment, and our proper relation to God. The sermons were aimed at the members of the Court of Chancery, whom the Rolls Chapel served, which was charged with weighing considerations of equity against common law to ensure that equity was applied in a manner consistent with conscience.<sup>397</sup>

Butler argues that virtue consists in *following one's nature*. The *Sermons* are meant to explain "what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it."<sup>398</sup> To undertake an investigation of human nature, one must determine "what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature."<sup>399</sup> There are three components of the "inward frame": conscience, self-love and benevolence, and the passions.<sup>400</sup> Each of these "*internal principles*" plays a role in enabling us to fulfill our moral natures.<sup>401</sup> Butler thinks of these principles as hierarchically ordered under conscience, or the

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<sup>397</sup> For more on this historical background, see: Aaron Garrett, "Bishop Butler on Bullshit" (unpublished); Aaron Garrett, "Reasoning about morals from Butler to Hume," *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, ed. Ruth Savage (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 169–186; David Lieberman, *The Province of Legislation Determined: Legal Theory in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71-87; Theodore Plucknett, *A Concise History of the Common Law* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 675-710.

<sup>398</sup> Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons & other writings on ethics*, ed. David McNaughton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), Preface.13, p.5.

<sup>399</sup> Butler, Preface.12, p.5

<sup>400</sup> Butler, Preface.14, p.6

<sup>401</sup> Butler, Sermon 1.4, p.18

“principle of reflection,” by which agents “approve and disapprove their own actions” and provide negative reinforcement for that conduct which conflicts with our nature.<sup>402</sup>

Benevolence and self-love are dispositions that lead us to approve of our own happiness and that of others; conscience ensures that our internal principles are functioning properly; the passions direct our conduct and motivate us to act. For Butler, the passions serve as the only “principles of action,” in that they direct us towards particular objects and afford us the motivation to pursue them. I take it that his claim is much stronger than Hume’s view about the motivational inefficacy of reason. Hume argues that our sentiments, when functioning correctly, motivate us to act in accordance with the ends set by justice and politeness. I claim that, for Butler, the passions not only motivate us to act morally but *provide* us with the ends of morality. To understand this claim and its implications for his views about partiality, I turn to Butler’s treatment of compassion.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Butler, Sermon 1.8, p.19. Butler uses the following example to helpfully differentiate between the roles of these internal principles: “thus a parent has the affection of love to his children: this leads him to take care of, to educate, to make due provision for them: the natural affection leads to this: but the reflection that it is his proper business, what belongs to him, that it is right and commendable to do so; this added to the affection becomes a much more settled principle, and carries him on through more labor and difficulties for the sake of his children, then he would undergo from that affection alone” (Sermon 1.8, p. 20). There are puzzles about how to construe Butler’s claim that conscience possesses a natural supremacy over the other internal principles, about how self-love and benevolence are related to one another, and if a regard to our own self-interest is sufficient to secure virtue morally. For a rundown of the major points of debate in Butler scholarship, see: David McNaughton, “Butler’s Ethics,” *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 377–392; Aaron Garrett, “Joseph Butler’s Moral Philosophy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/butler-moral/#ConPriHumNat>>.

<sup>403</sup> The topic of compassion is understudied in the Butler scholarship. One exception is Terence Irwin’s *The Development of Ethics: Volume II: From Suarez to Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 476-557

*The Aim of Compassion*

While every passion contributes to private and public good, certain passions have a “primary intention and design” that belong to our “public or social capacity.”<sup>404</sup> There are two such passions: joy in the happiness of another and compassion in their distress. Compassion is a response to another’s suffering that motivates us to ameliorate whatever situation is responsible for bringing the suffering about.<sup>405</sup> Butler notes that “compassion is a call, a demand of nature, to relieve the unhappy; as hunger is a natural call for food.”<sup>406</sup> While we at times are compelled to turn away from distress, he claims that this reaction “when it is in our power to relieve them, is as unnatural, as to endeavor to get rid of the pain of hunger by keeping away from the sight of food.”<sup>407</sup> Butler recognizes that our lives are spent attending to our personal affairs, so when we are faced with real misery we require “an advocate in us on their behalf, to gain the unhappy admittance and access, to make their case attended to.”<sup>408</sup> Such is the role of compassion in our nature.

Butler takes up the idea that reason is sufficient to motivate moral action – “is it not better to do this from reason and duty? Does not passion and affection of every kind perpetually mislead us?”<sup>409</sup> He responds that without the passions we are lacking a

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<sup>404</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.1, p.46

<sup>405</sup> Butler is careful to distinguish a “real sorrow and concern for the misery of our fellow creatures,” from “some degree of satisfaction from a consciousness of our own freedom from that misery” a reflection on “our own liableness to the same or other calamities” (Sermon 5.n1, p.52). By doing so Butler attempts to distance his own view of compassion from that of Hobbes, who maintains that it is nothing more than an imaginative concern for our own safety. Interestingly, Butler does admit that most instances of compassion *include* a sense of relief due to our having escaped a similar fate, but he maintains that this relief is not compassion, strictly speaking.

<sup>406</sup> Butler, Sermon 6.6, p.56

<sup>407</sup> Butler, Sermon 6.6, p.56

<sup>408</sup> Butler, Sermon 6.6, p.56

<sup>409</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.3, p.47

“sufficient principle of action,” noting that “reason alone, whatever anyone may wish, is not in reality a sufficient motive of virtue in such a creature as man.”<sup>410</sup> Only when reason is “joined with those affections which God has impressed upon his heart: and when these are allowed scope to exercise themselves, but under strict government and direction of reason; then it is we act suitably to our nature.”<sup>411</sup> I return to this point about reason *directing* the passions; for now, it is crucial to see that, for Butler, to disregard our passions’ natural aims is a “violation of and breaking in upon that nature and constitution that he [God] has given us.”<sup>412</sup> He worries about individuals who are “over-refined” in their moral views. When reflective beliefs have been allowed to trump natural affections, people fall “into errors, which no one of mere common understanding could.”<sup>413</sup>

Compassion allows “reason and conscience will have a fair hearing.”<sup>414</sup> We often adopt beliefs that harden our hearts. While developing these beliefs may be useful for protecting ourselves from undue stress, Butler thinks we often run the risk of overcorrecting our compassionate responses. For Butler, as for Mandeville and Rousseau, compassion is a *disarming* passion.<sup>415</sup> Our experience of it is meant to stop us in our

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<sup>410</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.3, p.47

<sup>411</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.3, p.47

<sup>412</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.3, p.47

<sup>413</sup> Butler, Sermon 5.15, p.51

<sup>414</sup> Butler, Sermon 6.12, p.59

<sup>415</sup> See: Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, Vol. 1, ed. F.B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 169-181. Mandeville’s tale of the lion here is particularly instructive (176-181). Mandeville remarks the following about our custom of eating meat: “I have often thought, if it was not for this Tyranny which Custom usurps over us, that Men of any tolerable Good-nature could never be reconcil’d to the killing of so many Animals for their daily Food, as long as the bountiful Earth so plentifully provides them with Varieties of vegetable Dainties. I know that Reason excites our Compassion but faintly, and therefore I would not wonder how Men should so little commiserate such imperfect Creatures as Crayfish, Oysters, Cockles, and indeed all Fish in general: As they are mute, and their inward Formation, as well as

tracks. Compassion leads us to reconsider how we are conducting ourselves and whether we are meant to alter our behavior. This passion shakes us out of complacency to allow our general good-will and benevolence to flow more freely.

### *The Role of Conscience*

The position I have been forwarding regarding Butler's moral theory is rather heterodox – I argue that the passions, as opposed to conscience or our dispositions to self-love or benevolence, tell us what we ought to do. To make this case clearer, I have to say more about conscience, self-love, and benevolence. Butler does say that conscience, or the principle of reflection, is *supreme* in his account of the inward frame of man; so how are we to understand this claim and to render it consistent with my argument?<sup>416</sup> In Sermon VIII, Butler mentions that, by tracing a passion “up to its original,” we may “see, *what it is in itself, as place in our nature by its Author*; from which it will plainly appear,

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outward Figure, vastly different from ours, they express themselves unintelligibly to us, and therefore 'tis not strange that their Grief should not affect our Understanding which it cannot reach; for nothing stirs us to Pity so effectually, as when the Symptoms of Misery strike immediately upon our Senses...But in such perfect Animals as Sheep and Oxen, in whom the Heart, the Brain and Nerves differ so little from ours, and in whom the Separation of the Spirits from the Blood, the Organs of Sense, and consequently Feeling it self, are the same as they are in Human Creatures; I can't imagine how a Man not hardened in Blood and Massacre, is able to see a violent Death, and the Pangs of it, without Concern” (173). Rousseau holds similar views about the impact of custom on our naturally compassionate tendencies. See: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” *The 'Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152-54, 166-67.

<sup>416</sup> The literature on Butler's account of conscience is extensive. See : Nicholas L. Sturgeon, “Nature and Conscience in Butler's ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 85.3 (1976): 316-356; Amélie Rorty, “Butler on Benevolence and Conscience,” *Philosophy* 53 (1978): 171-184; Stephen Darwall, “Conscience as Self-Authorizing in Butler's Ethics,” *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 209-241; R.G. Frey, “Butler on Self-Love and Benevolence,” *Butler's Moral and Religious Thought*, 243-268; Thomas Hill, “Four Conceptions of Conscience,” *Nomos XL* (1998): 13–52; Sahar Akhtar, “Restoring Joseph Butler's Conscience,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14:4 (2006): 581-600; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 476-557; Aaron Garrett, “Butler to Hume.”

*for what ends it was placed there.*”<sup>417</sup> Further, “when we know what the passion is in itself, and the ends of it, we shall easily see, *what are the abuses of it.*”<sup>418</sup>

Butler mentions that “passion or appetite implies a direct simple tendency towards such and such objects, without distinction of the means by which they are to be obtained.”<sup>419</sup> Take compassion. Perhaps there is no reasonable way to relieve my friend’s misery. Butler notes that “it will often happen there will be a desire of particular objects, in cases where they cannot be obtained without causing injury. Conscience interrupts, and disapproves their pursuit in these circumstances.”<sup>420</sup> Let us say that my friend’s misery can only be temporarily satiated by us destroying private property. Compassion may then lead me to engage in harmful and imprudent behavior. Reflection will thereby disapprove of destroying property because doing so will not fulfill the natural aim of compassion, and will come into conflict with good-will and benevolence. Conscience therefore ensures that the correct means to the ends proposed by our passions are taken.

The other role of conscience is to help weigh our passions.<sup>421</sup> As Butler points out, “the several appetites, passions, and particular affections, have different respects

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<sup>417</sup> Butler, Sermon 8.3, p.69

<sup>418</sup> Butler, Sermon 8.3, p.69

<sup>419</sup> Butler, Sermon 2.13, p.31

<sup>420</sup> Butler, Sermon 2.13, p.31

<sup>421</sup> Akhtar, “Restoring Butler’s Conscience,” disputes whether this is a role of conscience, and claims there is another “capacity” in human nature responsible for weighing the “power, motives and intentions to determine whether we are living according to our internal principles” (582). I take it that Butler’s account of conscience is ambiguous; it refers both to the snap judgments we make in situations of serious moral import, and to the weighing of motives we do in our “cool hours.” This may lead us to be unsatisfied with Butler’s account of conscience. I suggest the way out of disappointment is to downgrade the importance of conscience in his moral theory. Once we appreciate that, for Butler, our passions do the primary normative work we become less concerned with the *precise role* of conscience in the theory. We should be happy to know that 1) our sentiments are teleologically structured; 2) there is a natural ordering of our sentiments; 3)

amongst themselves. They are restraints upon, and are in a proportion to each other. This proportion is just and perfect, when all those under principles are perfectly coincident with conscience, so far as their nature permits, and it in all cases under its absolute and entire direction.”<sup>422</sup> Butler’s point is that our “frame” (i.e. the composite of our passions and capacities) naturally balances the passions. Anger gives us courage for self-defense and the motivation to punish those who have acted unjustly.<sup>423</sup> Anger can be carried to an excessive degree, becoming settled resentment, but our good-will, benevolence, and compassion often block established resentment. We may feel anger that our friend has again canceled plans at the last minute, but our compassion will temper this anger, allowing us to remember that she has been busy as of late and is experiencing a great deal of stress. Each passion naturally balances the other. When this proportion between passions is “just and perfect,” conscience approves of our conduct. However, as we know from experience, the passions often need assistance to achieve this balance.

Butler thinks of conscience as a magistrate that condemns actions with the aim of reforming behavior; the manner by which it seeks to reform behavior is shame.<sup>424</sup> He

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this ordering is determined by our ability to fulfill the duties associated our station; and 4) we possess a reflective capacity that both informs us when the ordering is off and gives us the ability to set things right.

<sup>422</sup> Butler, Sermon 3.2, n.1, p.37

<sup>423</sup> See also: Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Ch. 1; Ernesto V. Garcia, “Bishop Butler on Forgiveness and Resentment,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 11.10 (2011): 1–19; Linda Radzik, “Joseph Butler on Forgiveness,” *Vergebung: Philosophische Perspektiven auf ein Problemfeld der Ethik*, ed. Johannes Brachtendorf and Stephan Herzberg (Munster: Mentis, 2014), 139–147; Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24–88.

<sup>424</sup> Smith gives shame a similar role in his theory. See: TMS II.ii.13; III.i.16–18; III.i.73; III.i.99; III.i.105, etc. For recent accounts of the role of shame in morality, see: Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton

notes, “shame; a man can as little doubt whether it was given him to prevent his doing shameful actions, as he can doubt whether his eyes were given him to guide steps.”<sup>425</sup>

The role of conscience here is recognize that some passion has gone beyond its limit – that it has interfered with another passion – and to inform us of this imbalance. If the imbalance of passion has led us to act, we feel shame. The role of shame is to get us to stop and reflect on the balance of our passions. Perhaps our anger at our friend on account of her cancelling has led us to type out an unamiable text message; conscience will step in and inform us that this would be ill-fitting with the aims of good-will and the love that we feel for our friend. We might feel ashamed at having considered sending the text but more ashamed were we to have sent it – in the first case, conscience stops an action; in the second case, it attempts to ensure that it will never happen again.

Let us take stock. According to Butler, virtue consists in following our nature. Our nature is threefold, consisting of the passions, self-love and benevolence, and conscience. By way of self-love and benevolence, we possess stable desires for the happiness of ourselves and others. Our passions are designed to secure the desires of self-love and benevolence. While the passions possess natural ends, they come into conflict with one another. To function properly, we require some means by which to balance our

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University Press, 2006); Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Dan Zahavi, *Self & Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Krista K. Thomason, “Shame, Violence, and Morality,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41.1 (2015): 1-24; Eleonore Stump, “The Atonement and the Problem of Shame,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 4 (2016): 111-129.

<sup>425</sup> Butler, Sermon 2.1, p.27

passions with each other as well as with self-love and benevolence. Conscience plays this role – reflecting on the republic of our passions and ensuring there is peace.

*Love of Others – The Little Department*

Butler includes two sermons on our duties to others. The first of these is dedicated to the supposed conflict between self-love and our love of others. In the second sermon, Butler turns to the question of how we are to love our neighbor. According to him, love manifests itself as a “disposition to produce happiness.”<sup>426</sup> He distinguishes between four sorts of happiness: universal love, love of mankind, love of one’s country, and love of one’s neighbor. Regarding universal happiness, Butler notes that “man is so much limited in his capacity...and as we are not used to consider things in so general a way; it is not to be thought of, that the universe should be the object of benevolence to which creatures as we are.”<sup>427</sup> Butler argues love of mankind assumes an “object too general and very much out of our view.”<sup>428</sup> Even public spirit is only applicable to those “men of public stations in the character of a patriot,” which is “speaking to the upper part of the world.”<sup>429</sup> The proper object of love is then our neighbor, or those near and dear.

Butler differentiates three senses by which we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves: first, that we “bear the *same kind* of affection to our neighbor, as we do to ourselves”; second, that the love we bear to our neighbor should have “*some certain proportion or other*” to self-love; third, that the love we have for ourselves and our

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<sup>426</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.2, p.103

<sup>427</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.3, p.103

<sup>428</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.3, p.103

<sup>429</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.3, p.103

neighbor should “bear the particular portion of *equality*, that *it be to the same degree*.”<sup>430</sup> Regarding the first, Butler notes that we should at the very least “cultivate the affection of good-will to our neighbor” and that it should influence us to have the same regard for him that we have for ourselves. We ought to “appropriate to ourselves his good and welfare; to consider ourselves as having a real share in his happiness.”<sup>431</sup> Butler is *not* insisting that we begin to see our interests and those of our neighbor as indistinguishable. Rather, he argues that the “imperfection of nature, and state we are in” falsely contributes to the idea that our interest is at odds with our neighbor’s interests.<sup>432</sup> By cultivating good-will for them, we help to undercut this pernicious and impactful fiction.<sup>433</sup>

Butler treats the “due love of our neighbor” as a “general temper of mind.”<sup>434</sup> The first aspect of this temperament is a “readiness to forgo our right for the sake of peace as well as in the way of compassion.”<sup>435</sup> Compassion may lead us to act in ways that go beyond justice. Perhaps the recipient of our good-will is not deserving of it, either because we are not in a position to assist them, or because their state is the result of their own negligence or viciousness. As this attitude to “forgo our right” is a direct

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<sup>430</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.6, p.104

<sup>431</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.7, p.104

<sup>432</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.7, p.104

<sup>433</sup> If Butler is known for anything, it is for undercutting (or attempting to undercut) the apparent conflict between self-love and our love of others. For more on this, see: Henry Sidgwick, *Outline of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: MacMillan, 1906), 191-4; C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 55, 65; Terence Penelhum, *Butler* (London: Routledge, 1985), 39-57; Richard Henson, “Butler on Selfishness and Self-Love,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 49.1 (1988): 31–57; Elliott Sober, “Hedonism and Butler’s Stone,” *Ethics* 103.1 (1992): 97–103; David Phillips, “Butler and the Nature of Self-Interest,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60 (2000): 421-38. Ralph Wedgwood, “Butler on Virtue, Self-Interest and Human Nature” *Morality and Self-Interest*, ed. Paul Bloomfield (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 177-204.

<sup>434</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.21, p.108

<sup>435</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.21, p.108

consequence of “love and good-will,” this should tell us something about the lexical priority of love and justice for Butler. Though he wants our attempts to contribute to other people’s happiness to be constrained by justice, this is only relevant when discussing the general happiness, as opposed to those associated with our “neighbour, parent, master, magistrate,” etc.<sup>436</sup> Love of our neighbor requires that we set aside desert. Instead, we should attend to those around us, reducing their suffering and contributing to their happiness whenever it is possible to do so, within the constraints of our own powers.

Butler argues that if we attend to the immediate tendency of neighborly benevolence “it will teach us, that the care of some persons, suppose children and families, is particularly committed to our charge by Nature and Providence; as also there are other circumstances, suppose friendship or former obligations, which require that we do good to some, preferably to others.”<sup>437</sup> While we should cultivate good-will towards all, it is dangerous to consider the scope of our duties as extending beyond the little department. We are not competent judges of what produces happiness for all; we must approach these cases with caution. As Butler notes, “reason, considered merely as subservient to benevolence, as assisting to produce the greatest good, will teach us to have particular regard to these relations and circumstances; because it is plainly for the good of the world that they should be regarded.”<sup>438</sup> In other words, reason is subservient to benevolence and we do well by the world when we attend to our little department.

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<sup>436</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.22, p.109

<sup>437</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.27, p.110

<sup>438</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.27, p.110

*An Ethics of Partiality*

Our obligation to cultivate good-will towards others compels us to help them when we are in a position to do so while also simultaneously preventing us from engaging in cruelty. However, when it comes to promoting the happiness of others, our efforts should be directed at our loved ones, family, friends, and benefactors. Butler gives three reasons for this: the structure of the passions themselves; the limits of our knowledge about which actions produce happiness for those outside our little department; our place in the system of nature and our relation to God. I examined the first point in the last section; I discuss the second point here, leaving the third to the next section.

Butler is seen by many as an anti-utilitarian thinker on the basis of his “A Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue,” the second appendix to his *Analogy of Religion* (1736).<sup>439</sup> Butler notes that “we have the capacity of reflecting upon actions and characters, and making them an object to our thought: and on doing this, we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions, under the peculiar view of their being virtuous and of

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<sup>439</sup> Joseph Butler, “A Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue,” *Fifteen Sermons*, 135-141. The person to first interpret Butler as an anti-utilitarian was William Whewell. See his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1862), 101. This interpretation continued through much of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship. See: by C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, 81-2; W.D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 79; William Frankena, *Ethics* (London: Pearson, 1973), 16; J.B. Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 526; John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 8-11; 7. Some have argued that Butler is an *indirect* utilitarian. See: Robert B. Louden, “Butler's Divine Utilitarianism,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 12 (1995): 265-280. For an alternate take on this issue, see: Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 515-526. For a richly historiographical approach, see: Aaron Garrett, “The History of the History of Ethics and Emblematic Passages,” *Philosophy, Rights and Natural Law: Essays in Honour of Knud Haakonssen*, ed. Ian Hunter and Richard Whatmore (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 32-60.

good-desert; and disapprove others, as vicious and of ill-desert.”<sup>440</sup> He argues that experience bears this out; we approve and disapprove of an action based on its qualities and not its consequences. Butler also thinks we distinguish between virtue and vice and speak of their discernment in terms of a reflective capacity: “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.”<sup>441</sup>

The aim of the “Dissertation” is to examine the contours of this capacity. Of particular importance is Butler’s claim that “benevolence and the want of it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice. For if this were the case, in the review of one’s own character or that of others, our moral understanding and moral sense would be indifferent to every thing, but that the degree in which benevolence prevailed, and in which it was wanting.”<sup>442</sup> Conscience recognizes the value of veracity and justice without considering the extent of these actions to increase happiness. Butler takes aim at the “careless readers” of Hutcheson who imagine “the whole of virtue to consist in singly aiming, according to the best of their judgment, at promoting the happiness of mankind in the present state.”<sup>443</sup> God’s nature is directed to promote happiness but humans do not

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<sup>440</sup> Butler, *Dissertation*.1, p.135

<sup>441</sup> Butler, *Dissertation*.1, p.135

<sup>442</sup> Butler, *Dissertation*.8, p.139

<sup>443</sup> Butler, *Dissertation*.10, p.140. For more on the potential target of Butler’s objection here, see: Garrett, “History of History,” and Getty L. Lustila, “John Gay and the Birth of Utilitarianism,” *Utilitas* 30.1 (Mar. 2018): 86-106. Garrett also points out, via Irwin, that Richard Cumberland may be the target of Butler’s criticism. See Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 521. For a discussion of Gay and Cumberland, see: Lustila, “The Birth of Utilitarianism.” One of the clearest discussions of Cumberland’s role in shaping the utilitarian tradition is still found in Ernest Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 1-50.

share this aim, otherwise conscience would perceive no conflict between happiness and justice and veracity. Conscience shows us that we are meant to pursue other ends as well.

It is important to remember that, for Butler, conscience functions immediately, approving and disapproving of actions before we even have the opportunity to reflect on their consequences. God gives us this capacity so that we do not have to weigh the potential impact of every action before choosing one. We rarely have the luxury to undertake these sorts of calculations and cannot be sure we are any good at such calculating, even given the requisite time. As Butler points out:

Though it is our business and our duty to endeavour, within the bounds of veracity and justice, to contribute to the ease, convenience, and even cheerfulness and diversion of our fellow-creatures: yet from our short views, it is greatly uncertain, whether this endeavor will in particular instances, produce an overbalance of happiness upon the whole; since so many and distant things must come into account.<sup>444</sup>

Knowing which actions promote the greater good requires knowing how our actions will impact *everyone's* well-being, not simply those individuals who make up our little department. Even worse, Butler points out, many cases where people shirk duties for the sake of increasing happiness proceed from “ambition, the spirit of party, or some indirect principle, concealed perhaps in great measure from persons themselves.”<sup>445</sup> Since people cannot be trusted to know themselves, they should not neglect their duties on the basis of

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<sup>444</sup> Butler, Dissertation.10, p.140

<sup>445</sup> Butler, Dissertation.10, p.140

abstract moral standards like universal happiness. We are also limited regarding our ability to know, and therefore promote, the general happiness and so our attempts should be constrained to our near and dear.<sup>446</sup>

I discussed how we come to learn about the nature and scope of our duties by looking at how our sentiments push us towards certain objects and repel us from others. If we are honest with ourselves, and willing to constrain ourselves in light of the aims of our sentiments, we see that (a) we should work to alleviate the suffering of others, full stop; (b) we should promote the happiness of others when we are in a position to do so; (c) we should promote the happiness of those in our little department, full stop; (d) we should care for ourselves so that we can manage (a), (b), and (c) successfully. Regarding the conflict between the duties, Butler thinks that (c) trumps (b) but not necessarily (a). While Butler does not believe that (a) and (c) will come into conflict, there are reasons to believe that our chief duty is compassion, so that if we were in a position to help our father or relieve the suffering of a stranger, we ought to help the stranger. Settling this means entering into complications that go beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> In the case of our little department, we are less likely to shirk our duties since they are supported by our most intimate and powerful sentiments, compassion and good-will. The problem begins when we consider those duties we have regarding those with whom we are not acquainted. In these instances, we cannot be trusted to *know* how to increase the general happiness, due to our epistemic limits, and cannot be said to have genuine intentions to do so. We fill in gaps in our knowledge with our own biases and prejudices about what makes people happy. This leads us to have a dangerous self-certainty concerning our ability to promote the general happiness. While Butler argues that *some* people are in a position to promote the general happiness – our leaders, for example – these people are few and far between.

<sup>447</sup> From Butler's statement in the *Sermons* that "this world was not intended to be a state of any great satisfaction or high enjoyment" (*Sermon* 6.5, p.55), conjoined with his comments on the nature of compassion, we can conclude that he is more concerned with relieving misery of others than with promoting their happiness. Given the choice between the chance to make my father a

Butler and Hume disagree about which forces constitute the largest threat to morality. For Hume, the dominant concern for morality is factionalism that arises from accepting principles of action that are opposed to the common point of view. For Butler, the concern is that we deceive ourselves; that we silence our sentiments on account of their conflict with our narrow self-interest. Butler thinks the problem of self-deception is systemic, so much that we can even quell our own conscience. The only way to get around this problem is to cultivate a love for God so that we are brought closer to our nature. However, as we will see, Butler's solution to the problem of self-deception ends up leading us further from our nature. It seems that by loving God, we silence the very sentiments that we are trying to save by cultivating this love.

### **Getting Out of Our Own Way**

Given that our passions direct us to moral ends, and reflection settles all conflict between them, it seems the problem of partiality has been solved. But this is too easy. There are three ways for our passions to go wrong on Butler's view: through (a) a conflict of the passions; by (b) not being honest with ourselves about where our passions are leading us; and (c) suppressing our passions by committing to moral principles that are anathema to our inner frame. In this section I will examine (b) and (c) by discussing Butler's discussion of self-deception in Sermon VII and X and his Sermons preached in the House of Lords (1740). I end the section by considering our role in the system of nature as children of God, the attitude called for by this role, and how it informs us about

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bit happier and to relieve a stranger of great suffering, Butler seems committed to the latter action being the correct one.

Butler's ethics. This sets up my discussion of Smith, who eschew Butler's views about love of God while keeping the substance of his moral theory.

*Self-Deception and the Problem of Hypocrisy*

Butler refers to self-deceit as the most “melancholy reflection.”<sup>448</sup> As he points out, “many men seem perfect strangers to their own characters”<sup>449</sup> How are we to understand self-deception?<sup>450</sup> Butler says “there is plainly, in the generality of mankind, an absence of doubt or distrust, in a very great measure, as to their moral character and behavior; and likewise a disposition to take for granted, that all is right and well with them in these respects.”<sup>451</sup> People shy away from reflecting on their character to avoid shame. Butler distinguishes self-deception from the pedestrian way that people distort their sentiments, like those “men of pleasure,” who choose pleasure over their greater interest.<sup>452</sup> For Butler, inattention to our self can be general – “a general ignorance of themselves, and wrong way of thinking and judging in every thing relating to themselves” – or particular, confined to passions like ambition or covetousness.<sup>453</sup>

In some ways, being partial to particular aspects of one's personality is more worrying than the case of general self-deception; people can use reflection on certain

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<sup>448</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.2, p.84

<sup>449</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.2, p.84

<sup>450</sup> For more on the place of self-deception in Butler's moral theory, see: Béla Szabados, “Butler on Corrupt Conscience,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (1976): 462-469; Amélie Rorty, “Butler on Benevolence and Conscience”; Penelhum, *Butler*, 77; Tennant, *Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics*, 62, 150; Aaron Garrett, “Bishop Butler on Bullshit” (unpublished); Aaron Garrett, “Self-Deception and Self-Knowledge in Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Self-Knowledge*, ed. Ursula Renz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 164-182.

<sup>451</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.3, p.85

<sup>452</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.11, p.89

<sup>453</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.5, p.86

aspects of their character to shield themselves from its unsavory aspects. As Butler notes, “there is such a thing as men’s being honest to such a degree, and in such respect, but no further...such general and undistinguishing censure of their whole character...confirms them in their self-deceit. They know that the whole censure is not true, so they take for granted that no part of it is.”<sup>454</sup> Say that you are a jealous person, prone to distrust of others, even those with whom you are close. However, you are also a generous person – you go out of the way to do favors for others. It is likely that your generosity, when mixed with jealousy, makes it so that your benevolence is wrapped up with a need to gain fealty from others. You use generosity as a shield to avoid facing your jealousy, saying “look, I am a good person – see all the things I do for others.”

*Partial* honesty entrenches the inconsistency between a person’s judgments of himself and that of others. The person’s commitment to think well of himself is strengthened by his knowledge that he *does* possess laudable qualities. He has a desperate need to protect his own reputation for fear that these traits be exposed as a farce. In turn, this leads to a kind of self-assurance that further strengthens his negative judgments of others. This holds even in pedestrian cases; for example, many of us have experience with individuals who are constitutionally impatient but who cannot stand impatience in others. Butler is more concerned with those instances where the vices in question are problematic, and the judgments of others severe, though the structure is the same in both cases. He argues that there is a worry with some vices that the person may develop a “hardness of heart with respect to others,” which can lead one to engage in any and all

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<sup>454</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.5, p.86

forms of wickedness and injustice, and what he refers to as “oppression,” the worst of all evils.<sup>455</sup>

Oppression, for Butler, consists in the rigid application of principles to censure or punish others without a “merciful, a liberal, a kind and compassionate” spirit.<sup>456</sup> This is not to say that justice is not principally important for the functioning of society. Butler suggests that only those individuals who are fundamentally self-deceived would apply a principle of justice so rigorously that it admitted of no other considerations, even of mercy.<sup>457</sup> Justice and mercy are two sides of the same coin, according to Butler. Failing to treat another person with compassion can only proceed from one’s inability to see this person as anything less than hateful. To maintain this stance, it would have to be assumed that one acted with the authority of God himself, as Balaam did when he heeded the call of Balaak to curse the Israelites.<sup>458</sup> Surely, to act with this assumed authority in a way that is forbidden by God – without compassion – requires a fair amount of mental gymnastics but is nonetheless something of which we humans are capable.

In this way, Butler thinks of self-deception along the lines of a self-forgetting. He gives the example of the “extravagant person” who spends themselves into ruin, despite

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<sup>455</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.7; 10.10, p.87

<sup>456</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.10, p.87

<sup>457</sup> Butler’s prime example of this is King David, “who plainly gave scope to the affections of good-will and compassion” in his dealings but who was nonetheless capable of great wickedness without “any real sense of it” (Sermon 10.10, p. 87). Any person in a “cool hour” – who is able to heed the call of conscience while making note of the proper balance of their affections – would never allow themselves to adopt a principle of action which silenced their compassion. Butler’s discussion of self-deception is an attempt to make sense of the fact that otherwise decent people act without regard to the natural direction of their passions.

<sup>458</sup> For more on the Balaam story, see: Garrett, “Butler on Bullshit.”

knowing that “their expenses so far exceeded their income.”<sup>459</sup> Think of someone who continually charges items to his credit card without having the money to make his monthly payments. Perhaps this person knows that he is imprudent but does not care. Butler rejects this explanation, suggesting instead that the person *does* care about his unfortunate state and that it is *precisely this concern* that causes him to turn away from its cause. While I cannot close my eyes, plug my ears, and forget that *An Autumn Afternoon* is playing on my television, I can willfully forget about my credit card statement by distracting myself. As Butler points out, “it is as easy to close the eyes of the mind, as those of the body: and the former is more frequently done with willfulness...than the latter; the actions of the mind being more quick and transient, than those of the senses.”<sup>460</sup> This self-forgetting may take the form of drinking or drug use; it may also express itself through more productive means, like writing an article or a book.

Self-forgetfulness and an oppressive spirit come together in interesting ways for Butler.<sup>461</sup> Were it not for the negative impact that self-deception has on how we interact

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<sup>459</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.11, p.89

<sup>460</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.11, p.89

<sup>461</sup> When scholars discuss self-deception in Butler’s writings, they are primarily concerned with its relation to the conscience. Since conscience is not immediately motivating, we must rely on our ability to *see* the dictates of conscience as consistent with self-interest to act morally. Self-deception threatens to sever this tie between self-interest and our conscience. To my knowledge, no scholars have picked up on the further connection between self-deception, self-certainty, and an oppressive spirit. This connection is made by other British Moralists in the context of discussions about enthusiasm. Consider: Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (Cambridge: J. Fleisher, 1656); John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 697-703; Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*, ed. Douglas Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 1-36; David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 117-8; 185-6; 193-4; 270-1; David Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty

with and treat others, he would likely see it as a silly, unfortunate, but ultimately harmless propensity. The self-deceived person characteristically lacks the proper suspicion of their motives and dispositions – they act with a kind of single-minded self-assurance that is easily observable to others, on account of its blatant hypocrisy. Butler notes, “whilst men are under the power of this temper...they are fortified on every side against conviction: and when they hear the vice and folly of what is in truth their own course of life...they will often assent to us...persuading themselves that they are out of the case, and that it hath no relation to them.”<sup>462</sup> Take the example of a local businessman who extolls the virtues of fairness and humanity while cheating his customers and upselling his products. When the case of the businessman’s hypocrisy is made by an onlooker, Butler says he will likely double down on the values of fairness and humanity while re-describing his own actions in this manner.

The *redescription* of one’s acts fits nicely with an oppressive spirit. After all, the oppressor does not think of himself as such; he considers himself to be just. As Butler points out, “tyranny...unjust wars, and persecution, by which the earth has been laid to waste; all this has all along been carried with the pretense of truth.”<sup>463</sup> He refers to this veneer of justice as “justest satire upon what has in all times been carrying on under it.”<sup>464</sup> We misconstrue the tyrant when we refer to him as capricious; such a person acts on principle but appeals to mistaken principles and clumsily applies them. On Butler’s

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Fund, 1985). Butler does not make a tight connection between enthusiasm and self-deception in the *Fifteen Sermons*, but the connection becomes increasingly evident in the *Analogy* and the *Six Sermons*.

<sup>462</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.11, p.88

<sup>463</sup> Butler, “A Sermon Preached Before the House of Lords,” *Fifteen Sermons*, 11, p.145

<sup>464</sup> Butler, House of Lords.12, p.145

view, the only justifiable moral principles are those derived from the functioning of our sentiments. Few of these principles give a single overriding reason to act – they are meant to be balanced against one another, with context determining which principle will receive the most weight in a circumstance. If we attend to our inner frame, we will still make mistakes about the weight of particular principles, but we will never act with the sort of self-certainty indicative of oppressive behavior.

Considering the danger of self-deception, Butler does not give us many tools to combat it, short of telling us to be watchful of our own character and to put ourselves in other people’s shoes before acting.<sup>465</sup> But as we saw in the discussion of oppression, self-deception can take the form of a refined “deep and calm source of delusion” that can survive the most vigilant inspection of one’s character.<sup>466</sup> After all, if one commits to a set of principles and if this commitment means sacrificing humane sentiments for some other end, then the proponent can see this as an unfortunate but ultimately justifiable

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<sup>465</sup> Butler suggests three strategies for combating self-deception. First, be aware that “men are exceedingly prone to deceive themselves, and judge too favourably in every respect, where themselves, and their own interest are concerned” (Sermon 10.13, p. 90). Second, get acquainted with our real character, especially those parts of ourselves of which we are least proud. He notes: “what particular scandal, think you, would he [your enemy] be most likely to fix upon you? And what would the world be most ready to believe?” (Sermon 10.14, p. 90). Third, ensure that these qualities do not impact our behavior. To do so, we should engage in a two-step process of imaginative empathy: a) “substitute another for yourself, when you take a survey of any part of your behaviour, and consider what is proper and fit and reasonable for you to do upon any occasion” and b) “substitute yourself in the room of another; consider yourself as the person affected by such a behaviour.” (Sermon 10.15, p. 90). By taking an outsider’s perspective on our own conduct we can sometimes pull ourselves out of focusing on our narrow self-interest, even if only temporarily. Butler also argues that rules play a role in keeping us on track, morally speaking. For more on this, see: Ian Blaustein, “Conscience, Moral Motivation, and Self-Deception” (unpublished dissertation, 2015) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/15642>>

<sup>466</sup> Butler, Sermon 10.16, p. 91

result. Butler thinks that the only solution to this problem is to cultivate a greater love for God, which will put us in closer touch with our station and its corresponding duties.

*Love of God – Submission and Ignorance*

Butler's comments on self-deception create problems for his moral theory. His theory becomes even more fraught when we consider his views about loving God. Butler claims that the "whole of piety and virtue" is encapsulated in the duty to love our neighbors and to love God.<sup>467</sup> I maintain that, for Butler, while we should cultivate feelings of compassion and benevolence towards our fellow human beings, we should never lose sight of the fact that "the present world is not our home," and our chief duties are those related to our station of servitude of God.<sup>468</sup> I argue that, once we pay mind to Butler's comments about the love of God, what appears to be an intuitive and partialist moral system threatens to collapse into a Christianized Stoicism, like with Hutcheson. This view gives us two conflicting standards with which to deliberate: first, our frame (passions, dispositions, conscience, etc.) and our relation to others; second, our relation to God. The second, for both Butler and Hutcheson, seems subservient to the first, which puts us in a self-effacing relationship with our sentiments.

While our family members are the proper objects of our love, we may not hold any of them up as exemplary. When it comes to individuals of merit, we consider them with a loving esteem, provided that we are properly attuned to virtue: "to be a just, a good, a righteous man, plainly carries with it a peculiar affection to or love of justice,

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<sup>467</sup> Butler, Sermon 13.2, p.113

<sup>468</sup> Butler, Sermon 6.13, 59

goodness, righteousness, when these principles are the objects of contemplation.”<sup>469</sup>

Added to the fact that all “superior excellence of any kind...is the object of awe and reverence to all creatures,” Butler concludes that we love those who embody traits of which our frame approves, especially when they are expressed more perfectly than in ourselves.

When it comes to our relation to God, Butler shifts from talk about love to piety, a distinct attitude. For him, love includes a component of well-wishing that is unnecessary, if not improper, when it comes to how we think about God. That said, according to Butler, piety seems to be the relevant love-like relation we ought to have to God. Piety is expressed in two ways; as a “resignation to the divine will, which is the general temper belonging to this state; which ought to be the habitual frame of our mind and heart”; second, as “acts of devotion,” which are meant to be “exercised at proper seasons.”<sup>470</sup> He claims that “human nature [is] formed to compliance, yielding, submission of temper,” which means that when we encounter something of great value that we do not yet possess, we “suspend our desires after it.”<sup>471</sup> Exemplary persons become objects of awe and reverence. When our love is directed at God, the result is a resignation of will:

“Nature teaches and inclines us to take up with our lot: the consideration, that the course of things is unalterable, hath a tendency to quiet the mind under it, to beget a submission of temper to it. But when we add, that this unalterable course is

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<sup>469</sup> Butler, Sermon 13.7, p.115

<sup>470</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.2, p.120

<sup>471</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.3, p.121

appointed and continued by infinite wisdom and goodness; how absolute should be our submission, how entire our trust and dependence?”<sup>472</sup>

In the case of a person, our will may be suspended to some degree, giving way to a contemplative respect that provides further reasons to, at the very least, not taint the value of this revered object. In the case of God, our resignation “may be said to be perfect, when our will is lost and resolved up into his.”<sup>473</sup> When we cede our will to God, we become an agent of his divine will. In terms of the first aspect of piety, Butler stresses that we ought to “*acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace.*”<sup>474</sup> The result of this temper is a kind of tranquility that cannot otherwise be experienced in this life.

Piety consists in the “actual exercise of those affections towards God, which are supposed habitual in good men.”<sup>475</sup> Virtue involves acting in accordance with our nature; our dispositions of self-love and benevolence form our background propensities; our passions direct us to the pursuit of objects that conduce to these propensities; reflection informs us of the proper means for achieving this end. Compassion, good-will, resentment, etc. have people as their proper objects. Butler argues that we can determine the ends of our passions by observing how they function in everyday life. This knowledge is collected and implemented by reflection and deliberation. However, he changes his tune about the passions in Sermon XIV, saying that we should “withdraw from the avocations of sense...to yield ourselves up to the influence of the divine presence, and to give full scope the affections of gratitude, love, reverence, trust and

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<sup>472</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.3, p.121

<sup>473</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.5, p.121

<sup>474</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.5, p.121

<sup>475</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.6, p.122

dependence; of which infinite power, wisdom and goodness, is the natural and only adequate object.”<sup>476</sup> We ought to love, revere, and trust God in a way that makes subservient the aims given to us by our sentiments regarding our fellows beings.

Sermon XIV puts Butler’s comments on ignorance in a new light. Near the end of the *Sermons*, Butler gives a different view of our station: “our condition in this world is a school of exercise for this temper [resignation and submission]: and our ignorance, the shallowness of our reason, the temptation, difficulties, afflictions, which we are exposed to, all equally contribute to make it so.”<sup>477</sup> If this world is a “state of discipline and improvement,” we ought to improve ourselves in light of some goal, which seems to be resignation and submission to God. However, resignation does not consist in following one’s nature *as constructed*, shoring it up against the dangers of self-deception. We are instead meant to *fashion* our nature – to silence those passions that tie us to this world and keep us from hearing the voice of God. But are these two aims not at odds with each other? How can we be true to our nature when doing so means remaking ourselves?

In the final Sermon, “Upon the Ignorance of Man,” Butler leaves us with four reminders about our knowledge of the world. First, we cannot expect to be able to plumb the depths of reality. Second, this temper of ignorance is the proper response to all apparent injustices that seem to result from the nature of things. We can know with great certainty that God exists and that he is good – any perceived problem we find in nature is the result of our own ignorance. Third, given our natural state, we should seek the regulation of our manners and faculties in light of the aims for which we were created.

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<sup>476</sup> Butler, Sermon 14.6, p.122

<sup>477</sup> Butler, Sermon 15.9, p.129

Lastly, we should cultivate gratitude for that being who stands above us. It is the third point that presents problems for Butler. If we follow the ends set by our passions, we have the basis for a sophisticated and intuitive partialist theory of morals. If we redirect these passions to God, we end up with an ethics that undercuts much of what Butler says in the earlier Sermons and he ends up closer to Stoicism than expected:

“In all lowliness of mind we set lightly by ourselves: that we form our temper to an implicit submission to the Divine Majesty; beget within ourselves an absolute resignation to all the methods of his providence, in his dealings with the children of men: that, in the deepest humility of our souls, we prostrate ourselves before him, and join in that celestial song; ‘Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints: who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name.’”<sup>478</sup>

Butler reminds us to “to govern and regulate out passions, mind, and affections” with an eye to following our nature; to free ourselves from those ill-tempered passions, self-deception, and the untoward selfishness so inimical to virtue.<sup>479</sup> Doing so ensures our happiness in this life and in the life beyond. This manner of self-discipline means truly coming into our own. Butler gives us a beautiful vision of the moral life. That said, there is the aforementioned tension in his moral theory. Which normative standards are authoritative – those which concern our relations to others, or our relation to God? I do not think Butler ever resolves this tension. Admittedly, there are important philosophical

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<sup>478</sup> Butler, Sermon 15.18, p.133

<sup>479</sup> Butler, Sermon 15.16, p.132

questions about how to weigh the duties associated with our various stations, theological or not. Butler identifies a tension that many of us feel in our moral lives.

### **Smith and the Science of Sentiment**

Our discussion of Smith begins with the recognition of a tension in Butler's ethics. For Butler, our sentiments provide us with crucial information about how to conduct ourselves. We are meant to care for the good of our little department. With the help of our conscience and the use of rules to correct for the dangers of self-deception, this task is one that can be managed by most human beings. Though Butler argues strongly for constricting our moral concern to those in our little department, he also ends the *Sermons* by considering our duties to God. Some of what we are called upon to do for God seems at odds with the cultivation of love for those near and dear. While God does not require that we cast off our concern for our little department, taking our relation to God seriously shifts the normative standard to God as opposed to our frame. The result is a tension in our identity. How can we wholeheartedly commit to the good of others when we know that the wellspring of our station lies beyond this earth?

Adam Smith (1723-1790) follows Butler to a large degree in the content of his moral theory. Smith's account of the impartial spectator, and his description of how it develops as a tool for individuals, is closely connected to Butler's view of conscience. Butler and Smith both place greater trust in our natural sentiments than do either Gay or Hume, and argue that the source of normativity lies therein. Both figures claim that moral rules should play a secondary role to sentiment-directed judgment. Smith follows Butler in claiming self-deception is the chief roadblock to virtuous conduct. In short, there is

significant overlap between their ethics. What Smith avoids with his theory is the aforementioned tension that Butler creates by shifting the source of moral value from our sentiments to God. In Smith's work, we get a fully-formed solution to the problem of partiality. The remainder of this chapter sketches his proposed solution.

Before illustrating Smith's solution to the problem of partiality, it is important to lay out some basics of his moral theory. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/1790), he sets out to answer two questions: first: "wherein does virtue consist? Or what is the tone of temper, and tenour of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praise-worthy character?"; second, "by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it may be, recommended to us?"<sup>480</sup> We can differently express these questions as follows. First, what makes another person, or ourselves, an object of esteem and approval? Second, what explains our tendency to carve the world up in moral terms; or in terms of conduct being proper and improper, responses to conduct being merited and unmerited, etc. These are questions about moral psychology – Smith is interested in which mechanisms account for our making moral judgments and the grounds on which we take ourselves to be making them. In other words, Smith is observing the contours of our nature and using this investigation as the basis of his moral science.

In TMS VII, Smith examines the moral thought of figures that he considers important for understanding his own moral theory. Smith frames his discussion around the two aforementioned questions, laying out the different answers one might offer and categorizing different figures accordingly. To the first question, Smith thinks there are

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<sup>480</sup> Smith, TMS VII.i.2

three potential answers: someone is an object of our esteem insofar as their conduct is either proper (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Shaftesbury, among others), prudential (Epicurus), or disinterestedly benevolent (Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson); To the second question, Smith considers four possible options: moral distinctions are made on account of our own self-love (Hobbes, Mandeville), reason (Cudworth and Clarke), the moral sense (Hutcheson), or a sentiment such as sympathy (Hume).

Smith characterizes his own view as a *propriety* theory – we approve and disapprove of characters on account of their conduct and affections being proper, given their station in life and the circumstances in which they find themselves. TMS I and II are largely dedicated to explaining what it means for an action or affection to be proper. He distinguishes between two kinds of propriety: propriety proper, which concerns one's affections (i.e. whether one has the correct attitude in some circumstance) and merit, which refers to one's conduct (i.e. whether one has acted correctly). In both cases, propriety is determined by *sympathy*, or the concordance we experience with an agent's affection or with the affection of those individuals who are impacted by the agent's action. When it comes to the second question – explaining our tendency to carve up the world morally – Smith puts himself alongside Hume as one who argues that our propensity to approve of certain characters, and to disapprove of others, is explained in terms of our sympathetic capacities. Sympathy thereby leads us to make moral distinctions and determines the content of our moral categories.

By eschewing the role that God plays in guaranteeing the normativity of our sentiments, Smith furthers Butler's solution to the problem of partiality. For Smith, we

have no recourse other than our sentiments. What distinguishes Smith from figures like Gay and Hume is that he thinks regulating our sentiments with an impartialist principle like utility leads us to have a problematic relation to the needs of those with whom we are naturally concerned. For Smith, the source of moral value lies in these relations and not in an external principle. Smith recognizes the problem of partiality; further, he acknowledges that faction and bias present concerns for any moral theory. Smith argues that by paying mind to our sentiments and to how they bond us to others, and by heeding the dangers of self-deception, we do justice to our natural partialities while correcting for our factionalist tendencies. Smith holds that we can avoid these concerns by being honest with ourselves, and by finding others to keep us honest.

One might at this point be concerned that Smith puts undue faith in our sentiments. Perhaps Smith is naïve or relies on God as the source of value after all – that the existence of a creator secures the normativity of our sentiments. In this case, there would be little to separate Smith from Butler, and Smith's ethics would produce the same tension that we have been discussing throughout the chapter. While a consideration of Smith's religious belief goes beyond the aim of this chapter, I will consider an alternate interpretation, whereby he is able to avoid the problems of Butler's ethics. On my reading, Smith is a skeptic. He argues that our sentiments, with the help of reflection and other aspects of our frame, give us the only proximate evidence we have regarding how we should conduct ourselves. To look outside our nature – to God, the universe, or other abstract sources of value – is to lead ourselves astray, the result of which will be, at best, a fractured moral identity; at worst, widespread conceit and cruelty.

*The Dangers of Stoicism*

In TMS VII, Smith examines different moral theories he considers to be significant, for understanding his own theory.<sup>481</sup> Smith dedicates almost half the discussion to the Roman Stoics (Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, in particular), whose writings enjoyed a resurgence post-Renaissance in Europe. A number of figures treated in the dissertation – principally Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler – can be seen as operating in Stoic tradition. Throughout the dissertation, I have pointed to a tension in each of their views, namely, their acceptance of two conflicting normative standpoints: our human frame and God (or nature, for Shaftesbury). Smith sees this tension as native to Stoicism and develops his own theory in response. Smith argues that the standpoint of nature is epistemically unattainable for human beings: we cannot know what nature calls upon us to do. Further, when we claim to possess this knowledge, we express a conceit that distances us from the only normative standard to which we have access: our sentiments. Through this process, Smith argues, we weaken our connection to our little department, thereby creating the tension in our moral identity found in Butler, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson.

Smith's discussion of Stoicism in TMS VII is framed by their doctrine of suicide, according to which it is proper to commit suicide insofar as one is called upon to do so by nature. It is notable that Smith uses the doctrine of suicide to frame his criticism of Stoic moral theory, as the topic comes up only rarely in Marcus Aurelius' and Epictetus' writings. Still, Smith argues, in this doctrine we clearly see the tension in Stoicism

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<sup>481</sup> Much of what follows is drawn from my "Smith and the Stoic Principle of Suicide," *European Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

between the acceptance of two conflicting normative standards. As this tension is found in Butler, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson, and Smith developed his theory in response, we must turn to his discussion of the Stoics to understand the character of his moral theory. We begin where Smith suggests – with the discussion of suicide.

*Stoicism – Epistemic Concerns*

For the Stoics, the propriety of suicide is determined by the extent to which one's existence adds to the prosperity of the universe. As Smith points out:

“The prosperity of the whole should, even to us, appear preferable to so insignificant a part as ourselves...if, indeed, any opportunity of extricating ourselves should offer, it became our duty to embrace it. The order of the universe, it was evident, no longer required our continuance in this situation, and the great Dictator of the world plainly called upon us to leave it, by clearly pointing out the road which we were to follow...we might be assured [that our doing so] tended most to the prosperity and order of the whole, which was what we ourselves, if we are wise and equitable, ought most of all to desire” (TMS VII.ii.1.18).<sup>482</sup>

The Stoic's duty is to support the “order of the whole” and to commit suicide only if he is no longer in a position to provide this support. But to determine the propriety of suicide, he must first know the role that he occupies in the system of nature, the duties associated

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<sup>482</sup> See: Cicero: “[for the Stoic] when a man has a preponderance of the things in accordance with nature, it is his proper function to remain alive; when he has or foresees a preponderance of their opposites, it is his proper function to depart from life” (A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Volumes I-II. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 425).

with this role, and his ability to fulfill them. As Epictetus notes, “you are an actor in a play the character of which is determined by the Playwright...if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly; and so if your role be that of the cripple, an official, or a layman. For this is your business, to play admirably the role assigned to you.”<sup>483</sup> The first step is to identify one’s assigned role.

We might take Epictetus literally when he refers to one playing the role of official, beggar, or citizen, and think of these stations as being populated with positional duties that one is expected to fulfill. If one is born an aristocrat and acts in a way that brings shame on one’s family – say, by currying the favor of a foreign despot – it is proper to commit suicide, particularly if it is requested by someone of stature. The disgraced aristocrat can no longer fulfill his role in society on account of his sullied reputation.<sup>484</sup> Smith’s discussion of suicide in TMS VII centers on the loss of one’s social position. He is thinking of cases where someone’s honor has been besmirched.

But there is a problem. One occupies a number of roles with overlapping duties. Perhaps the aristocrat is also a father – is he allowed to abscond from his fatherly duties on account of his embarrassment? Further, often pride lurks behind these supposedly honorable means of safeguarding one’s position: “under the Emperors this method of dying seems to have been, for a time, perfectly fashionable...we find an account of

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<sup>483</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses, Books 3 and 4, and Encheiridion*, ed. W.A. Oldfather (Massachusetts: Loeb Classics, 1928), I.17).

<sup>484</sup> It can be helpful to think of Panaetius’ doctrine of the four *personae* in this context, according to which one’s character is thought of as a confluence of one’s humanity, individuality, social position, and occupation. See: Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I.107-21); Miriam Griffin, “Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide I,” *Greece & Rome* 33.1 (1986): 64-77; Christopher Gill, “Personhood and Personality: The Four-personae Theory in Cicero, *de Officiis* I,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1988) 169-199.

several persons who chose to die in this manner, rather from vanity and ostentation, it would seem, than from what would appear, even to a sober and judicious Stoic, any proper or necessary reason.”<sup>485</sup> In committing suicide, the Stoic, hardly acts like a “sober and judicious” spectator, tending to the duties of their station. Smith balks at the idea that reputation is relevant to determining whether to commit suicide, claiming that were the Stoic to enter into the “views of the great Superintendent of the universe,” the “complete approbation of his own breast” should be significant to comfort him.<sup>486</sup>

For Smith, this epistemic gap between ourselves and nature creates a tension in the Stoic’s view. Perhaps one could appeal directly to the system of nature; such an appeal might take the form of a rational intuition that one is no longer of use to nature. Smith argues that achieving this degree of knowledge is impossible, as “sublime speculations” about one’s place in nature are beyond the “narrowness of our comprehension.”<sup>487</sup> As we cannot look to the universe to be our guide, we should seek the approval of the impartial spectator.<sup>488</sup> Our only access to the “exquisite and divine beauty” of moral perfection is through one’s “observation upon the character both of himself, and of other people” and the work of moral progress.<sup>489</sup> To determine whether one should commit suicide, the Stoic must attain a perspective that is unattainable.

The Stoic must instead rely on a moral exemplar to set the standard of propriety for suicide. But, as is clear in Seneca’s work, there are two different standards for proper

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<sup>485</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.I.33.

<sup>486</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.39, 28.

<sup>487</sup> Smith, TMS VI.ii.3.6.

<sup>488</sup> Smith, TMS II.ii.2.

<sup>489</sup> Smith, TMS VI.iii.25.

suicide – one for the sage and another for the rest of us.<sup>490</sup> The sage possesses all knowledge concerning matters virtuous, vicious, and indifferent, and is not bothered by illness, poverty, or any other external impediments to their will.<sup>491</sup> While Seneca means for the sage to be our model, he is aware that most people are fearful of death. For those of us non-exemplars who wish to be free of weariness, there is always suicide.<sup>492</sup> But even in these conditions, the sage might reason that “if the body is useless for its duties, why wouldn’t it be appropriate to escort the failing mind out the door?”<sup>493</sup> The sage might comfort themselves: “that flesh will never drive me into fear...I shall never show ‘respect’ for this paltry body. When I see fit, I shall dissolve my partnership with it.”<sup>494</sup>

So what makes the sage’s decision to commit suicide proper? For Seneca, when the sage commits suicide, he *chooses* to exit life but does not *flee* from it out of fear or cowardice.<sup>495</sup> The sage’s decision to commit suicide is not determined by emotions that bind his will.<sup>496</sup> Seneca treats the difference between the sage and others as an *internal* one. But Smith argues that few people fit the model of the sage, meaning that virtuous suicide will be open to a few.<sup>497</sup> Even for the sage, the standard of propriety is on shaky ground, not only because they may be acting pridefully, but since the decision to do so is

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<sup>490</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, trans. and ed. by Margaret Graver and A.A. Long. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), “Letter 75.8-18,” 237-8.

<sup>491</sup> Seneca, *Selected Philosophical Letters*, trans. and ed., Brad Inwood. (New York: Clarendon Press, 2007), “Letter 71.5,” 26. Seneca even suggests that the wise are superior to God insofar as they are free of the anxieties of life, not by nature but through a force of will. See: *Letters on Ethics*, “Letter 53.11,” 155).

<sup>492</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, “Letter 91.21,” 341.

<sup>493</sup> Seneca, *Selected Philosophical Letters*, “Letter 58.34,” 9.

<sup>494</sup> Seneca, *Selected Philosophical Letters*, “Letter 65.21,” 13-4.

<sup>495</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, “Letter 24.25,” 90.

<sup>496</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, “Letter 77.6,” 247.

<sup>497</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.26.

meant to proceed from a recognition of an *external standard*: that they can no longer perform their duties.<sup>498</sup> After rejecting a conventional standard of propriety, Seneca offers the standard of the sage, who is meant to provide guidance about when committing suicide is proper. But the latter fails to give us guidance about when to end our lives.

Absent a workable standard of propriety for suicide, the decision to commit suicide boils down to deciding whether life is worth enduring. Smith notes that, for the Stoics, “there neither was nor could be any evil in death; and that, if their situation became at any time too hard for their constancy to support, the remedy was at hand, the door was open, and they might, without fear, walk out when they pleased.”<sup>499</sup> If one simply walks out when one pleases, one implies that the only relevant standard when deciding to commit suicide is the desire to not live. Seneca even suggests that being fed up with life is a sign from nature that one *should* end it:

“Life is not always something to hang onto. Our good does not consist merely in living but in living well. Hence the wise person lives as long as he ought to, not as long as he can. He considers where he will be living, and how, and with whom, and what he will be doing...If he encounters many hardships that banish tranquility, he releases himself. Nor does he do so in a time of need; rather, as soon as he begins to have doubts about his fortunes, he makes a careful assessment to determine whether it is time to quit.”<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.31.

<sup>499</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.30.

<sup>500</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, “Letter 70.4-5,” 209.

If one's life is troublesome, it follows that one is justified in committing suicide. But if Stoicism requires that one submit to the system of nature, then suicide should be prohibited: any situation can be overcome by understanding that it, while unfortunate from one's own perspective, is in fact necessary to the system of nature.

### *Stoicism – Moral Concerns*

The Stoic is epistemically immodest when he claims to know the conditions under which it is proper to end his life. In directing focus towards the system of nature, the Stoic diverts his attention away from its proper object: the “little department” he occupies.<sup>501</sup> Two consequences follow from this epistemic immodesty. First, the Stoic becomes less receptive to the sociable affections directed at his little department and to the commitments that flow from it. Second, the Stoic cultivates an excessive degree of self-estimation, in the form of pride, which exacerbates the first problem – thereby further obscuring the question of when it is proper for one to commit suicide.

When the Stoic focuses his attention on the system of nature, he treats himself and those related to him as *components* of this system.<sup>502</sup> As Marcus Aurelius points out:

“Let my first conviction be that I am *part* of a Whole, which is under Nature's governance; and my second, that a bond of kinship exists between myself and all other *similar parts*. If I bear those two thoughts in mind, then...*being a part*...I shall cheerfully accept whatever may be my lot. In the second place, inasmuch as

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<sup>501</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.44.

<sup>502</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.20

there is this bond of kinship between myself and *my fellow parts*, I shall do nothing that might injure their common welfare.”<sup>503</sup>

Instead of collapsing the spheres of natural moral concern, Smith argues that Stoicism calls on us to cultivate unhealthy attitudes towards our “little department,” so that even when we act on their interests, we do so for the wrong reasons.<sup>504</sup> For the Stoic, the obligations we have to others are captured by the relation they bear to us. Instead of engaging with others in their particularity, the Stoic interacts with them *as parts*; their individuality is subsumed under the relation they bear to the Stoic within the system of nature.<sup>505</sup> The obligations I have concerning my father are specific to the fact that he is a father and I am his child – although I might have different obligations to him *qua* rational human being.<sup>506</sup> When I consider my obligation to my father, I look to his desires, goals, and our shared history when deciding what I owe him. By using an abstract relation as a guide for how to act, Smith argues that Stoicism replaces our sentiments with an idealized set of attitudes that destabilize morality.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), X.6.

<sup>504</sup> Some scholars argue that Smith interprets the Stoics as collapsing our spheres of natural moral concern, as illustrated by the *oikeiōsis*. On this point I depart from Fonna Forman, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-27. For more on Smith’s use of *oikeiōsis*, see Leonidas Montes, *Adam Smith in Context: A Critical Reassessment of Some Central Components in his Thought* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004), 8, 41, 79, 89, 125; Leonidas Montes, “Adam Smith as an *eclectic* Stoic,” *Adam Smith Review* 4, ed. Vivienne Brown (New York: Routledge, 2008) 30-56; Norbert Waszek, “Two Concepts of Morality: A Distinction of Adam Smith’s Ethics and its Stoic Origin,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45.4 (1984): 591-606; Gloria Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics: The Classical Heritage in Adam Smith’s Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 204-6.

<sup>505</sup> Smith, TMS III.iii.11.

<sup>506</sup> Smith, TMS VI.ii.1.1-9.

<sup>507</sup> Smith, TMS VI.ii.3.3.

For Smith, the Stoic does not properly relate to his little department. He treats his near and dear as objects of beneficial conduct or sources of obligation, as opposed to wellsprings of love or solace, which require a degree of vulnerability to others that is not recommended by the Stoics.<sup>508</sup> Without vulnerability, one cannot enter into the sentiments of those with whom one frequently interacts. Besides being unable to attend to the needs of these individuals, the Stoic cannot gauge how his actions will impact the emotional well-being of other people. We are meant by the Stoics to downplay our affections, which leaves us unable to interact with others in way that befit these relationships.<sup>509</sup> When our sentiments have been shaped so that we only note the perspective of nature, we see those around us merely as *objects* of our conduct.

By limiting the importance our emotional responses, we foster a stubborn indifference to feeling. One consequence of this cultivated indifference is the undercutting of mutual sympathy, which is crucial for determining the propriety of one's sentiments. As moral agents, we should be concerned with bringing our sentiments into coincidence with others. It is the coincidence of sentiment that provides us with a standard of what to approve of and how to act.<sup>510</sup> If we are unwilling to partake in the exchange of mutual sympathy, we are likely to favor our own judgment over that of others, at great cost. When our approval floats free from mutual sympathy, we are likely to be perverted by a wrong system like Stoicism. This system, alongside deadening our

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<sup>508</sup> Smith, TMS III.4.11

<sup>509</sup> Smith, TMS VI.ii.3.6

<sup>510</sup> Smith, TMS I.i.2.1; VI.ii.1.17.

sensitivity to others, leads us into error and produces a distorted sense of our relations to our little department.

Pride compounds the problem. As Smith notes, pride was the contributing factor to suicide becoming “perfectly fashionable” during the Roman Empire.<sup>511</sup> He discusses pride in a few places in TMS and distinguishes it from vanity. The proud person “disdains to court your esteem. He affects even to despise it, and endeavours to maintain his assumed station, not so much by making you sensible of his superiority, as of your own meanness.”<sup>512</sup> A vain person “is very seldom convinced of that superiority which he wishes you to ascribe to him. He wishes you to view him in much more splendid colours than those in which, when he places himself in your situation, and supposes you to know all that he knows, he can really view himself.”<sup>513</sup> The vain person courts the esteem; the prideful person’s sense of his own merit leads him to have contempt for esteem.<sup>514</sup>

Repugnance for esteem separates the prideful from the magnanimous. As scholars have pointed out, magnanimity is an important virtue for Smith.<sup>515</sup> The distinction

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<sup>511</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.32.

<sup>512</sup> Smith, TMS VI.iii.35.

<sup>513</sup> Smith, TMS VI.iii.36.

<sup>514</sup> Smith, TMS VI.iii.45, Pride leads one to see one’s own concerns as being of greater importance than those of others. This is made worse by the fact that “the pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors” (WN III.ii.10). Smith sees a tight connection between pride, love of domination, and persuasion. While a proper examination of this topic requires another paper, it is important to remember that Smith maintains that “the desire of being believed, the desire of persuading, *of leading and directing other people*, seems to be one of the strongest of all our natural desires” (VII.iv.25) [emphasis mine]. People yearn for a “harmony of minds” that, conjoined with pride and love of domination, may lead one to subdue one’s fellows to achieve this harmony (TMS VII.iv.28). See: Charles L. Griswold, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith: A Philosophical Encounter* (Routledge, 2018), 243-7.

<sup>515</sup> Eric Schliesser, “The Obituary of a Vain Philosopher: Adam Smith’s Reflections on Hume’s Life,” *Hume Studies* 34.2 (2003): 327-362; Ryan Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of*

between pride and magnanimity lies in how one reacts to fortune. While magnanimity involves possessing fortitude, pride “render[s] us altogether indifferent and unconcerned in the success or miscarriage of [that] which Nature has prescribed to us as the proper business and occupation of our lives.”<sup>516</sup> This indifference is compounded by Stoic severity, which is at odds with the “great cheerfulness” that Smith associates with magnanimity.<sup>517</sup> Cheerfulness signifies a generous spirit; the core of generosity is gratitude and a concern for public interest.<sup>518</sup> This concern is not echoed by the Stoic, whose “hardness of heart” renders him insensible to sociability and silences his sensitivity to his “humble department,” including the need for him to continue existing.<sup>519</sup>

We can now bring together the elements of Smith’s moral criticism of Stoicism. When we adopt the perspective of nature, we sever our connections to others. The consequence is increased self-assurance, which gives way to excessive self-estimation in the form of pride. This pride codifies our sense of independence, which only further disconnects us from our sociable nature, leading us to consider actions such as suicide as praiseworthy. I now move to consider the extent of Smith’s skepticism.

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*Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132-74; Andrew J. Corsa, “Modern Greatness of Soul in Hume and Smith.” *Ergo* 2.2 (2015): 1-32; Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosophy and Public Thinker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 358-70. Hanley discusses magnanimity and its pitfalls: “the tragedy of magnanimity lies in the fact that the dazzle of its display renders both the possessor and its spectator unable to assess worth – an ironic failing given that the turn to magnanimity was itself justified as an attempt to recover the concept of moral worth from its vulgarization by the rich and great” (170).

<sup>516</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.1.47

<sup>517</sup> Smith, “The Death of David Hume,” Hume, *Essays*, xlvi.

<sup>518</sup> Smith, TMS IV.ii.10-11)

<sup>519</sup> Smith, TMS VI.iii.15; VI.ii.3.6

*Skepticism – Following Our Nature*

What does Smith’s criticism of the Stoic principle of suicide reveal about his commitments as a moralist? I suggest that Smith is a skeptical moralist on two fronts. First, his method for determining what is virtuous does not proceed on the basis of first principles, whether about moral motivation or about the aims of human action. Smith begins his moral inquiry by observing how we proceed in our moral lives, gathering evidence about how we react to different situations, and noting its impact on our ability to live well alongside others. Second, Smith rejects the Stoic’s appeal to intuition in determining what we are called upon to do. His account of moral virtue is based in sympathy – judgments about how we ought to act are based in the concordance with our fellows, as opposed to nature or other abstract ideas of propriety. In this manner, Smith’s ethics is fallibilist along the lines of Academic Skepticism under Carneades, or of Cicero.<sup>520</sup>

Skepticism is tied to a rejection of philosophical schools – the skeptic accuses the schools of dogmatism. Smith engages with these schools in TMS VII, albeit in a different way.<sup>521</sup> One way to interpret TMS VII is as Smith’s attempt to show how his theory corrects the shortcomings of others while also preserving what is valuable in them. On this view, Smith engages his predecessors with the aim of producing a synthetic moral

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<sup>520</sup> For more on these topics, see: R.J. Hankinson, “Values, objectivity and dialectic: the sceptical attack on ethics; its methods, aims and success” *Phronesis* 49 (1994): 45–6; Harold Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Richard Bett, “Ancient Scepticism,” *Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112-128; Richard Bett, “Scepticism and Ethics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*. ed. Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181-194.

<sup>521</sup> For another treatment of this topic, see: Charles L. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147-78

system. Some scholars place Smith in the history of *eclecticism*, a cousin of the skeptical tradition.<sup>522</sup> Both eclectics and skeptics reject the dogmatism of the schools – the latter focus on criticizing the foundations of their doctrines, while the former handle their doctrines as a toolbox, using them “piecemeal.”<sup>523</sup> As one scholar points out, eclecticism was an “even more destructive challenge to the schools, in that it questioned the unity of their doctrines as schools and was harder to dismiss out of hand than skeptic[ism].”<sup>524</sup> The eclectic neutralizes the schools’ influence by showing that one can accept particular doctrines without becoming a school partisan, and that one can combine the insights of opposing schools. But this interpretation misses the spirit of TMS VII.

Smith uses the doctrines of the schools in his ethics. His account of prudence draws on the Epicureans; his view of benevolence on the Neo-Platonists; his account of propriety on the Peripatetics and Stoics. We might interpret Smith as an eclectic, one who forms his view from common moral experience and the writings of predecessors, insofar as their doctrines are confirmed by experience. But referring Smith as an eclectic in this sense is uninformative as, in many ways, the history of modern ethics is of the triumph of eclecticism, where the stranglehold of the Ancient schools fades into the background.<sup>525</sup> The term, “eclecticism,” also falls short in helping to explain *why* Smith’s criticism of his

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<sup>522</sup> Aaron Garrett and Ryan Hanley, “Adam Smith: History and Impartiality,” *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Vol. I: Morals, Politics, Art, Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 239-282.

<sup>523</sup> Aaron Garrett, “Eclecticism of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy,” *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. Aaron Garrett (New York: Routledge, 2014), 9.

<sup>524</sup> Garrett, “Eclecticism,” 9.

<sup>525</sup> Garrett and Hanley “Adam Smith: History and Impartiality” 2015; Garrett, “Eclecticism”; Ulrich Johannes Schneider, “Eclecticism and the History of Philosophy,” *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Donald R. Kelley (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 83-101.

predecessors takes a particular shape. The question is *why* does Smith endorse common moral experience as a standard for evaluating his predecessors?

Consider Smith's engagement with Stoicism. Smith's criticism of the Stoics is aimed at their moral epistemology. For Smith, the Stoic is not licensed to the claim that nature calls upon them to do anything, much less to commit suicide. This assumed license leads the Stoic to draw spurious conclusions about the character of duty and the nature of obligation. What begins as an error ends up having tremendous consequences: on account of a presumed access to nature, the Stoic rejects proximate, albeit defeasible, evidence for how one ought to act. As a result, the Stoic does not feel the weight of those duties tied to their little department. By identifying the Stoics' failure to properly ground moral judgment, Smith is not undercutting the possibility of making reasonable attributions of praise and blame but shifting our sense of what evidence is required for these attributions.

For Smith, our judgments and attributions receive weight from their concordance with others. Through testing and revising our judgments, they are seen as trustworthy. This method of testing and revising our beliefs is recommended by Carneades, the first Academic Skeptic and a hero of David Hume's: "In ordinary life, when we are investigating a small matter we question one witness, when it is a greater matter, several witnesses, and when it is an even more essential matter we examine each of the witnesses on the basis of the mutual agreement among the others."<sup>526</sup> We call on others to substantiate our claims and to curb our self-certainty. Without their assistance, we proceed naively, avoiding what is required to develop the skills for competent moral

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<sup>526</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, ed. Richard Bett. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38-9.

judgment. Smith supplements this model of revision by attempting to shape our conduct through moral illustration. By providing us with portraits of virtue, Smith seeks to awaken our sentiments and intensify our attachment to ideas of propriety and merit.

This latter project comes to fruition towards the end of TMS VII, where Smith discusses his approach to practical ethics. According to Smith, ethics ought to proceed by offering descriptions of virtues and vices in order to illustrate the “deformity and misery” of the latter and the “propriety and happiness” of the former.<sup>527</sup> The aim of this exercise is to get clear on the “sentiment of the heart” from which each virtue originates and to convey a “general way of acting” associated with their exercise.<sup>528</sup> Though the approach is imperfect, Smith argues that an observer armed with a “delicate and an accurate pencil,” can replicate our experiences of the virtues and awaken us to their value.<sup>529</sup> By giving us “agreeable and lively pictures” of virtue, our love for them becomes “inflamed.”<sup>530</sup> Once we are inflamed, we are more likely to guide our judgments by the correct ideas of propriety and merit, and to act in a virtuous manner as well:

“By the justness as well as the delicacy of their observations they may often help to both correct and to ascertain our natural sentiments with regard to the propriety of conduct, and suggesting many nice and delicate affections, form us to a more exact justness of behaviour, than what, without such instruction, we should have been apt to think of.”<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.3.

<sup>528</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.3.

<sup>529</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.4.

<sup>530</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.6.

<sup>531</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.6.

The description the moralist offers opens up the possibility for us to relate differently to our sentiments. Through this process, we gain more productive ways to express these sentiments and a better understanding how they bolster our moral commitments.

For Smith, attempts to justify our moral conduct in terms of intuition, or by appeal to abstract conceptions of propriety, run headfirst into skeptical arguments. By not recognizing the strength of these objections, one risks operating in a dangerous manner. Many figures in the skeptical tradition, like Carneades or Cicero, stress that we should heed the duties of common life since they provide the only measure for how we ought to act. Few go beyond this injunction to avoid doing violence to appearances for the sake of communing with a deeper source of value. Smith uses his criticism of the Stoics as a jumping off point to construct an ethics of common life – an effort on which he reflects in the discussion of practical ethics. Smith focuses on suicide because it is a limit case, where the reasons to go on seem to come up short. He shows how our connection to ourselves and others fails, on the Stoic account, and how it can be preserved.

### **Making Room for Reasonable Partiality**

At the outset of this chapter I stated that Smith's moral theory is similar to that of Butler, particularly when it comes to how they think our passions should inform our conduct. Despite there being little literature on the relation between Butler and Smith, this claim is largely accepted by scholars.<sup>532</sup> Smith is seen as in the sentimentalist camp of the British Moralism tradition, and many would agree with an older tradition of

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<sup>532</sup> Notable exceptions are Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 22-5; Alice MacLachlan, "Resentment and Moral Judgment in Butler," *Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 161-177; Garrett and Hanley, "Adam Smith: History and Impartiality."

scholarship that lists Butler as being at least a peripheral member of this ethical school. There is no need for me to re-litigate whether Smith has been rightly classified; my concerns about the application of the term “sentimentalism” to Hume have already been discussed in Chapter II. What remains for me to do is clarify the contrast between Smith and Butler and, by doing so, deepen our understanding of the contours of Smith’s moral theory – a theory whose details have been analyzed by many scholars over the past 30 years. I will build on this wealth of scholarship and take much of it for granted.

Throughout the dissertation, I have discussed the ways in which our sentiments dispose us to act primarily for the good of our friends, family, and loved ones. We have seen that partial concern can lead to bias and faction; we have also seen that for some, like Hume, these sentiments are a stepping stone to treating considerations like the common good as authoritative, downgrading the authority of these local considerations in matters of mutual concern. From this observation we see that a hierarchy forms, for Hume, between norms grounded in the impartiality of usefulness and the norms given by our frame. I argue that there is no such hierarchy in Smith’s moral theory. The concentric spheres of concern that are given to us by nature cannot be subverted by more general abstract principles like usefulness, at least when it comes to morality. (Such a hierarchy does exist in the case of jurisprudence but to examine the relationship between morality and jurisprudence goes beyond the stated purpose of this chapter.)

Most scholars argue that usefulness is a secondary principle for Smith, that the sentiments are inextricably connected to his account of morality, and that he holds a Ciceronian conception of virtue. What scholars disagree about is the extent to which the

impartial spectator – however it may be construed – corrects our more natural sentimental dispositions.<sup>533</sup> I hardly aim to settle this issue in the remaining pages. That said, I do wish to cast the debate in a different light, which may go part of the way to its resolution. Though the impartial spectator is very much a product of our nature – resulting the imagination, severing the self into actor and observer and viewing one’s conduct from the perspective of the latter – it is only authoritative insofar as it remains connected to our nature. The judgments handed down by the impartial spectator are the result of reflecting on the extent to which one’s conduct lines up with one’s commitments. In this manner, it does not provide us with a perspective by which we forge genuinely moral norms that

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<sup>533</sup> As Garrett and Hanley note in their “Adam Smith: History and Impartiality,” there are a number of ways to construe the relationship between the impartial spectator and our natural moral sentiments. Some, like Debes, Darwall, and Fleischacker argue that the spectator puts us in touch with second-person reasons, allowing us to correct our self-love. See: Stephen Darwall, “Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 28.2 (1999): 139–64; Samuel Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Remy Debes, “Adam Smith on Dignity and Equality,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20.1 (2012): 109–40. Others argue that the impartial spectator puts us in touch with the perspective of the moral community, in light of which we can guide our conduct. See: Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*. Still others appeal to the fitness of the impartial spectator’s sentiments to explain its natural authority over our sentiments. See: Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). There is also a Kantian reading of the impartial spectator on offer that is not mentioned by Garrett and Hanley. See: Maria A Carrasco, “Adam Smith: Self-Command, Practical Reason, and Deontological Insights” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20.2 (2012): 391-414; Christel Fricke, “The Sympathetic Process and the Origin and Function of Conscience,” *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 177-189. Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty*, 32-63. I lean towards the reading given by Irwin in *The Development of Ethics*, Ch. 60, along with the Garrett’s and Hanley’s take in the aforementioned chapter about the place of history in shaping the impartial spectator’s judgments. For more takes on the impartial spectator, see: Alexander Broadie, “Sympathy and the Impartial Spectator,” *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 158–88; Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “Sentiments and Spectators: Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Judgment,” *Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 124-144; Remy Debes, “Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination,” *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought, and Legacy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 192-207.

then correct our parochial concerns. To do so would be to view our moral commitments from the removed standpoint of a philosopher, as proposed by the Stoics.

I have argued that Smith finds the Stoic procedure of moral reflection problematic and its account of propriety unacceptable. Few scholars would argue that Smith accepts Stoicism, even in a qualified sense; even those who afford the impartial spectator a great deal of authority caution that doing so does not imply that Smith's theory is either Stoic or Kantian for that matter. Still, for Smith, moral claims do not originate with the impartial spectator but with our nature and, more particularly, with our sentiments and the relations that they reinforce. The role of the impartial spectator is analogous to Butler's conception of conscience – it forces us to confront the extent to which we are abiding by the duties we already recognize. To heed the call of conscience, and to be of merit, is to not allow our unsociable desires or self-deception to subvert our nature. I make this case by, first, looking at Smith's discussion of the relation between nature and philosophy and argue that, for him, we can trust our nature more than we can philosophy when it comes to morality. Second, I suggest that Smith's method in TMS expresses this very idea – that the aim of philosophy is to reinforce our nature as opposed to seeking its correction.

### **Weighing the Perspective of Nature and Philosophy**

Throughout Smith's writings he makes a distinction between nature and philosophy, typically associating reason with the latter and our instincts, dispositions, and sentiments with the former. The relationship between nature and philosophy in Smith's

work is difficult to ascertain and there is much scholarly literature on the subject.<sup>534</sup> Although scholars agree that the concept of nature does some heavy lifting in Smith's moral theory, at least with regard to his account of the passions, it is not clear whether the principles of nature and philosophy ever genuinely conflict – and if they do, which of these forces possesses genuine authority over the other and on what grounds it claims this title. Surely Smith means for TMS to educate his audience on the nature of virtue and their duties as human beings. Part of the process involves examining ourselves and refining the baser parts of our nature. In this way, philosophy plays a *corrective role* with regard to nature. At times, however, Smith notes that it plays a *supportive role* for nature, reinforcing tendencies that nature has bestowed on us and giving them greater weight in our reasoning (e.g. justice).<sup>535</sup> Other times, philosophy uncovers irregularities in our sentiments that are best left uncorrected for Smith (e.g. moral luck).<sup>536</sup>

My goal in this section is not to propose a solution to this interpretative problem in Smith's work but to examine those passages where he discusses the tension between “nature” and “philosophy” which bear on the problem of partiality. I argue that, for Smith, nature determines the weight of our moral duties while philosophy gives us the

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<sup>534</sup> Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce, and Conscience* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 76-99; Richard A. Kleer, “Final Causes in Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33.2 (1995): 275–300; Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 311-29; Lauren Brubaker, “Does the ‘wisdom of nature’ need help?” *New Voices on Adam Smith*, ed. Leonidas Montes and Eric Schliesser (New York: Routledge, 2006), 168-192; Ryan Hanley, “Scepticism and Naturalism in Adam Smith,” *Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 198–212; Fonna Forman, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 27-72; Gavin Kennedy, “Adam Smith on Religion,” *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, 464–84; Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosophy and Public Thinker*, 12-5; 25-48.

<sup>535</sup> Smith, TMS II.ii.2.1

<sup>536</sup> See: Aaron Garrett, “Adam Smith and Moral Luck,” *Adam Smith als Moralphilosoph*, ed. Christel Fricke and Hans-Peter Schütt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 160-177; Keith Hankins, “Adam Smith's Intriguing Solution to the Problem of Moral Luck,” *Ethics* 126.3 (2016): 711–46.

tools to better understand how our nature functions and what it demands of us. As our nature compels us to show greater concern for those in our little department, Smith claims that it is the role of philosophy to inform us of what this duty entails and not to correct this natural partiality. Unlike Hume, Smith does not argue that this partiality can be justified on consequentialist grounds. There is no principle that gives normative weight to our sentiments; rather, these sentiments are the only tool we possess to guide our conduct. Nature provides us with a roadmap, Smith notes, because the “happiness of mankind” cannot be left dependent on the very “slowness and uncertainty of philosophical researches.”<sup>537</sup> Though this discussion can tell us more about how Smith’s views about the relationship between nature and philosophy more generally, examining this subject goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

I frame much of the following discussion around a comment that Smith makes about the scope of our duties and those with which we should be rightfully concerned:

“To what purpose should we trouble ourselves about the world in the moon? All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety upon that account seems to be no part of our duty. That we should be but little interested, therefore, in the fortune of those whom we can neither serve nor hurt, and who are in every respect so very remote from us, seems wisely ordered by Nature; and if it were possible to alter in

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<sup>537</sup> Smith, TMS III.5.4

this respect the original constitution of our frame, we could yet gain nothing by the change.”<sup>538</sup>

The Stoic claims that to become fully virtuous, one must be able to see oneself as a citizen of the world, whose duties extend equally to all components of the system of nature. As I discussed in this chapter, Smith is not persuaded by this approach to thinking about our duties – he finds it problematic on both epistemic and moral grounds. His claim in the passage just quoted seems straightforward. There are many sentient beings in the world, most of whom we will never interact with and whose well-being will not impact us in any manner. While we should wish the best for these people, provided they are reasonable, it seems wholly improper to spend any time agonizing over their fate since they are not our concern. Luckily, Smith notes, our nature ensures that we pay little mind to those outside our little department; our imagination stays fixed on the well-being of our friends and loved ones, and on how we can work on behalf of their good.

One could run the following argument against the justifiability of our inattention to others. Take any family in West Virginia. Chances are that this family has many of the same needs and concerns as my own. Perhaps they are financially worse off than my family, geographically stuck, and tethered to an uncertain lifestyle. Say that this lifestyle bears great significance for many members of the family. Considering the ways in which I may be of service to this family in a time where there is greater potential for me to impact their lives – say, by using my skills as an educator to increase the opportunities that their children have – why should I not see my fate as tied up with their own? In some

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<sup>538</sup> Smith, TMS III.3.9

ways, this criticism may come off as unfair. Smith lived in different times. While egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism are the standard assumptions of democratic thought, Smith was writing in a time where the world was much smaller. Still, the criticism cannot be swept under the rug. Smith was aware of the complexities of exchange and knew that our actions had an impact on our compatriots and on our fellow humans more generally. It would be irresponsible to not recognize this fact, even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

However, Smith's claim that we should not concern ourselves with "the world in the moon" is not properly thought of in causal terms. His position is not that we should show greater care for those closest to us because our actions have a negligible impact on those with whom we are not acquainted. If an economist were to demonstrate that our actions – say, regarding the products we purchase – impact people on the other side of the world, it would follow that we should be concerned for others to the extent that our decisions help or hurt them. If it can be shown that my decisions exercise greater influence over the lives of a family in Bangladesh than over those my own family, we are forced to conclude that we should show greater concern for the family in Bangladesh.<sup>539</sup>

What Smith would find troublesome about this view is the appeal to utility to ground the decision to prioritize others over our little department. Much has been written about Smith's views on utility. He dedicates a chapter in TMS to the impact of utility on our judgments about aesthetic and moral beauty, which also offers a window into how he views Hume's moral system in relation to his own. The criticism Smith makes of Hume

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<sup>539</sup> This example is meant to invoke the impartialism of Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1.1 (Spring 1972): 229-243. For a characterization of the roots of this view, see: Peter Singer, Leslie Cannold, Helga Kuhse, "William Godwin and the Defense of Impartialist Ethics," *Utilitas* 7.1 (1995): 67-86.

in TMS IV focuses on his failure to properly characterize how our moral sentiments function in everyday contexts. For Smith, Hume attempts to reduce our praise and blame of others (and ourselves) to considerations of utility – that is, the extent to which one “promote[s] or disturb[s] the happiness both of the individual and of society.”<sup>540</sup> Smith argues that this way of understanding our moral lives is too simplistic, noting that “the sentiment of approbation always involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility.”<sup>541</sup> While humanity, generosity, and public spirit are certainly useful to others – by tightening the bonds of society – we do not praise them on these grounds.

Smith criticizes Hume on the same grounds that Hume did Mandeville, and all those who reduce all human motivation to self-love.<sup>542</sup> For Hume, these figures are driven to explain human behavior in the simplest manner possible. This drive for simplicity has its source in the desire to make one’s explanations aesthetically pleasing. There are few things more beautiful than a clean, orderly, simple explanation that connects to form a coherent explanatory system. Were it the case that our conduct was properly understood as various expressions of self-love, one could construct a science of human nature that explains our actions on par with those that physics offers for how middle-sized dry goods move in space. If only matters were that simple. As we discussed in Chapter 2, Hume seeks to explain all instances of praise and blame of characters in terms of them as either being agreeable to themselves or to others, or as useful to

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<sup>540</sup> Smith, TMS IV.2.1

<sup>541</sup> Smith, TMS IV.2.5

<sup>542</sup> Hume, *Enquires*, 248.

themselves or to others. As I argue in there, when it comes to moral deliberation, for Hume, usefulness takes precedence over agreeableness.

For Smith, Hume betrays the same “love of system” as does Mandeville in his attempt to reduce moral considerations to utility. One can imagine Hume responding as follows: since Smith explains moral life in terms of one principle – sympathy – he is subject to the same criticism, that he is more concerned to offer a *simple* explanation than one that fully captures the breadth of our moral experience. Smith even refers to his view as the “system of sympathy.”<sup>543</sup> While sympathy is the force that allows for the *possibility* of moral praise and blame, Smith’s explanation of how it functions is rather complicated. He sums up his view at the end of TMS VII, noting that our approval or disapproval of another’s conduct and character is derived from four sources: 1) our ability to sympathize with the agent’s motives; 2) our ability to sympathize with the gratitude or resentment felt by those parties impacted by the agent’s conduct and character; 3) the extent to which an agent’s motives and patient’s gratitude or resentment are concordant with the general rules regarding what is fit and proper; (4) the extent to which these actions are a part of a “system of behavior” that tends to promote the general happiness.<sup>544</sup> Notice that sympathy only plays a direct role in the first and second sources of moral judgment.

There are a number of points to be made about the third and fourth sources of approval and disapproval. Let me emphasize two points. Although our perception of, say, someone’s gratitude being in concordance with a general rule regarding the extent to

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<sup>543</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iii.1.4

<sup>544</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iii.3.15

which one should feel grateful in a particular circumstance does not engage our sympathy, Smith claims that moral rules are nothing more than inductive generalizations of our collective sympathetic responses. The purpose of moral rules is two-fold: first, to test our own sympathetic response, and the responses of others, against a standard, to ensure they are not anomalous; second, to make decisions more quickly than we would otherwise. As many scholars have pointed out, what becomes troubling about Smith's account of general rules is the rigidity that he seems to give them, noting that we should cultivate a "sacred regard" for them. Given the malleability of human nature, and the origin from which general rules are derived, referring to them as divinely authored seems to be a bridge too far. The second point concerns Smith's comments on utility. Smith is concerned with expected as opposed to actual utility; insofar as he is interested in one's conduct, as opposed to their character, Smith treats actions as a part of a larger system, meaning that he does not consider the utility of individual actions.<sup>545</sup>

Although Smith refers to his system as one centered on sympathy, we can see that his view of moral approval and disapproval is more complicated than Hume. While Smith escapes the criticism he levels at both, it does not follow that his theory is superior on account of it being complex, unless the aim is solely to paint our moral lives more colorfully than does Hume. But Smith's criticism is not merely that Hume's views are too simplistic; rather, the simplicity is indicative of a mistaken approach to thinking about morality – one that is unduly philosophical, as opposed to anchored in nature. It is true

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<sup>545</sup> Smith gives utility a large role in the *Wealth of Nations*, under the consideration of "expediency." That said, for him, the topic of WN is not ethics, strictly speaking, but political economy. and so different principles are operative as the subject under consideration is no longer individuals' actions or character. More in section VI.

that human beings are, at times, motivated by considerations of self-love, vanity, or even the desire for domination, according to Smith. Human beings also enjoy well-ordered desks, rooms, buildings, and social structures; there is something beautiful about everything occupying a particular space and fulfilling a particular function. The perception of well-orderedness is, as Hume would say, equally agreeable and useful. That said, to say that we can explain a father taking on a second job to support his daughter's interest in playing hockey *wholly* in terms of the father's self-interest, or that we praise him for doing so *wholly* in terms of his being useful to his daughter or to society at large is a philosophical abstraction.

For Smith, the abstraction in which Hume is engaged does violence to our moral experience, particularly our sentiment-based obligations to those in our little department. To ground these obligations in self-interest, utility, or any other impartial principle is an inaccurate account of how we make sense of them in our lives; notably, appealing to such a principle puts all our distinct obligations to others on a level-playing field. According to Smith, this characterization of what we ought to do regarding others does not capture the moral seriousness of our commitments to near and dear, or to the nature of my duties to others generally, regardless of their standing to me. When it comes to the content of these moral duties, Smith is insistent that our nature sets the terms of deliberation and is the basis of any reasonable account of ethics.

Like many 18<sup>th</sup> century British moralists, Smith was particularly aware of how he presented his doctrines – attention to Smith's method of presentation can, at times, yield as much information about his ethical thought as can the content of his doctrines. Smith's

commitment to a moral theory that is based on our commitments to our little department is expressed in the form that the TMS takes; that is, as a series of descriptions of how our sentiments function and the general shape of our moral lives. Like Butler, Smith eschews the appeal to utility to explain how we relate to virtue and the duties we have regarding others and ourselves. Smith leaves us with a picture of morality that is complex and reflective of our experience.

### **Ethics: Method and Limits**

In this chapter I have examined an account of partiality that stresses the importance of our sentiments as action-guiding. This view requires that we place trust in our natural disposition to love and care for those closest to us. The role of impartiality, for Butler and Smith, is not to turn a critical eye on these sentiments but to counter our all-too-human tendency to deceive ourselves, especially by way of abstract principles. Concerns about abstraction are clearest in Butler's treatment of self-deception and Smith's comments on the Stoic principle of suicide. But there remains a tension in Butler's ethics; love of God requires that we suppress our natural tendencies for the purposes of carrying out our divine mission. There is no such tendency in Smith, who rebuffs all appeals to the system of nature to guide our conduct. For Smith, all the creator has to teach us regarding how we should carry ourselves in this life is to be found in our frame.

Smith is the fullest expression of what some call the "sentimentalist" tradition of moral philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is seen to begin with Shaftesbury, or at least Hutcheson, and continue to Smith. Broadly speaking, a sentimentalist grounds morality in

our sentiments and sees them as action-guiding. Since our sentiments are many, and the values they represent and help reinforce are even greater, a sentimentalist is largely uninterested in the project of reducing our moral responses to a set of basic principles on which we can reflect. Instead, as we see in Smith and in Butler, sentimentalist figures are more interested in studying how our sentiments inform how we should relate to others and even to ourselves. Hume is interested in the contours of our passions; however, like Descartes, Hobbes, and Malebranche, Hume is skeptical about their value. In this way, Gay and Hume do not share Butler's (and Smith's) commitment that God or nature has shaped our frame such that our passions give us insight into how we should act.

Smith ends TMS VII by discussing practical ethics and the two approaches that philosophers have commonly taken concerning this subject. One approach, which he associates with the Ancient moralists, offers descriptions of virtues and vices in order to illustrate the “deformity and misery” of the latter and the “propriety and happiness” of the former.<sup>546</sup> Whether it be by sketching an anatomy of our sentiments, or providing us with a general sense of how we should act, Smith claims the approach is imperfect. While he sees his task as partly one of describing our sentiments with continually greater accuracy, he claims that even the incomplete illustrations we have of the virtues – whether prudence and benevolence, or those discussed by Cicero or Aristotle – are sufficient to give us a sense of what it means to act virtuously, and to compel us to do so.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.3.

<sup>547</sup> “By the justness as well as the delicacy of their observations they may often help to both correct and to ascertain our natural sentiments with regard to the propriety of conduct, and suggesting many nice and delicate affections, form us to a more exact justness of behaviour, than what, without such instruction, we should have been apt to think of” (Smith, TMS VII.iv.6).

The second approach to practical ethics, which Smith associates with the casuistry of both the schoolmen and writers on jurisprudence, “endeavour[s] to lay down exact and precise rules for the direction of every circumstance of our behaviour.”<sup>548</sup> Smith is suspicious of the attempt to provide precise rules in matters other than justice. I agree with most scholars that Smith’s approach in TMS is one of ethics, although he associates it primarily with the Ancients. Smith aims to improve his audience with his writings, at least in the case of TMS (the issue becomes more complicated with the *Wealth of Nations* or the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*). I follow the line of interpretation that treats Smith as a practical moralist, concerned with the project of “animat[ing] to us what is generous and noble” and “soften[ing] us to what is gentle and humane.”<sup>549</sup> Given the imperfect nature of a science of ethics, for Smith, all one can accomplish in writing an ethics is to moderately improve on those of the Ancient moralists. For Smith, improvement is made by offering illustrations of virtue of vice in a manner suitable to our times.

Given Smith’s views about the nature of ethics, what interests me is his comment that works of casuistry “teach us to chicanery with our own consciences, and by their vain subtleties serve to authorize innumerable evasive refinements with regard to the most essential articles of our duty.”<sup>550</sup> He notes that the “frivolous accuracy” introduced by the casuist contributes to their “dry and disagreeable” nature and the fact that those who take them seriously are most likely to “fall into error.”<sup>551</sup> On its face, the former criticism is superficial while the latter is more serious and flows from the “frivolous accuracy” the

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<sup>548</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.7.

<sup>549</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.33.

<sup>550</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.33.

<sup>551</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.33.

casuist displays in their work. However, Smith's claim is that the presentation contributes directly to the aforementioned error. He argues that these works are "incapable of exciting in the heart any of those emotions which it is the principal use of books of morality to excite."<sup>552</sup> That casuistry invites us to speculate about morality without considerations of the heart, which makes us likely to commit moral failings.

While casuistry creates an obstacle to the functioning of our moral sentiments, it is not the only force that concerns Smith when it comes to our ability to be properly guided by our nature. He notes that ethics is most prone to "embellishments of eloquence."<sup>553</sup> While painting the character of virtue in great colors is important for the aim of "inflaming our natural love of virtue," Smith thinks certain manners of writing can undercut our natural sentiments.<sup>554</sup> His concern about embellishment can be seen most clearly in his criticisms of Shaftesbury, whose writing serves as "an example of the pompous and grant style."<sup>555</sup> Smith treats this style as an attempt by Shaftesbury to separate himself from the "true propriety of language" and, in turn, the affections and conduct of human life.<sup>556</sup> Here we are reminded of the Stoics, whose high-minded manner of writing contributed to thinking about morals and about how they ought to relate to others. Any reader of Shaftesbury is familiar with this use of style to evoke high-minded sentiments and conduct, a style that Smith finds dangerous.

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<sup>552</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.33.

<sup>553</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.6.

<sup>554</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.6.

<sup>555</sup> Smith, LRBL i.v.50.

<sup>556</sup> Smith, LRBL i.137.

While Smith is worried about how embellishments in ethical writing can help give weight to mistaken views, he is more concerned about how authors like Mandeville use their writing to chip away at our moral confidence. By using a tone that is “lively and humorous, though coarse and rustic” in its eloquence, Mandeville is able to give “his doctrines an air of truth and probability,” despite their “erroneous” nature.<sup>557</sup> For Smith, Mandeville’s works neither inflame our natural love of virtue nor our desire for self-command. Mandeville instead lampoons the “great, awful, and respectable virtues” as a “cheat and imposition on mankind,” while those “soft, amiable, and gentle virtues” are treated as products of vanity.<sup>558</sup> He suggests that all love of virtue is merely the desire to be seen as distinguished by others. Smith, like others writing at this time, was concerned with Mandeville’s writings because they captured the imagination of polite society.

Smith ends his examination of virtue on a seemingly optimistic tone. He makes a distinction between natural philosophical theories and those of moral philosophy, noting that the former (he then gives the example of Descartes’ vortices) can persist despite not being anchored in truth since their subject matter is distant from us. As Smith writes:

“When a traveler gives an account of some distant country, he may impose upon our credulity the most groundless and absurd fictions as the most certain matters of fact. But when a person pretends to inform us of what passes in our neighborhood, and of the affairs of the very parish which we live in, though here too, if we are careless as not to examine things with our own eyes, yet the greatest

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<sup>557</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.4.6.

<sup>558</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.4.2; TMS VII.ii.4.7.

falsehoods which he imposes on us must bear some resemblance to the truth, and must even have a considerable mixture of truth in them.”<sup>559</sup>

Smith is satisfied to inform us that the theories in moral philosophy are susceptible to a degree of evidence not required by those in natural philosophy. Nevertheless, what is problematic about the writings of Shaftesbury, the Stoics, or of Mandeville is that they are far from “groundless and absurd fictions” – they possess a small connection to the truth of things. What makes ethical writing important, for Smith, is that there is a great deal at stake and that even pernicious moral theories have a recognizable pull on the our imagination, even for those who are hardly “injudicious” or “inexperienced” readers.<sup>560</sup> It is incumbent on the moralist to exercise caution in how they analyze our passions and the manner in which they choose to speculate about moral matters. Although our nature defends us from any gross perversion of our sentiments, the shape they take can be influenced by customs and the writings and teachings of a time.<sup>561</sup>

I return to the differences between Hume and Smith in the conclusion of the dissertation. For now, it is important to say a bit more about the implication that Smith’s moral view has on the problem of partiality. For Smith, there is no problem when it comes to how our sentiments shape our values and inform us how to act. The problem comes from those forces that interrupt the functioning of our sentiments. The vast majority of these forces are political or legal, and their examination belongs not to ethics but to jurisprudence, a topic that comes up at the end of TMS. Smith famously projected

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<sup>559</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.4.14.

<sup>560</sup> Smith, TMS VII.ii.4.14.

<sup>561</sup> Smith, TMS V.2.16.

that he would write a work that gave “an account of the general principles of law and government and of the different revolutions they have undergone in the different ages and periods of society.”<sup>562</sup> Though the work was never completed, its contents come down to us through student notes on the subject. A treatment of its contents goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, though the beginnings of an answer are contained herein.

This demarcating of our moral lives into different areas of study, each of which has its own standards of evidence has its roots in the natural law theory of Pufendorf. This view becomes influential by the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is reflected in the work of Bentham and Mill, as much as in the writings of Kant and Hegel. There are ways in which this solution to the problem of partiality – making it a matter of politics instead of ethics – is unsatisfactory. After all, one must still answer the question of how politics and ethics relate to one another. Regardless, Smith’s point is that the tension we see between our partial and impartial commitments is not native to ethics. This tension only appears to us as salient once we take matters of jurisprudence seriously; only when we view our lives as citizens and not as simply as members of families or particular communities, that we are confronted with the problem of partiality.

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<sup>562</sup> Smith, TMS VII.iv.37

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have presented an interpretative framework through which to understand the British Moralism tradition. In discussing this tradition, scholars have often focused on questions of moral metaphysics and moral obligation, eschewing matters of practical ethics. I have cast this tradition in a different light, centering my narrative on *the problem of partiality*. I have made the case that this problem originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of certain tensions in Locke's moral thought. By doing so, I aimed to show that the British Moralists' concerns were ultimately *practical*. To the extent that these figures were taken by questions about the nature of moral properties, for example, they wished to address concerns about selfishness, factionalism, moral disagreement, and how to weigh different moral considerations. Ethics, for them, is a tool to help us better navigate our conflicts so that we can live well together.

I have traced the problem of partiality from Locke through Cockburn, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson in Chapter 1, to Gay and Hume in Chapter 2, to Butler and Smith in Chapter 3. Now, I return to Hume and Smith in the context of considering a solution to the problem of partiality. Of the figures considered, only the theories presented by Hume and Smith are robust enough to solve the problem of partiality. I proceed as follows. First, I discuss Hume's solution to the problem of partiality and the "dilemma of variability" that his account faces. Second, I discuss Smith's solution to the problem of partiality and how his skepticism informs his view of the problem. Third, I explore the practical orientation of the British Moralists and how Smith's practical ethics

contributes to this tradition. Fourth, I consider the extent to which the problem of partiality can be solved.

### **Hume's Solution to the Problem of Partiality**

Hume argues that we desire our own happiness and the happiness of those near and dear over that of strangers. The imbalance of these desires lends itself to faction and conflict whenever it is not possible to act for the general interest. Luckily, according to Hume, we possess the mechanism of sympathy which, through the relations of contiguity and resemblance, connects us to the desires and passions of others, even of those neither near nor dear. We cannot be indifferent to the fates of our fellows. Still, Hume maintains, when it comes to rendering judgments about conduct and character, or making determinations about what to do, our particular interests are often given undue weight. We allow our partial concerns to shape our ideas of what is moral. We therefore often find ourselves in situations where we sincerely take ourselves to be justified in our conduct despite all countervailing evidence.

#### *Hume's View*

Hume argues that the aforementioned situation is intolerable, noting “the more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain,” the more we recognize that “...every man's interest is peculiar to himself, and the aversions and desires, which result from it, cannot be supposed to affect others in a like degree.”<sup>563</sup> Through reflection, Hume points out that we are led to adopt a “method of correcting

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<sup>563</sup> Hume, “Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,” *Enquiries*, 5.2.25, p. 228.

our sentiments, or at least, *of correcting our language* where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable [emphasis mine].”<sup>564</sup> While we are unlikely to change the sentiments of others directly, we can find a shared way to speak about morals. To do so, we require a language “moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community.”<sup>565</sup> For Hume, such a language would allow us to reflect on the value of conduct and character from a common perspective.

How does Hume imagine that this language would function? He contrasts the so-called general language with the language of self-love. Hume notes the use of the language of *self-love*: “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.”<sup>566</sup> When speaking from the general language, Hume envisions that we expand our scope of concern and consider the interests of people more generally. In using the moral language, I no longer refer to others as a rival, or as an adversary, but as imprudent, benevolent, unjust, etc. By doing so, I allow others the opportunity to either concur with or reject my description; their testimony provides me with the evidence about which traits and conduct are conducive or detrimental to the common interest. Through the process of observing, describing, reflecting, and conversing with others, we are able to provide fine-grained judgments that accurately track the general interest.

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<sup>564</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 582.

<sup>565</sup> Hume, “Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,” *Enquires*, 5.2.25, p. 228.

<sup>566</sup> Hume, “Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals” *Enquires*, 5.2.25, p. 228.

Through the progress of individual correction, we gradually establish standards to coordinate our judgments. Hume recognizes that, even with this coordination, there will be differences in how people *feel* about particular moral phenomenon, though he does not think that these differences in feeling present a concern. The point of the general language is to provide a common ground from which conduct and character are spoken about. It may be that violations of politeness bother me more than they do others. The strength of my evaluation is not determined by the extent to which others share in my disapprobation but in the recognition that an action is, in fact, impolite. Hume argues that as we identify ourselves with the general interest, we come to *feel* these evaluations independently of their relation to our particular interest (though there are limits to this process).<sup>567</sup> The most that we can hope for is to recognize the mutual interest as authoritative, even when these considerations seem uninspired in the face of our more selfish and partialist tendencies.

As I argued in Chapter 2, according to Hume, we come to treat the general perspective as authoritative through a shift in our identity. This shift has an internal and external component. Externally, our conversations about shared concerns alter our ideas of which traits, characters, etc. are of value.<sup>568</sup> We begin to see our own interests as entangled with that of others, and ourselves as engaged in a project of living well with others. Internally, our pride, which often puts us at odds with others through the force of

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<sup>567</sup> Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals" *Enquires*, 5.1.4-9, p. 214-16.

<sup>568</sup> My argument for this position comes in the previous chapter, in my treatment of "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences." See especially: *Essays* 126, 132.

comparison, becomes informed by how others view us.<sup>569</sup> No longer do we consider ourselves merely as an individual, or as a member of a family, but as part of a moral community.<sup>570</sup> While our needs are not expected to overlap completely with the group, our conduct and character is either conducive or detrimental to the common interest. As we wish to think well of ourselves, and for others to share in this judgment, we fashion ourselves in a manner most apt to secure this correspondence.<sup>571</sup> The internal and external components conjoin, accounting for our increased temperance, refinement, and delicacy.

### *The Dilemma of Variability*

Hume gives us a model for resolving disputes between conflicting sets of interests and desires by providing us with a common point of evaluation to which we can all commit. He also offers us a plausible story of how we come to see ourselves as bound to the interests of others, which allows us to construct norms that foster living well alongside one another. In this way, Hume's proposed solution to the problem of partiality tracks the interests and concerns of the moral community, even when these interests change over time. While he admits it is possible that people will develop different norms from community to community, Hume thinks that we can confront this problem without

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<sup>569</sup> Initially, Hume argues that our pride is supportive of the "almost universal propensity of men, to over-value themselves" (Hume, *A Treatise*, 598). In the same discussion, Hume also writes about the "over-weening conceit" people have regarding themselves (Hume, *A Treatise*, 596). As I noted in Chapter II, one of Hume's primary concerns is to find a way to redirect this pernicious form of pride towards more virtuous ends.

<sup>570</sup> I argue for this interpretation in Chapter 2, particularly in my discussion of moral conversation.

<sup>571</sup> Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals" *Enquires*, 9.1.10, p. 276.

undercutting the validity of our moral science.<sup>572</sup> After all, it would be a mistake to suppose that we could lay down norms to stand for all people and ages. There is enough overlap between the interests of people to promote general stability between factions and communities. Given the additional insights of history, this continuity between norms allows us to construct a genuinely informative moral science.

A great strength of Hume's account – its sensitivity to variability – is also its greatest weakness. The standard of mutual benefit is hardly sufficient to guide action on its own terms; rather, it provides a test for our actions, policies, or norms. But actions, policies, and norms are distinct categories, and Hume is ambivalent about which are subject to considerations of usefulness. My interpretation of his account throughout the dissertation has been that *norms*, rather than an individual's actions, are the proper object of the moral standard. In this manner, an individual is meant to assent to norms of judgement and action that are justified in terms of their being generally beneficial to the community. For Hume, praiseworthiness does not necessarily require that one know the full extent of a specific norm's usefulness. Instead, it is only important that one seeks to fashion oneself in light of justifiable norms, thereby becoming refined and developing the sentimental disposition to act virtuously.

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<sup>572</sup> Hume notes that “the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same; though the conclusion which they draw may be very different. That they all reason aright with regard to this subject, more than with regard to any other, it is not incumbent on any moralist to show. It is sufficient, that the original principles of censure or blame are uniform, and that erroneous conclusions can be corrected by sounder reasoning and larger experience.” He continues, “all the differences, therefore, in morals, may be reduced to this one general foundation, and may be accounted for by the different views, which people take of these circumstances.” (Hume, “Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals” *Enquires*, “A Dialogue,” 36-7, p. 335-36.

Even so, we are left with the problem of how to weigh our duties to others – that is, we are still left with the problem of partiality. Any norms that we use to make these determinations will be based in the standard of usefulness. The resulting determinations will either be too revisionary or too conservative. I considered the potential revisionary consequences of Hume’s theory in Chapter 2. There, I focused on the idea that some alterations to our values and sentimental dispositions are not desirable. I argued that the requirements of delicacy are too stringent for most people – they would be expected to alienate themselves from their commitments to those near and dear with the intention to cultivate higher aims. For those who undergo this transformation, they would view their fellows with either contempt or indifference. Comparison undercuts sympathy and stymies feelings of fellowship. In the worst cases, the delicate would create their own faction and develop an enthusiasm that set them apart from the moral community. In such a case, Hume’s theory would *increase* partiality.

Of course, considerations of usefulness might *reinforce* our partial attachments as opposed to dismantle them. It would be detrimental to the moral community if people eschewed their attachments to those near and dear. Imagine the damages of undermining the bonds of family and friendship for the purpose of instilling in people a sense of higher aims. Hume’s moral theory is far from a call for revolution in the social order. In fact, he is rather conservative when it comes to his endorsement of policies or norms. Instead of greatly revising our moral beliefs and commitments, Hume’s ethics may leave everything as it is and then justify the status quo on the basis of usefulness. In this case, we might worry that Hume offers post-hoc justifications for whatever norms happen to exist. After

all, facing up to the problem of partiality means distancing ourselves from our moral intuitions and making room for the interests of those with whom one is not yet connected. The moral perspective requires that we feel the pull of impartiality and seek to find equilibrium between our concerns and its demands.

Regardless of how you interpret Hume's normative theory, by showcasing either its revisionary or conservative tendencies, there is much to take away from his ethics. I have focused on Hume's concern for practical questions; that his ethical thought begins from the recognition of a conflict in common-sense morality that leads to faction and disorder. Hume's aim is to help us develop strategies to bolster the sociable aspects of our nature. In time, and with practice, we may begin to look past our narrow concerns, and to see ourselves as part of a project to live well alongside others. At the end of the *Treatise*, Hume refers to himself as an anatomist of morals, as opposed to a painter.<sup>573</sup> While I do not refuse Hume this description of his project, there is as much edification as explanation in his writings. It is Hume's focus on edification and practical conflicts that connect his theory with the British Moralism tradition. I return to discuss the practical orientation of British Moralists later on. I turn now to offer further reflections on the work of Butler and Smith.

### **Smith's Solution to the Problem of Partiality**

I see Smith and Butler's moral theories as closely aligned. According to Butler, virtue consists in following our nature. There are three aspects of our nature: particular passions (compassion, anger, etc.), dispositions of self-love and benevolence, and

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<sup>573</sup> Hume, *A Treatise*, 620-21.

conscience. By way of self-love and benevolence, we possess stable desires for the happiness of ourselves and of others. Our passions are then designed to secure the means for fulfilling these desires. Some passions are aimed more directly at securing our own happiness, while others are more concerned with the happiness of others. If the passions function properly, we can do right by ourselves and others all at once. While the passions have natural aims, they may *seem* to conflict with one another. Anger may cause us to strike a person who has rear-ended our vehicle. Compassion could block this anger when we see how upset the other person is at themselves for their mistake. To function properly, we require some means by which to balance our passions with one another. Conscience plays this role, allowing us to achieve harmony in our frame.

According to Butler, the key to confronting the problem of partiality is found in *our nature*. If we attend to the structure of benevolence and love, “it will teach us, that the care of some persons, suppose children and families, is particularly committed to our charge by Nature and Providence; as also there are other circumstances, suppose friendship or former obligations, which require that we do good to some, preferably to others.”<sup>574</sup> We should cultivate good-will for all, but it is dangerous to extend our duties of benevolence beyond the little department. We are not competent judges of what produces the general happiness. An additional concern for Butler, when it comes to the possibility of vice, is that we silence our sentiments on account of their conflict with our narrow self-interest. His solution is to cultivate love for God so that we are brought closer to our nature. We must remember the ends for which we were created: to reduce suffering

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<sup>574</sup> Butler, Sermon 12.27, p.110.

to the extent that we can and to ensure the happiness of those in our little department. We cannot hope for a more righteous end.

*Smith's View*

To a great degree, Smith's moral theory overlaps with Butler's ethics. Smith provides a more sophisticated account of how we *determine* whether an action is conducive to virtuous ends and how this determination comes to strike us as *authoritative*. The first part of Smith's theory is found in his discussions of propriety and sympathy. Propriety is the criterion of moral judgment – we approve of characters on account of their conduct and affections being proper, given the circumstances. Smith distinguishes propriety, in the narrow sense, which concerns the extent to which another's affection is fitting to its object, from merit, which refers to the consequences of another's action. Propriety, in the broad sense, is determined by *sympathy*: our concordance with an agent's passions, or the passions of those who are impacted by the agent's action. Sympathy is then the ground of moral judgment. Our propensity to approve of conduct and characters is explained by sympathy. Without sympathy, we are unable to determine if a passion or action was proper or merited and morality would seem alien to us.

The other aspect of Smith's ethics is his account of moral authority, which I do not discuss in the dissertation. Therein we confront Smith's account of the impartial spectator. He introduces the concept in TMS III to get clearer on our idea of moral duty. Provided that we can determine the propriety and merit of other people's conduct, questions remain: how do we apply these standards to our conduct? What explains the fact that these standards strike us as authoritative? Why not just make an exception for

ourselves? Smith's answer is the impartial spectator. Moral education begins when we rely on the sanction and praise of others to motivate the idea of duty; however, over time we gain the ability to check ourselves – we become our own spectators.<sup>575</sup> Like Butler's account of conscience, Smith's impartial spectator is a mechanism for ensuring that our sentiments are functioning properly, that our judgments are tracking the concordance of our fellows, and that our conduct is not the result of violent passions authorized by self-deceit.<sup>576</sup> Unlike Butler, Smith argues that the impartial spectator is not a natural capacity but a cognitive achievement that results from interaction with our fellows. Smith recognizes that the impartial spectator will not be sufficient to secure virtuous conduct – we still require assistance from others.<sup>577</sup>

The worry about Smith's account is that its foundation is shaky at best. On one front, Smith seems to put undue faith in the rightful functioning of our sentiments and the mechanism of sympathy. What justifies the fact that our response to harmful behavior is resentment for the perpetrator? Why not compassion for the victim or curiosity about whether and why the perpetrator thought that their action was justified? People are often wrong about which actions warrant anger. One might argue that Smith is naïve or relies on God to secure the veracity of our sentiments, but this criticism misses the skeptical orientation of Smith's ethics. For him, our sentiments give us the only proximate evidence we have regarding how we should conduct ourselves. I examined two aspects of Smith's skepticism in Chapter 3. First, his method for determining what is virtuous does

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<sup>575</sup> TMS III 3.2.3.

<sup>576</sup> TMS III 3.4.4.

<sup>577</sup> TMS III 3.3.1.

not proceed on the basis of first principles. Smith begins his inquiry into morals by observing how we proceed in our daily lives and gathering evidence about how we respond to different situations. We discover the content of morality by looking at how we react to others. The project of the moral philosopher is to collect data about this responsiveness and construct a framework to explain the data.

Second, Smith's ethics is grounded in sympathy – judgments about how we ought to act are based in sympathetic concordance. For him, our judgments receive weight from their concord with others. We can only depend on others to help guide our conduct. Through testing and revising our judgments, they are seen to be trustworthy. This method of testing and revising our beliefs is proposed by Carneades: “[in] ordinary life, when we are investigating a small matter we question one witness, when it is a greater matter, several witnesses, and when it is an even more essential matter we examine each of the witnesses on the basis of the mutual agreement among the others.”<sup>578</sup> We call on others to ground our moral claims and to curb our self-certainty. Without their assistance, we proceed naively, avoiding what is required to develop the skills for moral judgment.

Smith supplements this model of revision with illustrations of moral virtue. He argues

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<sup>578</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, ed. Richard Bett. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38-9. The method of testing and revising our moral beliefs proposed by Carneades has had tremendous influence on moral epistemology. Of course there is nothing inherently skeptical about testing our moral beliefs by way of bringing them into mutual agreement with the beliefs of others; a similar method, reflective equilibrium, is proposed by Nelson Goodman and John Rawls, and used by many scholars in moral and political philosophy. At base, Carneades' method is coherentist insofar as it takes no particular belief set as foundational, but aims to produce concordance between belief sets. Whichever belief set results from this concordance is deemed trustworthy and should be at least provisionally adopted. Carneades' skepticism explains why he would accept this method. If, as Carneades argues, we do not have access to a standard that successfully grounds our moral beliefs, and we have no choice but to have said beliefs, the most we can hope for is a belief set that concords with the readily available evidence – namely, our non-moral beliefs and the moral beliefs of others.

that providing a model for virtue awakens our sentiments and allows for a greater commitment to morality. By providing us with a model for virtue, our sentiments are awakened and we experience a greater commitment to morality.

*Skepticism and the Problem of Partiality*

As I discussed in Chapter 3, Smith means for the TMS to educate his audience on how to live virtuously. This process involves a complex relation between philosophy and nature. At times, Smith means for philosophy to help us refine our nature. Consider the case of our unsociable sentiments, which damage our connections to others and even to ourselves. Philosophical reflection informs us of these dangers and gives us the tools to combat our baser tendencies. Other times, Smith claims that philosophy plays a support role for our sentiments, directing them to their natural ends – like in the case of resentment, the affective foundation of justice.<sup>579</sup> Still other times, he argues that philosophy provides rationales for what appear as defects in our nature (moral luck, etc.). I have argued throughout the dissertation that, for Smith, nature sets the limits of reasonable philosophical discussion.<sup>580</sup> As our nature compels us to show greater concern

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<sup>579</sup> Smith, TMS II.ii.2.1.

<sup>580</sup> One might argue that this reading of Smith puts him close to Hume, at least the conservative interpretation. While both Hume and Smith agree that nature sets a limit to reasonable philosophical discussion, they render the idea of our nature differently. For Hume, to say that we naturally approve and disapprove of characters on the basis of utility or agreeableness is not philosophical, in a narrow sense of the term. There is nothing speculative about the examining our practices of praising and blaming and inferring general principles that are operative in these particular cases. The principles that result from this exercise are deemed natural insofar as they reflect common moral experience. In this way, Hume is saying we cannot allow speculative principles (truth, relations of reason, fitnesses, etc.) to undercut these natural principles. Smith's problem with Hume is that his explanations of moral phenomena are unduly determined by the principles he infers from our moral practices. Smith argues, contra Hume, that our attributions of praise and blame cannot be understood fully in terms of usefulness and agreeableness. Despite

for those in our little department, Smith claims it is the role of philosophy to inform us of what this duty entails rather than correcting this natural partiality.

These sentiments are the only source we possess to guide our conduct. Our nature provides us with this roadmap because the “happiness of mankind” cannot be left dependent on the “slowness and uncertainty of philosophical researches.”<sup>581</sup> In Chapter 3, I considered the following quote:

“To what purpose should we trouble ourselves about the world in the moon? All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety upon that account seems to be no part of our duty. That we should be but little interested, therefore, in the fortune of those whom we can neither serve nor hurt, and who are in every respect so very remote from us, seems wisely ordered by Nature; and if it were possible to alter in this respect the original constitution of our frame, we could yet gain nothing by the change.”<sup>582</sup>

As I pointed out there, Smith is responding to the Stoic idea that virtue requires being able to see oneself as beholden only to the system of nature. I argued that, according to Smith, this position is problematic on both epistemic and moral grounds. There are many beings in this world – while we should sincerely wish them all well, it would be improper

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Hume’s attempt to explain our nature, Smith claims that his explanations fall prey to speculation and ignore key aspects of our moral experience. I explore this topic more in Chapter 3, particularly in my discussion of how Smith weighs the perspectives of nature and philosophy.

<sup>581</sup> Smith, TMS III.5.4

<sup>582</sup> Smith, TMS III.3.9.

for us to turn our attention away from our little department towards the tribulations of those outside our moral community. What I did not discuss in the preceding chapter was the idea that, for Smith, we should still regard ourselves as a part of the system of nature. In fact, it is crucial that we do so if we are to take our duties seriously. The Stoic's problem is that they reject the proximate evidence they have about what nature demands of them – their sentiments – in favor of attempts to discern the intentions of the system.

System-level thinking is distinctly philosophical for Smith, and problematic when it comes to understanding our moral duty. We can see a connection between Smith's critique of Stoicism and his objection to Hume's appeal to usefulness as a moral standard, which he discusses in TMS IV. For Smith, the attempt to capture moral judgment in terms of usefulness, or the extent to which an action "promote[s] or disturb[s] the happiness both of the individual and of society" fails to properly account for our moral experience.<sup>583</sup> He claims that "the sentiment of approbation always involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility."<sup>584</sup> While humanity, generosity, and public spirit are useful, we do not praise them on these grounds. Smith claims that we praise traits on account of our sympathy with those who are impacted by their expression. It is possible to justify a disproportionate concern for our little department on the grounds of usefulness. If everyone were to have equal concern for every other, friendship and love would not exist in their current form. However, Smith claims that this justification based in utility is nonetheless mistaken.

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<sup>583</sup> Smith, TMS IV.2.1.

<sup>584</sup> Smith, TMS IV.2.5.

The problem with justifying the concern for our little department in terms of usefulness is two-fold: it runs contrary to our experience and to what consider normatively significant about our relationships. On the first point, consider the case of someone who buys a birthday present for their younger sister. The result of their gift is that the sister feels appreciated and the bond between the siblings is tightened. We can see how this consequence is useful for both parties. When we praise the gift-giver, and find the entire interaction agreeable, matters of usefulness are far from our mind. To describe the interaction as useful is an abstraction and hardly tracks the lived experience of the siblings. Let us say that this person's sister does not care to receive a present and wishes instead that their sibling donate money to charity. By giving money to charity, the sibling tightens the bond with their sister and makes her feel appreciated while also doing well by others. Notice that there are two sets of values operating: the action itself (giving to charity) and the action qua-gift-giving.

When we praise the gift-giver, we do so on account of their having bought a present for their sister; when we praise the action, its object is the sister. To the extent that we invoke usefulness, it is only in the second judgment and not the first. It would be improper to conflate these two judgments. Let us say that, instead of buying a present, the gift-giver were to donate to charity absent the sister's request to do so; this action would hardly count as valuable in both senses. Perhaps it is better for this person to donate money to charity instead of buying their sister a present. Still, it seems improper to capture the value of this action in terms of the amount of usefulness that I can bestow on one party as opposed to another. The characterization of what I ought to do in either case

does not capture the moral seriousness of my decision, or the nature of my duties to other people generally. When it comes to our duties, Smith is insistent, like Butler, that our nature and not abstract principles set the terms of deliberation and is the basis of morality.

Since the philosopher must rely on our nature to guide their practice, their method cannot consider morality as a matter of abstraction. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, to do so is to ignore the aim of ethics: to find a way to live well together. Notice: this aim is practical as opposed to theoretical. The issues that face us – self-deceit, faction, disagreement, etc. – are inescapably concrete. Smith’s skepticism allows him to obstruct any tendency to engage in speculation about morals and to remain fixed on practical concerns. Even without the shared predilection for skepticism, the British Moralists were primarily focused on questions related to practical ethics. We can see this emphasis by looking at how the moralists positioned themselves against their interlocutors. Although Hutcheson and Smith seem opposed when it comes to relying on our proper relation to the system of nature, they view their project in much the same light. For both figures, moral philosophy is meant to edify and to educate its audience. The main obstacle to this project is cynicism, or a cultivated indifference to virtue. The moralist tries to awake us to what we already know: that what we do and what we become is a matter of great concern.

### **Practical Philosophy and the Moralist Project**

Selby-Bigge’s contrasts the “moralist” with both the “satirist” and the skeptic. Moralists, to a large degree, take the principles of commonsense morality at face value – their aim is to persuade people to act in accordance with these principles and to give them

the tools to do so skillfully. Satirists, in turn, lampoon this very commitment. As Selby-Bigge points out, “when the moralist says that men ought to regulate their conduct on certain principles and ought to cultivate certain motives in preference to others, the satirist tests the possibility of these principles, by asking whether in fact men do usually or ever act on them: he does not ask how far men recognize them as ideals or standards of conduct.”<sup>585</sup> He notes: “the whole force of satire, as distinguished from cynicism, is the force of contrast—between profession and practice, between reality and sham; and the denunciation of the sham is by implication the recognition of the reality.”<sup>586</sup> According to the satirist, people are unable or unwilling to guide themselves on the basis of moral principles, even when they recognize them as true and authoritative. On this view, the moralist’s project is well-meaning but misguided.

Selby-Bigge distinguishes the satirist from the skeptic, though he argues that one mindset can lead to the other. Impatience and contempt with people’s routine inability to act on their commitments may lead us to question the validity of the commitments. We might think that morality, either in its narrow or broad sense – extending from matters of justice to politeness – is a mere fiction. In this way, the smugness of the satirist gives way to what Selby-Bigge calls “scientific skepticism,” where tools of empirical science are used as a means to undermine the ground of our moral principles and the sources of moral motivation.<sup>587</sup> As he notes, “philosophers also sometimes take an unphilosophical

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<sup>585</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xi.

<sup>586</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xii.

<sup>587</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xiii.

pleasure in emphasizing the mean beginnings of things.”<sup>588</sup> This attempt to undercut the ground of our moral practices, armed with the tools of scientific observation, serves as a formidable opposition to the moralist’s project. After all, if people begin to believe that there is no reality to moral distinctions, they will see no reason to recognize distinctions of virtue and vice, or to guide themselves in light of such recognition. They will instead choose to act on their passions and narrow self-interest.

Some moralists are led to consider moral metaphysics in an attempt to combat scientific skepticism. All the figures treated in this dissertation do so to some extent or another. Still, as Selby-Bigge points out, the satirist is a bigger concern for the moralist. Why? When virtue becomes a target of the satirist’s wit, he says, “the respectable person finds that when his cloak of smug pretence is stripped off he is no more naked than the statesmen or divine, and sees no reason why he should be clothed than such good company, while the disreputable person takes credit to himself for his superior frankness.”<sup>589</sup> One of the chief reasons that philosophers have long tied virtue to happiness is that, by doing so, happiness animates virtue. Once one sees others living viciously, seemingly without consequence, their commitment to morality is weakened. And since most people, either in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or today, are not philosophers, it is not the *arguments* of figures like Mandeville that loosen the grip of ethics on their minds, but the attempts to make the life of virtue look foolish.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xiii.

<sup>589</sup> Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists*, xiv.

<sup>590</sup> Mandeville is one of the few figures in the British Moralism tradition who is equally a satirist and a scientific skeptic. I have discussed Mandeville only periodically in this dissertation, though his impact on philosophy and popular writing during the period cannot be overstated. One of the

Typically, the satirist comes up in conversations about the extent to which self-love influences our moral feelings and judgments. The satirist, using their wit and refined style, tries to convince us that our feelings of love, benevolence, compassion, etc. are but a cloak for self-interest. Because we are cognitively sophisticated beings, we can successfully hide these facts from other people and even from ourselves. As many have noted, however, the satirist runs up against moral experience here. It is all too obvious that we feel love and concern for at least some of our fellow beings, even if we are also selfish and narrow-minded at times. The satirist does not have a similar problem when it comes to considerations of partiality. Given our natural concern for those near and dear, what reason could we possibly have for looking beyond their interests? Chances are that few instances of partial conduct will create widespread societal strife or even undercut one's well-being. After all, if one is able to do better for oneself and one's little department than for others, one can then enjoy the fruits of such success alongside the joys of dominance and the rewards of an eminent reputation.

The moralist faces a difficult task, namely that of confronting the satirist. It would be much easier to claim that all normative value is derived from an impartial perspective and that all attachment to family, party, nation, etc. is a contingent consequence of primitive psychological mechanisms. From this perspective, the moralist could argue that these basic attachments should not be taken seriously from a moral point of view. That said, as moralists attempt to do right by commonsense morality, they cannot deny that we

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reasons Mandeville had this impact was because of his uncanny ability to combine the knowledge of the new science, including advancements in medicine, with the polite style of satirical prose. Hutcheson, Gay, Hume, Butler, and Smith all wrestled with Mandeville's work. One could rightly read much of the British moralist tradition as a response to Mandeville.

have normatively significant connections to our near and dear and that these connections ought to be action-guiding, at least in some respect. We cannot absolve ourselves of these commitments, lest we endanger our own humanity in the process. The moralist also cannot deny that, at some level, it appears as if there is little incentive to extend our scope of concern. How does one go about convincing another that they should transcend their own natural commitments, and tie their identity with this transcendence, given that there is no straightforward advantage to doing so?<sup>591</sup>

Few moralists would claim that argumentation is sufficient to achieve this end. Instead, they appeal to description and illustrations of virtue to ensure that people are driven to widen their narrow sense of concern. This project belongs to *practical ethics* as opposed to *moral theory*.<sup>592</sup> As I have argued throughout the dissertation, instead of putting matters of speculation front and center, the British Moralists are concerned with how to expand our naturally narrow scope of concern, with how to undercut faction and self-deceit, and with how to get people to see themselves as engaged in a larger ethical project alongside others. But we are still left with the question with which we began: how do we weigh the duties to our near and dear with the duties we have to others? I return briefly to the problem of partiality.

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<sup>591</sup> Hume puts this point well: “*What is that to me?* There are few occasions, when this question is not pertinent: and had it that universal, infallible influence supposed, it would turn into ridicule every composition, and almost every conversation, which contain any praise or censure of manners” (Hume, “Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,” *Enquiries*, 5.1.12, p. 217.).

<sup>592</sup> Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 3.

### **Problems Without Solutions?**

Offering a solution to the problem of partiality goes beyond the aim of this dissertation. I have instead attempted to cast some light on this problem. As human beings, we have conflicting priorities. We are not only students or teachers; we are also parents, siblings, colleagues, mentors, citizens, etc. What is required of us in each of these contexts is not always clear. Maybe we find ourselves in a situation where we cannot be a good colleague and a good sibling at the same time. Even when these conflicts do not arise, where we act without running afoul of our conscience, we still ask whether it is right to give one relation greater weight than another. Perhaps we should attend to the needs of our siblings before those of our colleagues because of the more established relationship, or because we are more aware of their needs, or because not doing so would unduly harm the family. There are many ways to differently account for what seems like an intuitively correct decision.

In this dissertation, I have focused on the question of how, given the fact of natural partiality, we weigh these various considerations. As we have discussed throughout, a chief aim of ethics in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is to undercut the growth of faction; developing strategies for how to confront this problem is a practical one. I do not have a satisfactory answer to the problem of partiality, and I am not sure that Gay, or Hume, or Butler, or Smith do either. At the same time, I take it that any answer to this problem would inevitably come off as either one-sided or disingenuous. Certain philosophical problems are not meant to be solved, so much as they are meant to frame our thinking about moral phenomenon. Consider the case of love. We mean different things by love;

chances are that any attempt to define it will run contrary to our experience in some way. Still, love is a concept that allows us think through other moral questions: what are the limits of the self? what binds us to others? do we have control over this process? should these connections be normatively binding?

My sense is that the problem of partiality should be thought of along the same lines as love in moral discussions. The problem is that there is an additional *practical* concern with partiality. It is all well and good if probing the scope and limits of reasonable partiality enables us to get clearer on certain normatively significant questions. However, we are still stuck, caught between conflicting considerations, and not knowing which to give priority in specific circumstances. Absent a solution to the problem, we are left with our commonsense intuitions, which reinforce the very partiality that worried us from the beginning. The same partiality that underwrites bias, faction, and gives way to discord. Will we not end up in the same circumstances? Hume, Smith, and others were well aware that this result was possible. Smith returns to self-deception and the desire for dominion throughout his work, while enthusiasm is an ever-present danger for Hume.

So, what is left for us to do? Throughout the dissertation, I have discussed the strategies that Gay, Hume, Butler, and Smith use to expand the limits of our natural moral concern. Once we come to appreciate the moral perspective, we recognize that our own partialist tendencies can no longer go unquestioned – they must be justified. While it is difficult to know *how* these tendencies can receive justification, the fact that justification is required should be obvious to any aspiring moral agent. Perhaps, in light of these

complications, the most that we can do is remind ourselves that our partialist commitments, desires, and judgments cannot be given unquestioned authority in deliberation. If we successfully use the tools given to us by Hume, Smith, and others to cultivate the disposition to step back and recognize the considerations at stake in any decision, we will act with less self-certainty and self-conceit. Given the complexity of moral life, we cannot afford to act in an inattentive or unreflective manner, lest we reinforce faction and exacerbate the dangers of indifference and injustice.

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**CURRICULUM VITAE**









