

Exciting Reasons and Moral Rationalism in Hutcheson’s *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*

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Abstract: One of the most oft-cited parts of Francis Hutcheson’s *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* (1728) is his discussion of “exciting reasons.” In this paper I address the question: What is the function of that discussion? In particular, what is its relation to Hutcheson’s attempt to show that the rationalists’ normative thesis ultimately implies, contrary to their moral epistemology, that moral ideas spring from a sense? Despite first appearances, Hutcheson’s discussion of exciting reasons is not part of that attempt. Mainly, it is part of Hutcheson’s comeback to Gilbert Burnet’s objections to Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).

1.

One of the most oft-cited parts of Francis Hutcheson’s *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* is his discussion of “exciting reasons.”¹ In that discussion he defends what has come to be called, owing to its later association with David Hume, “the Humean view of motivation.” My topic in this paper is the relation of that discussion to Hutcheson’s critique of moral rationalism and, more generally, to his aims in the *Illustrations*.

By “moral rationalism” I mean the view, held by Samuel Clarke, William Wollaston, and Gilbert Burnet (among others), that moral rightness is a form of fitness or agreement with truth, the perception of which is an act or judgment of reason.² By “Hutcheson’s critique of moral rationalism” I do not mean just any of Hutcheson’s arguments that potentially threaten moral rationalism or oppose positions common to rationalists. Rather, I use that term for Hutcheson’s main task in the *Illustrations*, that of arguing that the rationalists’ account of right and wrong presupposes, contrary to their moral epistemology, that a *sense* is the source of moral ideas. Hutcheson announces this task in the prefatory material to the *Illustrations* and carries it out in the first three sections.³

¹ The *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* is the second of two essays, each by Hutcheson, published together in *Essay & Illustrations*. For Hutcheson’s discussion of exciting reasons see *Essay & Illustrations*, 138–44.

² A more detailed statement of this view is in section 2. See Clarke, *Works*, vol. 2: 579–733, esp. 608–30; Wollaston, *Religion of Nature*; and Burnet’s letters in *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*.

³ See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 7, 136–37, 157, and sects. 1–3. By the “prefatory material” I mean Hutcheson’s preface to *Essay & Illustrations* and his introduction to the second essay in that work, the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* (*Essay & Illustrations*, 3–11, 133–37).

Early in section 1 of his essay Hutcheson pauses to discuss exciting reasons, arguing that such reasons presuppose affections.⁴ On the surface, his discussion seems to be part of his critique of moral rationalism. For instance, the passages that surround it are clearly part of that critique; also, directly preceding section 1 Hutcheson says that to carry out that critique is “the Design of the following Sections.”⁵ However, on a closer look a puzzle arises. How does showing that exciting reasons presuppose affections help to show that the rationalists’ view of right and wrong presupposes, contrary to their moral epistemology, that moral ideas spring from a sense? In short, how does Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons relate to his critique of rationalism?

The answer to this question is not obvious; also, some tempting answers have notable defects. And as far as I know, no one has either examined those answers or attempted a better one. I do those things in what follows.⁶

My own answer is that Hutcheson’s discussion of exciting reasons is not part of his critique of moral rationalism. For example, it is not a premise in his critique or even a remote piece of support for his premises. A clue to its main purpose is the following of his remarks:

Some Letters in the *London Journals*, subscribed *Philaretus*, gave the first Occasion to the *Fourth Treatise* [the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*].⁷ ... The *Objections* proposed in the first *Section* of *Treatise IV*, are not always those of *Philaretus*, tho I have endeavour’d to leave no *Objections* of his unanswer’d. (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 10)

The objections mentioned here, which appeared in the *London Journal* in 1725, address Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).⁸ Their author, “Philaretus,” was Gilbert Burnet the Younger.⁹ I

⁴ *Essay & Illustrations*, 138–44.

⁵ *Essay & Illustrations*, 136–37.

⁶ This paper concerns not only Hutcheson’s discussion of exciting reasons but also his discussion of “justifying” reasons (in *Essay & Illustrations*, 144–46). However, the former discussion is my chief focus. One reason for this emerges in section 5.3: The function of Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons is more puzzling than the function of his treatment of justifying reasons.

⁷ In *Essay & Illustrations*, 11, Hutcheson explains that by “Fourth Treatise” and “Treatise IV” he means the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*.

⁸ Hereafter *Beauty & Virtue*. Let me add that some of Hutcheson’s points in *Beauty & Virtue*, *Essay & Illustrations*, and *Burnet vs. Hutcheson* occur in some of his other writings, e.g. in his posthumously published *System of Moral Philosophy* and his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*. Scholars disagree about the relation of those works to the former three; also, it is mainly the former three that account for Hutcheson’s influence and reputation. Additionally, it is in those three works, specifically in *Burnet vs. Hutcheson* and *Essay & Illustrations*, that we find Hutcheson’s objections to moral rationalism. Thus, with few exceptions my discussion of Hutcheson’s work is limited to *Beauty & Virtue*, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, and *Essay & Illustrations*.

⁹ Gilbert Burnet (1690–1726), second son of Bishop Gilbert Burnet of Salisbury (1643–1715), was a prebendary of Salisbury cathedral, a chaplain to George I, a fellow of the Royal Society, and the rector of East Barnet, Hertfordshire. He wrote prolifically on moral and religious subjects; in ethical theory he was a follower of Samuel Clarke. His letters about Hutcheson’s *Beauty & Virtue* were prompted by a positive review of that book which appeared in the *London Journal* on 27 March, 1725. Burnet submitted a response, objecting to Hutcheson’s moral theory from a rationalist perspective. Hutcheson soon replied.

will argue that despite first appearances, Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons is not part of his critique of moral rationalism; primarily, it is part of the task he mentions in this quotation, that is, part of his answer to Burnet's objections.

I consider my project worthwhile owing to the importance of the text it concerns. Hutcheson's *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* is a work of vast influence;¹⁰ in addition, it is a contribution to metaethics that has not lost its relevance. Any light we can shed on it is thus of value. To sort out some of its projects, to identify the aims, many of them nonobvious, of some of its most influential passages, is a task worth pursuing. This is especially true of any form of this task that gives detailed attention and interpretive weight to Burnet's letters of 1725. None of the best-known commentaries on the *Illustrations* does so.¹¹ This is surprising, given Hutcheson's remark that Burnet's letters "gave the first Occasion" to the *Illustrations*.

In the next section I clarify moral rationalism and Hutcheson's critique of it. In section 3 I explain Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons, including his distinction between exciting reasons and justifying reasons. In section 4 I raise the question that concerns me in this paper: How does Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons relate to his critique of moral rationalism? More generally, how does it function in the *Illustrations*? In section 4 I critique some initially tempting answers to this question. In the remaining sections I defend my own answer.

2.

Hutcheson's critique of moral rationalism aims primarily at the moral theories of Clarke, Burnet, and Wollaston. Here, in two propositions, is a composite of those theories:

All told, their exchange of letters, appearing in the *London Journal* from 10 April 1725 to 25 December 1725, included five letters from Burnet under the name Philaretus and three letters from Hutcheson under the name Philanthropus. This exchange, along with the review that sparked it and a preface and postscript by Burnet, later appeared as a pamphlet (*Burnet vs. Hutcheson*). Let me add that this exchange, though often cited or mentioned, receives little discussion or analysis. Two valuable exceptions to this point are Darwall, "Hutcheson on Practical Reason"; and especially Gill, *British Moralists*, ch. 12.

¹⁰ Much of its influence was channeled through David Hume's work, which was indebted to the *Illustrations* in several ways. On this topic see Darwall, "Hutcheson on Practical Reason," 73–74. Although scholars agree that Hume's moral theory was indebted to Hutcheson's, they differ on just how much it owed to it and on the degree to which it resembled it. Important recent works on this subject include Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson"; Norton, "Hume and Hutcheson: The Question of Influence"; Moore, "The Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Skeptic"; and Turco, "Hutcheson and Hume in a Recent Polemic."

¹¹ Raphael, *The Moral Sense*, 31–46; Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory," 359–64; Blackstone, *Francis Hutcheson and Contemporary Ethical Theory*, chs. 3 and 4; Hudson, *Ethical Intuitionism*, ch. 7; Jensen, *Motivation & Moral Sense*, 68–80; Strasser, *Hutcheson's Moral Theory*, ch. 3; and Irwin, *Development of Ethics*, 408–19.

Reason is the faculty from which moral perceptions originate. That is, the mental occurrences we denote by such terms as ‘moral approval’ and ‘moral disapproval’ spring from the same faculty that perceives logical and mathematical truths and performs the operations that uncover such truths.¹²

The property that elicits moral approval, that is, the feature of an act in virtue of which we deem the act morally right or good, is *reasonableness*, *fitness*, *conformity to truth*, or *conformity to reason*.¹³ We morally approve of an act to the extent that we detect, or think we detect, that property in the act.¹⁴

This pair of positions is what I mean by moral rationalism. The first position is about the source of moral knowledge; the second is about the marks of right and wrong. Hence I will call the two, respectively, the *epistemological* element (or thesis) and the *normative* element of rationalism. The theory they constitute differs sharply from Hutcheson’s moral theory, the main components of which are these:

The *moral sense* is the faculty from which moral perceptions originate. A sense is a natural power of the mind to receive, independently of the will and of any mediating reasoning, simple or irreducible “ideas” such as tastes, sounds, pains, and pleasures.¹⁵ It differs from reason, the function of

¹² This thesis is less explicit in Wollaston’s work than in Clarke’s and Burnet’s. But it is there all the same, as a result of things Wollaston says in Sections I and III (e.g. page 45) of *Religion of Nature*. See also Clarke, *Works*, vol. 2: 96, 98, 99, 571, 609, 612–16, 619, 626, 630, 655; and Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 12–17, 36–37, 42–43, 59–61, 65–66. The analogy between morality and mathematics, as used by early modern moral rationalists, receives useful treatment in Gill, “Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism: Is Morality More Like Math or Beauty?”

¹³ See Clarke, *Works*, vol. 2: 608–9; Wollaston, *Religion of Nature*, 13–18, 20–25, 26, 28, 52, 63, 65, 169, 181, 218; and Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10–11, 15, 36–46, 55–56, 58.

¹⁴ The use of ‘property’ in the singular is legitimate here, given that this thesis is a *composite* position. In fact, however, the terms ‘fitness,’ ‘conformity to truth,’ and so on, as used by early modern moral rationalists, are not always synonymous or univocal. And even when their meanings are fixed, questions about them abound. What exactly do they denote? Are they definable or indefinable? Are they descriptive or normative? If they are normative, in what way are they normative? Hutcheson deals with such questions in the first three sections of the *Illustrations*, not with the aim of answering them conclusively (which may be impossible), but with the goal of showing that insofar as the likely answers result in tenable moral theories, those theories presuppose that we have a moral sense.

¹⁵ Hutcheson usually uses ‘simple’ as it is used here: in the Lockean sense that makes it roughly equivalent to ‘irreducible’ or ‘unanalyzable.’ However, in at least one place he characterizes “simple” pleasures as those that arise “without any other previous Idea, or any Image, or other concomitant Ideas, save those of *Extension*, or of *Duration*; one of which accompanies every Perception, whether of *Sense*, or *inward Consciousness*” (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 15–16). Many ideas which, in Hutcheson’s view, are simple in the Lockean sense are not simple in this second sense. Moral ideas are examples. In Hutcheson’s view they are irreducible; however, unlike the ideas that arise from sight, taste, and the other external senses, moral ideas “arise only upon some *previous Idea*, or *Assemblage*, or *Comparison of Ideas*” (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 16). This makes the moral sense an *internal* sense in Hutcheson’s terminology. See his *Essay & Illustrations*, 16–17, and his *Synopsis of Metaphysics*, 117–21. For a valuable treatment of Hutcheson’s theory of the senses see Kivy, *Seventh Sense*, ch. 2.

which is not to originate simple ideas but to discover truths by operating on the simple ideas it receives from the senses. Among those ideas are moral approval and disapproval, the source of which is the moral sense.¹⁶

The property that elicits moral approval is *benevolence*. Our moral approval of an act, the approval that springs from our moral sense, results from our belief that the act stems from a benevolent affection.¹⁷

As Hutcheson sees it, our moral approval of an act is in the same category of ideas—‘ideas’ having a broad, Lockean sense—as our sensation of sweetness when we bite into a strawberry.¹⁸ In each case a *sense* is the source of a simple idea, received independently of the will and of any mediating reasoning, the latter being reasoning that intervenes between the stimulus of the idea and the idea itself. Once we believe that an act stems from benevolence our moral approval of it is immediate and involuntary. Also, our approval is not logically tied to the belief that sparks it. It is not a conclusion from that belief, but an effect of it, an effect that arises through the moral sense.¹⁹

Having set out the rationalists’ position in contrast to Hutcheson’s, I now can describe the project I refer to as Hutcheson’s critique of moral rationalism. In essence, Hutcheson argues that the normative element of rationalism implies that we have the sense to which his own moral theory refers. This is not to say that *as it stands*, the normative element *by itself* implies, in a strict sense of ‘implies,’ that we have that sense. The point is simply that on any reading of the normative element that results in a defensible position, to accept that

¹⁶ See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 4, 5, 8, 15–18, 136, 144–46, 149, 153–54, 155, 176, 177, 215–16; Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 19–26, 30–31, 52–53; and Hutcheson, *Beauty & Virtue*, 8–9, 10, 88, 89, 90, 92, 99–100, 132, 138, 140, 145, 178–79, 180, 196, 217–18.

¹⁷ Hutcheson, *Beauty & Virtue*, 90, 91, 112, 116, 118, 126, 128–29, 132, 135, 136, 138, 151, 176, 181, 196–97, 225, 233; Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 8, 19, 33, 36, 136, 149, 153, 155, 173–74, 174, 175, 177, 180–81; Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 20–21, 31. Much could be said about Hutcheson’s understanding of benevolence and related notions, but for our purposes we need not go into this topic. Useful material on it is in Roberts, *Concept of Benevolence*, ch. 1; Bishop, “Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson’s Philosophy”; and Radcliffe, “Love and Benevolence in Hutcheson’s and Hume’s Theories of the Passions.”

¹⁸ To say that in Hutcheson’s view these things are in the same category is not to suggest that he sees no important differences between them. He sees several such differences—for instance, as note 15 indicates, whereas the sensation of sweetness comes from an external sense, moral approval comes from an internal one.

¹⁹ This sketch of Hutcheson’s position ignores some issues that are not crucial for my purposes. One of them is whether Hutcheson is a noncognitivist. William Frankena thinks that he is; David Fate Norton thinks that he is not, that in fact he is a moral realist. This issue, especially Norton’s stand on it, has spawned vigorous debate. See Frankena, “Hutcheson’s Moral Sense Theory”; Norton, “Hutcheson’s Moral Sense Theory Reconsidered”; Norton, *David Hume*, ch. 2; Stafford, “Hutcheson, Hume and the Ontology of Morals”; Winkler, “Hutcheson’s Alleged Realism”; Norton, “Hutcheson’s Moral Realism”; Radcliffe, “Hutcheson’s Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism”; Kail, “Hutcheson’s Moral Sense: Skepticism, Realism, and Secondary Qualities”; Gill, *British Moralists*, 295–301; and Filonowicz, *Fellow-Feeling and the Moral Life*, ch. 5.

element is tacitly to grant that we have a moral sense.²⁰ In Hutcheson's terminology, the rationalists' normative element "presupposes" the moral sense.²¹ His argument is a challenge to moral rationalism because the sense to which he refers is a faculty, distinct from reason, from which moral ideas originate.²² If the rationalists' normative thesis implies that we have that sense, then moral rationalism conflicts with itself. Specifically, its normative element conflicts with its epistemological element.

Let me note that Hutcheson's stated aim is not to show that moral rationalism conflicts with itself. It is simply to show that the various forms of the rationalists' normative thesis "must necessarily presuppose [the] *moral Sense*, and be resolv'd into it."²³ However, Hutcheson knows that if we have a moral sense as he understands it, reason is not the faculty of moral perception. He knows, therefore, that by arguing that the normative element of rationalism presupposes the moral sense, he is arguing, in effect, that moral rationalism conflicts with itself.²⁴ I have little doubt, therefore, that his ultimate aim is to refute moral rationalism.

Fortunately, even if I am wrong about this I am not wrong about the following, which is the important point for my purposes: Hutcheson's strategy is to show, by examining different readings of the rationalists' normative thesis, that insofar as that thesis is plausible it commits its adherents to a moral sense

²⁰ Suppose that on the only reading of a thesis, *T*, that results in a defensible position, *T* reduces to proposition *p*. Suppose also that *r* is an entailment of *p* and *q*, where proposition *q* is true. Then even if *p* does not itself entail *r*, theory *T* (and *p* as well) implies *r* in a loose sense of 'implies.' To accept *T* is tacitly (or in effect) to grant *r*. Likewise, to accept *T* is tacitly to reject any proposition, *s*, that logically conflicts with *r*. In that sense, *T* conflicts with *s*.

²¹ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 7, 136–37; see also *Essay & Illustrations*, 157.

²² It is worth noting that the rationalists Hutcheson addresses recognize that the moral sense, conceived as an *originator* of moral perceptions, differs from reason—or, as they would put it, that it *would* differ from reason if it actually existed. (See, e.g., Clarke, *Works*, vol. 2: 557; and Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10–13, 44–46, 55–56.) It is also worth noting that although Burnet often says that we have a moral sense, by a "moral sense" he does not mean a faculty through which moral perceptions originate. In Burnet's view, all moral perceptions, all judgments to the effect that something is morally good or bad, fit or unfit, spring from reason. After they arise they produce pleasure or displeasure depending on their content (e.g. the perception that an act is morally good produces pleasure). This pleasure or displeasure is not distinctively moral; it can arise from nonmoral judgments no less than from moral ones. But when it arises from a moral judgment, then either it or our capacity to feel it invites the label 'moral sense.' (For evidence that this is Burnet's view, see his many comments about the moral sense in *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 9–17.) Were Burnet to understand 'moral sense' the way Hutcheson does, as denoting a faculty, distinct from reason, from which moral ideas originate, he would deny that we have a moral sense.

²³ *Essay & Illustrations*, 7. Hutcheson is here using 'must be resolved into' in a now antiquated way: to mean, roughly, "must be explained in terms of" or "make(s) sense only in light of." For similar usage see Hutcheson, *Beauty & Virtue*, 196; and Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 53.

²⁴ Why does he stop short of *saying* that moral rationalism conflicts with itself? Probably because he deliberately wants to avoid harshness toward it. As David Fate Norton points out, Hutcheson's disputes with the rationalists are disputes among friends; in many ways he and the rationalists are allies. They are allies, for example, in opposing the moral theories of Hobbes and Mandeville. See Norton, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory Reconsidered," 10. See also Gill, *British Moralists*, 154.

theory. If this strategy succeeds, Hutcheson not only achieves his stated aim but shows that moral rationalism conflicts with itself.

To exhibit Hutcheson's strategy more clearly, let me reconstruct the core of his argument, formulated as an effort to refute moral rationalism:²⁵

1. The normative element of rationalism admits of different readings; we can list several things that it might signify. Among them are the following:

Virtue, the property of an act that arouses moral approval of the act, consists of conformity to reason or truth, where such conformity amounts to this: the act is the object of true propositions.

Virtue consists of conformity to reason, where such conformity consists in there being justifying reasons for the relevant act.

Clarke's thesis: Virtue consists of *fitness*, where fitness is a function not of the desires, beliefs, compacts and the like of human, divine, or other intelligent beings, but of the eternal and immutable relations in the nature of things.

Wollaston's thesis: Virtue consists of *significancy of truth*. Actions, no less than sentences, signify propositions, and the virtue of an act amounts to its signifying true rather than false propositions.

2. On some readings, the normative element of rationalism is false, circular, or otherwise implausible. On the remaining readings, to accept it is tacitly to grant that we have a moral sense. (For instance, to adopt the first of the above four readings is to make the rationalists' normative thesis false. Vicious deeds, no less than virtuous ones, are the objects of true propositions.²⁶ To give a further example, on the second of the above readings the rationalists' normative thesis is committed to a moral sense theory. Nothing counts as a justifying reason unless we have a moral sense.²⁷)
3. Thus, to abbreviate the preceding premise, the normative element of rationalism presupposes the moral sense.
4. Therefore, since the epistemological element of rationalism is false if the moral sense exists, the normative element of rationalism rules out the epistemological element. To put this another way, if we think that virtue is fitness, agreement with reason, or agreement with truth, we must deny that reason is the faculty of moral perception.

²⁵ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 136–73.

²⁶ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 137–38.

²⁷ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 144–46.

This reconstruction calls for two comments. First, Hutcheson sometimes uses ‘virtue’ not as a normative term but as an abbreviation for something like this: “that property, discoverable through reason and the external senses, that causes the moral faculty to approve of an action.”²⁸ I use ‘virtue’ this way throughout this paper. Given this usage, to say that virtue consists of *x* is not to assert what Hutcheson would see as a *moral* judgment, a judgment arising from the moral sense. It is to assert the nonmoral judgment that *x* is that property (whatever it is), discoverable through our nonmoral faculties, that arouses moral approval.

Second, the above argument, being a reconstruction of Hutcheson’s reasoning, differs in some ways from the letter of his reasoning. For instance, Hutcheson prefers to examine, not various readings of the normative element of rationalism, but various readings of its key terms, such as ‘fitness’ and ‘conformity to truth.’ As a result, he says nothing exactly synonymous with the claim that the normative element, construed in the second of the above four ways, is committed to a moral sense theory. Even so, he implies that claim, and his intent is captured by it, when he considers the reading of “conformity to reason” according to which an act conforms to reason just in case justifying reasons exist for it. When he considers that reading he argues that justifying reasons “presuppose a *Moral Sense*,” that “all the possible Reasons must ... presuppose ... some *moral Sense*, if they are justifying,” that “we shall find our selves ... at a Loss for ... *justifying Reasons* without recourse to a *moral Sense*,” and so forth.²⁹ Given these passages, his point is well-expressed by saying that if we read the rationalists’ normative thesis in the way just mentioned, it is committed to a moral sense theory.

3.

Let us now consider Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons. In his view, every reason for action is either *justifying* or *exciting*.³⁰ A justifying reason is a

²⁸ For a similar point see Darwall, *British Moralists & Internal ‘Ought’*, 214. For an example of the usage to which I refer, see Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 164.

²⁹ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138, 142, 146.

³⁰ In both *Essay & Illustrations* and *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, Hutcheson cites Hugo Grotius when introducing this distinction. For instance, in *Essay & Illustrations*, 138, he adds the note, “Thus Grotius distinguishes the Reasons of War, into the *Justificae*, and *Suasoriae*.” This does not mean that Hutcheson’s distinction is the same as Grotius’s. Hutcheson’s “justifying reasons” differ from Grotius’s “justifiable causes,” which “influence men through regard for what is right.” (Grotius, *The Law of War and Peace*, II.1.1., 169.) Grotius seems to have in mind facts about an action that produce, through our desire to do what is right, a derivative desire to perform the action. However, Hutcheson’s “justifying reasons” produce something different. They produce moral approval, which, in Hutcheson’s view, is a *sensation* rather than a desire. (That sensations differ markedly from desires is something Hutcheson explicitly maintains. See *Essay & Illustrations*, 28–29, 30, 49, 50.) This raises a question: If moral approval is a sensation, and hence not a desire, and if, further, actions originate in desires, then how can moral approval produce actions? In particular, how can it produce moral actions, actions that spring from the kind of desires that elicit moral approval? Hutcheson was concerned with this question but never answered it satisfactorily. On his struggles with it see Jensen, *Motivation & Moral Sense*; Stewart, “John Clarke and Francis Hutcheson on Self-Love and Moral Motivation,” 272–75; Darwall, *British Moralists &*

“*Truth expressing a Quality [in an action], engaging our Approbation.*”³¹ In other words, a justifying reason is a fact (a true proposition) that arouses our moral approval of an act by alerting us to a particular feature of the act, a feature that pleases the moral faculty. An exciting reason, on the other hand, is a “*Truth [that] shews a Quality in the Action, exciting the Agent to do it.*”³²

The latter definition is not immediately clear; to understand it we must examine Hutcheson’s many remarks about exciting reasons. Based on a charitable reading of those remarks, I take him to mean this: exciting reasons are facts about an action³³—call them *x*, *y*, and *z*—through which an agent’s reason or reasoning leads her, if certain conditions are met, to perform the action. The conditions are these: First, and most obvious, the agent is aware of *x*, *y*, and *z*; her awareness of them is part of the cause of her action. Second, the phrase “leads her ... to perform the action” means no more than what it says; it does not imply that reason *alone* leads her to act, that no desire is part of the process. Third, “other things are equal” and no impediments, malfunctions, or unusual factors interfere. Fourth, the agent is reasoning, forming intentions, and so forth in a flawless way relative to the facts available to her. A handy way to abbreviate all this is to say that exciting reasons are facts about an action through which reason “recommends” the action.³⁴ Hutcheson, no less than his opponents, thinks that reason often recommends an action in this sense. He differs from his opponents on various particulars, especially on whether reason

Internal ‘Ought’, ch. 8; Bishop, “Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson’s Philosophy,” 277–95; and Radcliffe, “Love and Benevolence in Hutcheson’s and Hume’s Theories of the Passions,” 635–39.

³¹ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138.

³² Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138. In *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, page 48, Hutcheson defines an exciting reason as a “*Truth which excites the Agent to it [an act], by shewing that it is apt to gratify some Inclination of his Mind.*” This definition has a shortcoming: it makes Hutcheson’s view of exciting reasons—namely, that they move us through our antecedent *desires*—true by definition. It does so, at least, on an ordinary reading of “gratify some inclination.”

³³ Facts about it? Or propositions about it which, whether factual or not, have the support of the evidence at hand? Interpreted literally, Hutcheson holds the first of these views, but I suspect that he actually holds the second. At any rate, I see nothing unfair about reading him as holding the second.

³⁴ As my remarks suggest, I do not think we should interpret Hutcheson as holding that exciting reasons are bound to move a person (*ceteris paribus*) even if, say, she is reasoning illogically, ignoring pertinent facts, or forming intentions that frustrate her ends. To interpret Hutcheson this way would be unfair. On a fair reading, his exciting reasons are facts that move a person to the extent that she is deliberating, forming intentions, and so forth in ways that are free from such defects. One upshot is that such reasons are not *guaranteed* to move us (not even *ceteris paribus*); another is that if they fail to influence us, i.e. if they do not move us even *ceteris paribus*, then we are in the grip of at least a minor error, defect of practical reasoning, or the like. This makes Hutcheson’s exciting reasons a species of what we nowadays call *normative* reasons. (Cf. Dancy, *Practical Reality*, 21.) I emphasize this because the word ‘exciting,’ particularly when juxtaposed with ‘justifying,’ may suggest that Hutcheson’s exciting reasons are mere causes, devoid of normative force. Significantly, Hutcheson’s examples of such reasons (*Essay & Illustrations*, 138, 140) are a familiar type of normative reasons, namely, *instrumental* reasons. Such reasons indeed move or “excite” us to act, but not always. They can fail to do so if, say, we are suffering from a lapse or defect of rationality.

can recommend an act even if the act cannot satisfy a desire. If this is not possible, then exciting reasons exist for an action only if certain desires are present.

Hutcheson's discussion of reasons comes in two parts, the first about exciting reasons, the second about justifying reasons. The following passage launches the discussion.

If *Reasonableness*, the Character of Virtue, denote some other sort of *Conformity* to Truth [a sort that differs from simply being an object of true propositions], it were to be wished that these Gentlemen, who make it the original Idea of moral Good, antecedent to any *Sense* or *Affections*, would explain it. ...

They tell us, "we must have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*, since we judge even of our Senses and Affections themselves, and approve or disapprove them: This Standard must be our *Reason*, Conformity to which must be the original Idea of moral Good."

But what is this *Conformity of Actions to Reason*? When we ask the Reason of an Action we sometimes mean, "*What Truth shews a Quality in the Action, exciting the Agent to do it?*" Thus, why does a *Luxurious* Man pursue *Wealth*? The Reason is given by this Truth, "Wealth is useful to purchase Pleasures." Sometimes for a Reason of Actions we shew the *Truth expressing a Quality, engaging our Approbation*. Thus the Reason of hazarding Life in just War, is, that "it tends to preserve our honest Countrymen, or evidences publick Spirit:" The Reason for *Temperance*, and against *Luxury* is given thus, "Luxury evidences a selfish base Temper." The former sort of Reasons we will call *exciting*, and the latter *justifying*. Now we shall find that all *exciting Reasons* presuppose *Instincts* and *Affections*; and the *justifying* presuppose a *Moral Sense*. (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138)

Directly following this passage, in roughly six pages, is what I mean by Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons. One thing is clear about it; another is not. What is clear about it is that its immediate point is that "all the possible Reasons must ... presuppose some *Affection*, if they are exciting."³⁵ Hutcheson's point is no less about the conditions under which reason recommends an act than about the facts through which reason does so. His point is this: reason recommends an act only if the act agrees with the agent's affections. That is, it does so only if the act can further the agent's antecedent desires, the desires she has prior to considering the action. Hence, since exciting reasons are facts about an act through which reason recommends the

³⁵ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 142. Hutcheson sometimes refers not to affections alone but to affections and *instincts* as the things presupposed by exciting reasons (*Essay & Illustrations*, 138, 144). In other passages he speaks as if 'instinct' were either an alternative word for 'desire' or 'affection' or a reference to a species of desire or affection (*Essay & Illustrations*, 141–42, 143, 181). In still others he chooses words that suggest, on a quick reading, that exciting reasons presuppose, not affections alone or affections accompanied by instincts, but affections *or* instincts (*Essay & Illustrations*, 179). Do these passages reveal a confusion or ambivalence on Hutcheson's part? I do not think so. His position is that exciting reasons presuppose affections. But as I will soon point out in the text, he understands this position a certain way, a way that makes his occasional use of 'instinct' understandable. The affection directly presupposed by an exciting reason may have arisen, via practical reasoning, from a more basic affection, which in turn may have arisen from a more basic one still, and so on. However, this regressive sequence eventually ends in an affection which is instinctive in that it is the product of *nature* as opposed to reason. For some revealing passages see Hutcheson, *Beauty & Virtue*, 133, 236 n.; Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 32 n., 148, 181, 214; and Hutcheson, *Synopsis of Metaphysics*, 135–36.

act, their existence depends on whether the act agrees with the agent's antecedent affections.

Hutcheson holds this view for reasons we can put as follows.³⁶ First, whenever our reason leads us to act it does so by concluding that the act is an effective means to one of our ends.³⁷ Second, given suitable conditions, such a conclusion leads to a desire to perform the act, which in turn yields an intention to perform it. But the conclusion can do that—more generally, a cognition can produce an action—only with the aid of affections, namely, the affections to which our end owes its existence. Third, as the preceding point indicates, ends depend on affections. If my end is to visit Cairo this is only because I have an affection, namely a desire, the propositional content of which is that I visit Cairo.

For clarity, let me add one more thing. It concerns the above claim that a cognition can produce an action only with the aid of affections. Hutcheson accepts this claim whether 'produce' means "produce, period" or instead means "produce, insofar as the agent is being fully rational."³⁸ For instance, if 'produce' has the second meaning the resulting statement is this: "A cognition can produce an action—produce it, that is, insofar as the agent is being fully rational—only with the aid of affections." This statement, Hutcheson would say, is true for a two-part reason. First, cognitions themselves, cognitions independent of affections, have no causal or motivational force.³⁹ Second, the requisite affection, the one necessary to give the cognition force, is not covered by the phrase "insofar as the agent is being fully rational." In Hutcheson's view, to say that an agent is being fully rational (or reasonable) is to imply nothing about the content of the agent's affections. There is no affection—no desire, emotion, or the like—that reason alone can require or create.⁴⁰

4.

I said that one thing is clear about Hutcheson's discussion; another is not. What is clear about it is the fact just explained: that its immediate point is that

³⁶ See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138–44.

³⁷ This sentence, as well as the previous paragraph, reflects the account of practical reason in Hutcheson's *Illustrations*, according to which practical reasoning is instrumental. However, as Stephen Darwall points out, Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (the first of the two essays in *Essays & Illustrations*) implies that practical reason has more than an instrumental role. That essay does not imply that reason alone can produce desires or actions; even so, it implies that the conclusions through which reason gives rise to desires and actions are not always about means to ends. See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 33, 50; Darwall, *British Moralists & Internal 'Ought'*, 224–26; and Darwall, "Hutcheson on Practical Reason," 80–83.

³⁸ Or fully *reasonable*, to use Hutcheson's preferred term. See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 143.

³⁹ No one, not even Hume, insists more strongly than Hutcheson does that cognitions unaccompanied by affections are motivationally inert. See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 214.

⁴⁰ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138–44, 214.

exciting reasons presuppose affections. What is not clear about it is its wider purpose. It arises in the course of Hutcheson's critique of moral rationalism, by which I mean his argument that the normative element of rationalism, which in brief says that virtue is agreement with reason, implies that a sense is the faculty of moral perception. Hence, it is natural to think that his discussion of exciting reasons somehow contributes to that argument. But if it does, how does it do so? And if it does not, what is its role in the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*?

I have already indicated my answer to these questions. I develop and defend that answer in sections 5 through 8. As a preliminary, allow me to make two points.

First, I find no answer to my questions in the existing commentaries on the *Illustrations*.⁴¹ Some of those commentaries pay little or no attention to Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons;⁴² others pay it attention, but say nothing about whether, or how, it fits into Hutcheson's effort to show that the normative thesis of rationalism presupposes the moral sense.⁴³

Second, three of the most tempting answers have defects. Although they contain some truth, their imperfections lead me to seek a better answer.

To address the three answers I must do some stage-setting. I must note that Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons pertains not just to the relation between affections and exciting reasons, but also to the possibility of defining virtue with reference to such reasons. To see this, we need only return to the block quotation in section 3 and read the question "But what is this *Conformity of Actions to Reason*?" with an eye on what precedes it. We see that it means this: "But what is this 'conformity to reason' intended in the thesis 'Conformity to reason is the original idea of moral good'?" The latter thesis is an abbreviation of the normative element of rationalism;⁴⁴ so we can reword the question to

⁴¹ Which is not necessarily a *criticism* of those commentaries. Depending on the purposes of a commentary, some interesting questions receive attention in it; others do not. Let me add that I also find no answer to the above questions in Michael Gill's *British Moralists*, part 3 of which, though not a commentary on the *Illustrations*, has much to say (mainly in ch. 12) about Hutcheson's opposition to rationalism. As Gill explains (302, n. 11), Hutcheson's treatment of exciting and justifying reasons has no direct bearing on his (Gill's) main purposes; for that reason, he does not discuss it.

⁴² Raphael, *Moral Sense*, ch. 2; Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory"; and Hudson, *Ethical Intuitionism*, ch. 7.

⁴³ Peach, "Editor's Introduction," 19, 30–31, 94–95; Blackstone, *Francis Hutcheson and Contemporary Ethical Theory*, 27–30; Jensen, *Motivation & Moral Sense*, 68–80; Strasser, *Hutcheson's Moral Theory*, ch. 5; Irwin, *Development of Ethics*, 409–13; and Martin, "Francis Hutcheson," 233–34.

⁴⁴ In the *Illustrations* Hutcheson understands the expression "x is the original idea of moral good (or of goodness, virtue, etc.)" or "x is the idea of moral good" as equivalent to "x is the property that elicits approbation" or "x is the property, discoverable through our nonmoral faculties, the perception of which arouses moral approval." (This is especially evident if we consult, not just a single passage, but the body of passages in which either that expression or a kindred one occurs. See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138, 147, 148, 151, 159, 160, 161, 164, 167, 171, 172.) Given this usage, "Conformity to reason is the original idea of moral good" is a rough expression of the normative element of rationalism. Let me add that, given my use of 'virtue' in this paper, the statement "Conformity to reason is the original idea of moral good" is equivalent to "Virtue is (or consists in) conformity to reason."

say this: “But what is this ‘conformity to reason’ intended in the rationalists’ normative thesis?” After asking it, Hutcheson indicates that if the conformity in question is a feature an act possesses just in case *reasons* for the act exist, the conformity comes in two kinds, one of which amounts to there being *exciting* reasons for the act.

Thus, Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons pertains not just to the relation between exciting reasons and affections, but to Hutcheson’s interest in understanding the normative thesis of rationalism. He apparently wants to convey a point about the following reading of that thesis—for instance, about the implications of holding it.

Virtue, the property of an act that arouses moral approval of the act, consists of conformity to reason, where such conformity consists in there being exciting reasons for the act.

From here on, I call this the *E-version* or the *E-reading* of the rationalists’ normative thesis. The letter ‘E’ represents *exciting* reasons—or more accurately, the explication of “conformity to reason” in terms of such reasons. This version of the normative thesis contrasts with the following one, which I call the *J-version* or the *J-reading*:

Virtue, the property of an act that arouses moral approval of the act, consists of conformity to reason, where such conformity consists in there being justifying reasons for the act.

At this point, the first of the three tempting answers arises. According to it, Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons contributes to his critique of rationalism by supporting a premise in that critique. The premise in question is the second one, which says that on any feasible reading of the rationalists’ normative thesis, that thesis is implausible or else committed to a moral sense theory. Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons contributes to the defense of this premise by showing that the rationalists’ normative thesis is implausible on its E-reading.

This answer is tempting mainly because the rationalists’ normative thesis is indeed implausible on the reading just mentioned. (Many acts for which exciting reasons exist arouse no moral approval.) But tempting or not, I find the answer hard to accept—hard enough that I think we should grant it only as a last resort. Nothing in Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons implies that the normative thesis of rationalism, read as connecting virtue to the existence of exciting reasons, is implausible. Other passages imply it,⁴⁵ but his discussion of exciting reasons does not. In that discussion we find no claim or sign that the thesis is implausible; in fact, we do not even find the thesis set out explicitly.

⁴⁵ Or at least imply it when conjoined with other things Hutcheson holds. See Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 145, 154.

These facts are hard to explain on the hypothesis that the *intent* of Hutcheson's discussion is to cast doubt on that thesis.

In support of this point, let me recall the version of the rationalists' normative thesis which says, roughly, that an act is virtuous just in case it is the object of true propositions.⁴⁶ This thesis is not only false, but so clearly false that we need not be told that it is. Even so, Hutcheson points out that the thesis is false when he discusses it. Indeed, he not only points out that fact, but repeats it on a later page.⁴⁷ Since he asserts nothing similar about the E-version of the rationalists' normative thesis, I doubt that his aim in discussing it is to expose it as false.

Let us go on to the second of the three tempting answers. According to this one, Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons has nothing to do with the rationalists' claim that virtue is conformity to reason. It has just one function, a clue to which is a statement Hutcheson makes early in the *Illustrations*: "Reasonableness in an Action is a very common Expression, but yet upon inquiry, it will appear very confused, whether we suppose it the Motive to Election, or the Quality determining Approbation."⁴⁸ This statement (the answer continues) reveals that Hutcheson's discussion of reasons concerns exactly two things: the property of reasonableness insofar as we suppose it "the motive to election"; and the property of reasonableness insofar as we suppose it "the quality determining approbation." His treatment of exciting reasons exclusively concerns the first of those things; his treatment of justifying reasons exclusively concerns the second.

In sum, the second answer is that Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons concerns the property of reasonableness only insofar as it purports to be a *motive*. More fully, the answer is that Hutcheson's discussion has the sole aim of showing that the claim, "Reasonableness in an action is sometimes a motive" is confused, meaning that upon analysis it turns out to be false, misleading, or uninformative. It is false if it does not square with the picture of motivation sketched in section 3, according to which every action has an affection at its source. It is misleading, or at least uninformative, if it squares with that picture, for it is silent about the true cause of any action, that cause being a belief combined with a desire.

This answer is tempting partly because, as it indicates, Hutcheson has an interest in the property of reasonableness considered as a motive.⁴⁹ Also, the answer identifies *one* of Hutcheson's aims in discussing exciting reasons.⁵⁰ It

⁴⁶ See premise 1 in Hutcheson's critique of moral rationalism. See also the parenthetical remark in premise 2.

⁴⁷ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 137–38, 144.

⁴⁸ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 137.

⁴⁹ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 133, 134, 137, 138.

⁵⁰ Why would Hutcheson want to assess the claim that reasonableness is sometimes a motive? The answer is that he sees moral rationalism as one of three main contenders in ethical theory, the other two being his own moral theory and the egoism of Hobbes and the Epicureans (Hutcheson, *Essay &*

falls short, however, by treating it as his *sole* aim. To do the latter is to imply that Hutcheson's discussion does not pertain to his interest in the property of reasonableness considered as the stimulus of moral approval. That it pertains to that interest is borne out by several things, including the passage, quoted earlier, in which Hutcheson introduces the notion of exciting reasons. He introduces it in addressing a question that means "But what is this 'conformity to reason' intended in the thesis 'Conformity to reason is the original idea of moral good'?" The thesis referred to here is an abbreviation of the normative element of rationalism, according to which reasonableness, conformity to reason, is the property that sparks moral approval. It is in trying to understand that thesis, in trying to uncover its philosophical consequences, that Hutcheson takes up the subject of exciting reasons.

These remarks raise doubts not only about the second of the three answers but also about the third. That one goes as follows. The sole function of Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons is the one we discussed in section 3. It has no wider function, if by a "wider" one we mean that it contributes to a further project in the *Illustrations*. In other words, in discussing exciting reasons Hutcheson is simply pausing from his chief task—the task of showing that the normative component of rationalism presupposes the moral sense—to defend an idea he deems important. That idea is that exciting reasons presuppose affections—or, what comes to the same thing, that reason alone cannot move an agent even if the agent is fully rational. It is no surprise that Hutcheson considers this idea important. The opposing view, that some cognitions are intrinsically motivating, is essential to the moral theories of Clarke, Burnet, and Wollaston. These philosophers hold not only that moral perceptions spring from reason, but that they move us, if not automatically, then at least if we are being rational. No antecedent affections (or at least none that are inessential to full rationality) are required to make moral perceptions motivating.

This answer contains much truth. It does seem that for Hutcheson, the argument that reason alone cannot motivate is important independently of any bearing it may have on his other projects. Also, the view that moral perceptions intrinsically motivate, that they move us independently of pre-existing affections, is a part of Burnet's, and possibly of Clarke's, moral theory.⁵¹ Possibly,

Illustrations, 134–37). A feature of each of the latter two theories is that the quality the theory identifies as the elicitor of moral approval—benevolence in the one case, self-benefit in the other—is a motive in the broad sense. That is, it is a motive, incentive, or inducement to act. Also, Hutcheson gives considerable attention to those two qualities (especially in *Beauty & Virtue* and the first treatise in *Essay & Illustrations*) insofar as they serve as motives. Thus, he wants to do the same for the property identified by rationalists as the trigger of moral approval. That is, he wants to give some attention to the property of reasonableness, conformity to reason, considered as a possible motive or cause of actions.

⁵¹ Note that I say "possibly" of Clarke's moral theory, and I do not mention Wollaston's. I do not mention Wollaston's because I find no evidence that Wollaston regards moral perceptions as intrinsically motivating. I find one or two passages that *might* support such a reading (Wollaston, *Religion of Nature*, 169, 173), but they easily bear alternative readings. Also, I find passages that might suggest that in Wollaston's view, moral perceptions move us only in conjunction with a desire—specifically, our desire

even if Hutcheson's main concern is with Burnet's objections of 1725, he also has his sights on what he takes to be Clarke's view of moral motivation.

My own answer, which I soon defend, accommodates these truths but also adds to them. It does so because the above answer has some defects; it is not likely to be the full answer. Firstly, like the previous answer, it implies that Hutcheson's aim in arguing that exciting reasons presuppose affections is divorced from his interest in the view that agreement with reason is the mark of virtue. His argument seems clearly to be linked to that interest, clearly to be concerned with raising a problem for, or making a point about, the view that virtue in an act amounts to there being exciting reasons for the act.

Secondly, the answer implies that over twenty-three hundred words, or just over a third, of section 1 of the *Illustrations* contributes nothing to the projects Hutcheson announces in his prefatory material. Here I mean the two projects Hutcheson seems to make the focus of sections 1 through 3 of his essay, namely, his critique of moral rationalism and his reply to Burnet's objections. Of course, this implication *could* be true; Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons *could* be a lengthy digression from his two main tasks. However, given that he gives no sign that this is so, I think it is more likely, other things being equal, that his discussion relates to one of those tasks. At first glance it may seem to be part of the first task, the effort to show that the rationalists' normative thesis conflicts with their moral epistemology. I will argue, however, that it is part of the second task rather than the first.

5.

My question is about the function of Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons, about its role in his *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*. The core of my answer is this: Hutcheson's discussion is not part of his critique of moral rationalism. It has several functions; primarily, it is part of Hutcheson's defense of two assertions, one of which, predictably, concerns the thesis that virtue is conformity to reason. His defense of the two assertions counters an argument he finds in Burnet's letters. That argument challenges various things Hutcheson holds, including his moral sense theory.

for happiness (*Religion of Nature*, 31, 52, 181–82, 218). For an author who takes this to be Wollaston's view, see Radcliffe, "How Does the Humean Sense of Duty Motivate?," 391–92 n. 21.

Regarding Clarke's theory: I say that *possibly* it includes the view that moral perceptions are intrinsically motivating. I speak this way because the evidence that Clarke holds this view, although certainly not negligible, is far from conclusive. In considering this issue it is important to read not only Clarke's works on morality, but also his works on freedom and agency. For the most pertinent passages see Clarke, *Works*, vol. 2: 548–69, 579–630; vol. 4: 711–35. An important source on Clarke's account of freedom and agency is Harris, *Liberty & Necessity*, ch. 2.

Perhaps I should add that many philosophers are more convinced than I am that Clarke regards moral perceptions as intrinsically motivating. Two examples are Irwin, *Development of Ethics*, 387; and Darwall, "Ethical Intuitionism and the Motivation Problem." Darwall admits, however (on page 250), that the evidence for this reading is less than conclusive. Significantly, I find no evidence that Hutcheson is convinced that Clarke sees moral perceptions as intrinsically motivating. I find none, for instance, in the second section of Hutcheson's *Illustrations*, which concerns Clarke's notion of fitness.

I will begin by identifying the main conclusions of Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons. By those I mean the main conclusions stemming from his point that exciting reasons presuppose affections. Those conclusions challenge a thesis I call the Antecedence Claim; thus, after identifying them I will clarify that thesis. Next, I will explain how they contribute to Hutcheson's defense of two important assertions, each concerning the Antecedence Claim. Then, in sections 6 and 7, I will explain how those assertions provide a comeback to an argument Hutcheson finds in Burnet's letters.

5.1. The Main Conclusions of Hutcheson's Treatment of Exciting Reasons

A clue to the conclusions in question is the passage, quoted in section 3, that launches Hutcheson's discussion of reasons. Here is that passage in abbreviated form:

If *Reasonableness*, the Character of Virtue, denote some other sort of *Conformity* to Truth [a sort that differs from simply being an object of true propositions], it were to be wished that these Gentlemen, who make it the original Idea of moral Good, antecedent to any *Sense* or *Affections*, would explain it. ...

They tell us, "we must have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*. ... This Standard must be our *Reason*, Conformity to which must be the original Idea of moral Good."

But what is this *Conformity of Actions to Reason*? When we ask the Reason of an Action we sometimes mean, "*What Truth shews a Quality in the Action, exciting the Agent to do it?*" ... Sometimes for a Reason of Actions we shew the *Truth expressing a Quality, engaging our Approbation*. ... The former sort of Reasons we will call *exciting*, and the latter *justifying*. Now we shall find that all *exciting Reasons* presuppose *Instincts* and *Affections*; and the *justifying* presuppose a *Moral Sense*. (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138)

The last sentence in this passage is important. Given what comes before it, including the first two paragraphs in the quotation, it is short for something like this:

Now we shall find that all exciting reasons presuppose instincts and affections and the justifying presuppose a moral sense. Hence, contrary to what the gentlemen just mentioned say, we do not "have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*." Not only that, but if the thesis "Conformity to reason is the original idea of moral good" (or, to speak equivalently, the thesis "Virtue is conformity to reason")⁵² means that the virtue of an act consists in there being *reasons* for the act, then that thesis conflicts with, rather than draws support from, the claim that we have a standard antecedently to sense and affections.

⁵² Recall the last sentence in note 44.

Based on the above passage and others, I take Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons to have two main conclusions.⁵³ First, we do not have a "standard" antecedently to sense and affections. Reason can recommend an act only if the act agrees with our pre-existing affections. Second, if the thesis "Virtue is conformity to reason" means that virtue consists in there being reasons for the relevant act, where 'reasons for the act' denotes *exciting* reasons for the act, then that thesis conflicts with the premise meant to support it: that we have a standard antecedently to sense and affections. To put this another way, we have no standard antecedently to sense and affections if the rationalists' normative thesis is true on its E-reading, the reading that links virtue to exciting reasons. For on that reading, an act cannot be virtuous if it fails to agree with pre-existing affections.

5.2. The Antecedence Claim

The conclusions just stated concern the claim that "we ... have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*." Let us call this the Antecedence Claim. It comes from those "Gentlemen," referred to in the passage recently quoted, who make conformity to reason "the original Idea of moral Good, antecedent to any *Sense* or *Affections*." This is a reference to Gilbert Burnet,⁵⁴ whose letters of 1725 often say or imply that our "standard," "rule," "test," or "measure" of action is reason;⁵⁵ and that our standard, our use of it, or the truths to which it leads us are antecedent to sense and affection.⁵⁶ The relevant passages reveal that for Burnet, our standard is at work not just when we judge something to be right, but also when reason recommends an act. For Burnet those things are closely related: an act cannot be right unless reason recommends it.

⁵³ Of course, the quoted passage also affects the way I interpret Hutcheson's discussion of *justifying* reasons. I will come to that subject shortly.

⁵⁴ There is much evidence that the reference is to Burnet. Consider, for instance, the following two statements. Statement 1: "Philaretus [i.e. Burnet] often insinuates ... [that] [i] 'There must be some *antecedent Standard*, by which we judge the *Affections* or *Moral Senses* themselves to be *right* or *wrong*'" (Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 53). Statement 2: "They tell us, [ii] 'we must have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*, since we judge even of our Senses and Affections themselves, and approve or disapprove them'" (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138). Statement 2 is from the passage recently quoted from Hutcheson's *Illustrations*—the one that refers, I contend, to Burnet. Statement 1 comes from Hutcheson's letter of 9 October 1725 to the *London Journal*. Three facts are significant here. First, the letter just mentioned, which is Hutcheson's reply to Burnet's letters of 31 July and 7 August, contains Hutcheson's earliest discussion of exciting and justifying reasons. Hutcheson's treatment of those reasons in the *Illustrations*, meaning the treatment in which Statement 2 appears, is essentially a revised and amplified version of that earlier discussion. Second, in that earlier discussion, specifically in Statement 1, Hutcheson attributes claim [i] to Burnet. Third, [i] is strikingly similar to [ii], the assertion Hutcheson attributes, in Statement 2, to the author or authors he designates as "they." The latter fact, combined with the former two, is evidence that assertion [ii] is essentially assertion [i] in modified form, and that Statement 2 is essentially a rewording of Statement 1. This being so, the word "they" refers to Burnet.

⁵⁵ Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10, 12, 35, 41, 43, 45, 67.

⁵⁶ Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 11, 12, 16, 34–35, 36–37, 45–46, 59, 65–66, 70.

Although Burnet's remarks on this topic are unclear (e.g. he neither defines the words 'standard,' 'rule,' etc., nor uses them consistently), they reveal that the Antecedence Claim means roughly the following, which from here on I take to be the nub of that claim:

We have something—call it a standard—by means of which reason can recommend an act and we can perceive moral rightness (goodness, etc.) in the act even if the act does not please, agree with, or otherwise congenially relate to an internal sense or antecedent affection. For instance, these things can occur, e.g. we can see that an act is morally required of us, even if the act neither pleases our moral sense nor promises to satisfy a pre-existing desire. Indeed, whether an act pleases our moral sense depends on whether we first detect (or think we detect) moral rightness in the act.⁵⁷ Similarly, whether an act can satisfy a desire often depends on whether reason antecedently recommends the act, thereby spawning a desire to perform it.

This is the claim to which Hutcheson's two main conclusions pertain. The first of the two is that the above claim is false because, contrary to one of the things it says, reason cannot recommend an act unless the act agrees with an antecedent affection. The second conclusion concerns the E-reading of the normative element of rationalism, the reading that ties virtue to exciting reasons, and thus to antecedent affections. That conclusion is that on its E-reading, the normative element of rationalism conflicts with, rather than draws support from, the premise meant to establish it, namely, the Antecedence Claim. To put this equivalently, the rationalists' view that virtue is conformity to reason, read to mean that virtue consists in there being exciting reasons for the relevant act, does not follow from the Antecedence Claim; rather, it clashes with it. It does so by implying that actions are virtuous, they have a feature that can arouse moral approval, only if they agree with pre-existing affections. This implication conflicts with the view, central to the Antecedence Claim, that we can detect moral rightness in an act even if the act agrees with no antecedent affection. It does so because to detect such rightness is morally to approve of the act.

Having presented the Antecedence Claim, allow me to make some remarks about it. The first is that the phrase "reason recommends an act," as it figures in that claim, has the same meaning I gave it in section 3. By using it here I am attributing to Burnet the view, earlier attributed to Hutcheson, that under suitable conditions our reason or reasoning will lead us to perform an action. Also, as the Antecedence Claim reveals, I take Burnet to hold that reason sometimes produces actions that do not congenially relate to a sense or an antecedent affection.

⁵⁷ Note 22 is pertinent here, specifically the part about Burnet.

I do so on the basis of two sets of passages. Those in the first set imply or presuppose, collectively if not individually, a two-part thesis.⁵⁸ First, we sometimes form (through cogent reasoning) a belief of the form “A is fit,” “A is right,” “A is reasonable,” “A is obligatory,” “A conforms to truth,” or “A conforms to reason.” Second, we sometimes form that belief, and the belief is true, independently of any congenial relation between the action, A, and a sense or antecedent affection. The passages in the second set imply or presuppose that a belief of that sort can produce A in the absence of any relation of the kind just mentioned.⁵⁹ Normally, A will bear such a relation to “*Natural Affections*,” which will then serve as “additional Motives” for doing A.⁶⁰ But as the word ‘additional’ suggests, reason can produce A independently of the affections.

These facts show that in Burnet’s view, each of the following can exist or occur even if the act in question does not congenially relate to an internal sense or an antecedent affection:⁶¹

- the reasonableness (or conformity to truth, conformity to reason) of an action, A, and the moral goodness (fitness, rightness) of A;⁶²
- our apprehension that A is reasonable and/or that A is morally good; and
- our performance of A.

5.3. Two Assertions to which Hutcheson’s Conclusions Pertain

In the previous subsections I identified the two main conclusions of Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons; also, I clarified the thesis they challenge: the Antecedence Claim. Let me repeat those two main conclusions before proceeding:

⁵⁸ Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 12–16, 34–37, 42–46, 59–60, 61–62, 64–66.

⁵⁹ Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 16–17, 34–35, 41–43, 63, 65–66.

⁶⁰ Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 44.

⁶¹ If these things can exist or occur even if act A fails to relate congenially to a sense or an antecedent affection, then they can exist or occur *without the help* of a sense or an antecedent affection. For if they required such help, the sense or affection involved would be one to which A bears a “congenial” (e.g. a means-end) relation. Burnet recognizes this, for his statements often suggest or imply that an act can be reasonable (or deemed reasonable, etc.) not only independently of any *relation* to our internal senses or antecedent affections, but independently of those senses and affections themselves. See Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 12–17, 34–35, 36–37, 42–44, 60–61, 62, 65–67.

⁶² This item may seem to contain a redundancy—or at least to do so given Burnet’s views. Burnet often speaks as if morally good actions are identical to reasonable actions (Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 35, 40, 43, 45–46). However, perhaps Burnet actually believes that the class of reasonable actions is broader than that of morally good actions, i.e. that moral goodness is identical not with reasonableness *simpliciter* but with a particular form of it.

The Antecedence Claim is false. Contrary to one of the things it says, reason cannot recommend an act unless the act agrees with a pre-existing affection.

On its E-reading, the normative component of rationalism conflicts with, rather than draws support from, the premise meant to establish it, namely, the Antecedence Claim. To put this another way, the rationalists' view that virtue is conformity to reason, read to mean that virtue consists in there being exciting reasons for the relevant act, does not follow from the Antecedence Claim. Rather, it clashes with it.

Let me now show how these conclusions, and hence Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons, figure in Hutcheson's defense of two further assertions. After that, I will show how that defense counters an argument he finds in Burnet's letters. As a preliminary let me sum up the key points of Hutcheson's treatment of *justifying* reasons.⁶³ The relevance of doing so will soon be clear.

The immediate point of Hutcheson's treatment of justifying reasons is that such reasons presuppose the moral sense. His point here is no less about the conditions of moral approval than about the facts that arouse such approval. His point is this: unless an act pleases the moral sense, moral approval of the act does not occur; consequently, whether any facts can cause moral approval of the act, and hence whether justifying reasons exist for the act, depends on whether the act can please the moral sense.

This point supports three main conclusions. Hutcheson does not state them explicitly but his discussion implies them. First, the Antecedence Claim is false because, contrary to one of its elements, we cannot morally approve of an act unless the act pleases our moral sense. Second, on its J-reading, the reading that ties virtue to the existence of justifying reasons (and thus to a capacity to please our moral sense), the normative thesis of rationalism conflicts with the premise meant to establish it. In other words, if the thesis "Virtue is conformity to reason" means that the virtue of an act amounts to there being justifying reasons for the act, then that thesis conflicts with its alleged support: the Antecedence Claim. It does so by implying, contrary to the Antecedence Claim, that an act is virtuous only if it can please our moral sense. If the act cannot please that sense no justifying reasons exist for the act; hence, according to the J-version of the rationalists' normative thesis, the act is not virtuous. Third, on its J-reading, the normative thesis of rationalism implies the existence of the moral sense. For it implies that an act is virtuous only if it can please that sense, and of course an act can do that only if the moral sense exists.

By implying the third of these conclusions Hutcheson's treatment of justifying reasons contributes to his critique of moral rationalism. It contributes to the defense of that critique's second step, which says that for every plausible

⁶³ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 144–46. For a fuller picture see also the passages cited in note 16.

form of the rationalists' normative thesis, to accept that thesis is to grant that we have a moral sense. For this reason, the question "What is the relation between Hutcheson's discussion of justifying reasons and his critique of rationalism?" is less puzzling than the similar question about his discussion of exciting reasons.

However, I find this difference between the two discussions less interesting than two similarities. First, neither discussion aims solely or even mainly to support a step in the critique of moral rationalism. Only one of the two discussions, the one about justifying reasons, aims to do that. But it also supports two of the three conclusions identified shortly ago.

Second, those two conclusions, the first two in Hutcheson's discussion of justifying reasons, are parallel to the two conclusions in his discussion of exciting reasons. For example, in each of the two discussions the second conclusion, briefly stated, has the form "On its *x* reading, the normative element of rationalism conflicts with the Antecedence Claim." This similarity is no coincidence. It reveals that the two discussions are not entirely separate. They are parts of a single discussion, the chief aim of which is to support the following assertions.

The Antecedence Claim is false—indeed, it is false on two counts. Reason cannot recommend an act unless the act agrees with a pre-existing affection. Likewise, we cannot morally approve of an act unless it pleases our moral sense.

On either its E- or its J-reading, the normative element of rationalism conflicts with, rather than draws support from, the premise meant to establish it, namely, the Antecedence Claim. To put this another way, the rationalists' view that virtue is conformity to reason, read to mean either that virtue consists in there being *exciting* reasons for the relevant act or that virtue consists in there being *justifying* reasons for the act, does not follow from the Antecedence Claim. Rather, it clashes with it.

Let us call these assertions the *falseness assertion* and the *conflict assertion*. Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons is part of his defense of these assertions. It works in tandem with his treatment of justifying reasons to support the two assertions. Thus, to identify Hutcheson's aims in defending these assertions is to illuminate the aims of his discussion of exciting reasons.

6.

One of Hutcheson's aims in defending the above assertions is to thwart an argument he finds in Burnet's letters. As said earlier, a clue to this is a remark in Hutcheson's preface to the *Essay with Illustrations*:

Some Letters in the *London Journals*, subscribed *Philaretus* [Burnet], gave the first Occasion to the *Fourth Treatise* [the *Illustrations*]. ... The *Objections* proposed [to Hutcheson's *Beauty & Virtue*] in the first *Section* of *Treatise IV*, are not always those of *Philaretus*, tho I have endeavour'd to leave no *Objections* of his unanswer'd. (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 10)

This passage shows that Hutcheson devotes section 1 of the *Illustrations* partly to addressing objections to his moral theory, many of them Burnet's. Hence, it is worth asking whether Hutcheson's chief aim in defending the falseness and conflict assertions is to contribute, not to his critique of moral rationalism, but to his comeback to Burnet's objections. The answer, I contend, is yes. To see this let us return to the block quotation in section 3, especially to the paragraph just before the one that starts with "But what is this *Conformity of Actions to Reason*?" The one that starts that way launches Hutcheson's discussion of reasons. The one just before it is this:

They tell us, "we must have some *Standard* antecedently to all *Sense* or *Affections*, since we judge even of our *Senses* and *Affections* themselves, and approve or disapprove them: This *Standard* must be our *Reason*, *Conformity* to which must be the original *Idea* of moral *Good*." (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 138)

This paragraph comes in between two things. The first is Hutcheson's refutation of the crudest brand of the rationalists' normative thesis, the brand that equates virtue with being the object of true propositions. The second is Hutcheson's discussion of the E- and J-versions of the rationalists' thesis, the versions that tie virtue, respectively, to the existence of exciting reasons and to the existence of justifying reasons. Hence, it is easy to regard the paragraph as a mere transition passage, not worthy of close attention. But it merits such attention, for the part of it in quotes is an *argument*, an argument Hutcheson is addressing in his treatment of reasons for action. The structure of the argument is simple:

We judge even of our senses and affections themselves and approve or disapprove them.

Evidently, then, we have a standard antecedently to all sense or affections.

That standard must be our reason, conformity to which must be the original idea of moral good.

There is evidence that Hutcheson defends the falseness and conflict assertions with the aim of exposing multiple flaws in this argument. He first sets out the argument, and then asks a question the gist of which is "But what is this 'conformity to reason' intended in the argument's third step?" He then tries to establish, by way of addressing that question, the falseness and conflict assertions. And clearly those assertions, if true, reveal multiple flaws in the above argument, particularly in its second two steps. To give just one example,

the falseness assertion says that reason cannot recommend an act unless the act agrees with an antecedent affection; also, that we cannot morally approve of an act unless it pleases our moral sense. This is to say, in essence, that the second step in the above argument is false on two counts.

Of course, the fact that Hutcheson defends the falseness and conflict assertions with the aim of refuting the above argument does not show that he is addressing an argument of *Burnet's*. It does not do so even if combined with the fact that Hutcheson wants to refute the arguments in Burnet's letters. So let me add two further facts. First, *if* the above argument were suggested in Burnet's letters, Hutcheson would be eager to refute it. Indeed, he would want to expose multiple flaws in it. Second, as I will show, the above argument is suggested in Burnet's letters.

I will discuss these facts in the next section; meantime, let me amplify the above argument in a way that Burnet would endorse. To do so would be agreeable to Hutcheson, who intends the argument to capture Burnet's reasoning.

- (1) We evaluate not only actions but also the affections that produce them and the senses through which they please or displease us. We judge those senses and affections as good or bad, reasonable or unreasonable, by comparing their associated actions, the actions that please or agree with them, to what we antecedently regard as morally right or as recommended by reason.
- (2) Evidently, then, the standard through which we morally evaluate actions and through which reason recommends actions is *antecedent* to sense and affection. More precisely, the Antecedence Claim is true: We have a standard by means of which reason can recommend an act and we can perceive moral rightness in the act even if the act does not please, agree with, or otherwise congenially relate to an internal sense or an antecedent affection.
- (3) But then that standard can only be our reason, in which case the rationalists' normative thesis is true: conformity to reason is the essence of virtue.⁶⁴

To the extent that Burnet advances the reasoning Hutcheson attributes to him, he does so in the above form or in one similar to it. For instance, when he says

⁶⁴ This conclusion receives support from the two premises only if we add some further reasoning. Were Burnet pressed to do that, I suspect that he would reason thus: If the second premise is true, the standard to which it refers cannot be an affection or a sense. For example, it is implausible to think that the standard through which we detect moral goodness is an internal sense, and at the same time think that we can detect moral goodness in actions independently of any agreeable relation between the actions and a sense. Hence, the standard to which the second premise refers, being neither a sense nor an affection, can only be reason. Furthermore, what reason detects in an action—at least, what it detects when functioning in its moral capacity—is the action's reasonableness or lack thereof. Thus, it must be that reasonableness, conformity to reason, is the essence of virtue.

anything to the effect that “we judge even of our senses and affections themselves and approve or disapprove them,” he nearly always indicates that he intends the first of the above premises. His point is not merely that we evaluate senses and affections, but that we do so in a certain way: by comparing their associated deeds with the acts we antecedently deem morally right or recommended by reason.⁶⁵

7.

I have noted the main conclusions of Hutcheson’s treatment of exciting reasons; also, I have shown how they figure in his defense of two further assertions. In addition, I have shown how those further assertions, if true, refute the argument made up of statements (1) through (3). Let me now proceed to the two facts mentioned shortly ago: First, if the argument for (3) were suggested in Burnet’s letters, Hutcheson would be eager to refute it. In fact, he would want to expose multiple flaws in it. Second, the argument for (3) is suggested in Burnet’s letters.

7.1. Hutcheson’s Need to Refute the Argument for Statement (3)

As I said, Hutcheson would want to refute the argument for (3) if he found it in Burnet’s letters. This is because its second and third steps, if true, create problems for his ethical theory.⁶⁶ The first of those problems is obvious: step (2), the Antecedence Claim, contradicts Hutcheson’s view that moral perceptions spring from a moral sense. It does so because it says that we can perceive moral rightness in an act even if the act pleases no internal sense.

Step (2) also says that under suitable conditions, reason can produce an act even if the act agrees with no antecedent affection. This implies (given plausible assumptions) that reason can produce an act *without the help* of such an affection. So if (2) is true, some actions spring from reason alone, reason unaided by affections.

This raises a question: If some actions spring from reason alone, might not *virtuous* actions be among them? After all, we often describe virtuous deeds as reasonable, and we tend to think that if reason were more influential in human affairs, vice would be less common than it presently is. This is *prima facie* evidence that virtue, the feature of an act that elicits moral approval, reduces to this: the act originates from reason alone.

⁶⁵ See Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 34–38, 44–46, 66–67.

⁶⁶ I am not suggesting that Hutcheson is unconcerned with step (1). He is concerned with it, but he does not attend to it in his treatment of reasons for action. He discusses it a few pages later (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 149–51) and returns to it in a later section (*Essay & Illustrations*, 176–78). In essence, he defends the following points. If, in step (1), the words ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable,’ are *moral* predicates, then (1) is false. If, on the other hand, they are not moral predicates, e.g. if they stand in for ‘reliable’ and ‘unreliable’ or ‘accurate’ and ‘inaccurate,’ then even if (1) is true, it does not support (2).

Clearly, this is not merely a question; it is an objection to Hutcheson's moral theory.⁶⁷ The upshot is that if step (2) is true Hutcheson's moral theory invites an objection. Not surprisingly, Hutcheson is aware of the objection; he addresses versions of it in at least two places.⁶⁸ In each case he contends that every action has an affection at its source.

Step (3), like step (2), creates problems for Hutcheson if it is true. To give just one example, it says that the "standard" to which (2) refers can only be our reason, which implies, presumably, that reason is the faculty of moral perception. This conflicts with Hutcheson's moral epistemology.

In sum, if the argument for (3) were suggested in Burnet's letters, Hutcheson would feel a need to refute it. Indeed, he would want to expose multiple flaws in it. This is partly because he would feel a need to refute *both* elements of step (2), the Antecedence Claim. One of those elements is that under suitable conditions, reason can produce an act even if the act agrees with no antecedent affection. The other is that we can detect moral rightness in an act even if the act pleases no moral sense. Each of these assertions, if true, undermines Hutcheson's moral theory.

7.2. Burnet's Letters and the Argument for (3)

This brings me to the second of the two points I made earlier: that the argument for (3) is suggested in Burnet's letters.⁶⁹ First of all, there are several clues, both in the *Illustrations* and in Hutcheson's letters to the *London Journal*, that Hutcheson *thinks* the argument is Burnet's. One such clue is the passage I quoted in sections 3 and 5, which refers to the "Gentlemen" who make reasonableness "the original Idea of moral Good, antecedent to any *Sense* or *Affections*." As I said in section 5.2, this is a reference to Burnet.

⁶⁷ Although the point of the objection superficially resembles the normative element of rationalism, it actually differs widely from it. It says, not that virtuous deeds are necessarily reasonable, fit, or agreeable to truth, but that they *originate* from cognitive states alone.

⁶⁸ Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 139, 178–79; see also *Essay & Illustrations*, 181; and Hutcheson, *Beauty & Virtue*, 133.

⁶⁹ Although we can find passages in *Burnet vs. Hutcheson* that support this point, we must guard against misidentifying them. Consider the following of Burnet's remarks.

The Perception of *Pleasure* therefore, which is the Description this Author [Hutcheson] has given of his *Moral Sense* . . . , seems to me not to be a certain enough Rule to follow. There must be, I should think, something *antecedent* to justify it, and to render it a *real Good*. It must be a *Reasonable Pleasure*, before it be a *right* one, or *fit* to be encouraged, or listened to. (Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10–11)

In a valuable paper, "Ethical Externalism and the Moral Sense" (page 598 n. 13), Susan Purviance suggests that the argument for (3)—the short form of it addressed by Hutcheson—"summarize[s] the sort of objection raised" in this quotation. But it does not. For instance, unlike the first step in the argument for (3), the first step in the objection just quoted does not say that we judge even our senses and affections themselves. It says, in essence, that to accept Hutcheson's moral sense theory is to imply that our moral standard lacks the certainty or reliability we expect from it. Hutcheson sees that this objection differs from the argument for (3). He addresses it separately, soon after his discussion of reasons for action (Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 147).

However, I do not want to rest with the point that Hutcheson *thinks* the argument is Burnet's. I want to show that he does so for good reason. Let me first note that the statements that make up the argument are among Burnet's most often repeated claims.⁷⁰ Not only that, but they are at odds with things Hutcheson believes. Essentially, Hutcheson has identified three of the most salient of Burnet's contentions—three of the most salient ones, that is, that conflict with his own—and arranged them in the most natural logical order.

Actually, this is an understatement, for at least two passages in Burnet's letters approximate the argument for (3). Also, they occur in exactly the place we should find them if Hutcheson's treatment of reasons for action aims not just to refute that argument, but to do so on the assumption that the argument is Burnet's.

Let me explain this point, first by observing that Hutcheson's earliest discussion of reasons appears in his letter of 9 October, 1725, to the *London Journal*.⁷¹ As Hutcheson indicates,⁷² that letter is a response to Burnet's letters of 31 July and 7 August.⁷³ This fact is important in its own right. For if Hutcheson's earliest discussion of reasons is a response to Burnet, this is *prima facie* evidence that his later discussion is also such a response.

Thus, assuming two things—that the aim of Hutcheson's early discussion of reasons, like that of his later one, is to refute the argument for (3);⁷⁴ and that by addressing that argument Hutcheson means to be addressing an argument of Burnet's—we should expect the following: that if one or two passages in Burnet's letters approximate the argument for (3), they appear in the pair of letters just mentioned. That is, they appear in the letter of 31 July or the letter of 7 August. And sure enough, they appear in the letter of 31 July. Here is the first one, with two of its assertions labeled for easy reference:

The *Reasonableness* of the *Ends* of *Moral Agents* does not depend on their Conformity to the *Natural Affections* of the Agent, nor to a *Moral Sense* representing such *Ends* as *amiable* to him; but singly on their Conformity to *Reason*. ... That which perhaps may be apt to mislead us in this Point is, That we find in Fact it is always *Reasonable* to act according to *Natural Affection*, and the *Moral Sense*. And thence we may too hastily

⁷⁰ Each of the three statements is asserted, implied, or presupposed in many of Burnet's remarks. Regarding the first one see Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10, 34, 35, 36, 37, 43, 44, 45–46, 63, 66–67, 70; regarding the second see Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 34, 35, 36–37, 42–43, 45–46, 59, 62; regarding the third see Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 10–11, 12, 16, 17, 34, 35, 37, 42–44, 45–46, 59, 65–66, 67.

⁷¹ See Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 46–55.

⁷² In *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 46–47.

⁷³ For those two letters see Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 31–46.

⁷⁴ Let me add that nothing in Hutcheson's letter makes it implausible that his earliest discussion of reasons addresses the argument for (3). For example, his discussion aims at the view, implicit in Burnet's letter, "That there is some *Exciting Reason to Virtue*, antecedent to all *kind Affections*, or *Instinct* toward the Good of Others: And that in like Manner there are some *justifying Reasons*, or Truths, antecedent to any *Moral Sense*, causing Approbation" (Hutcheson, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 48–49). This statement is a rough summary of the Antecedence Claim, a step in the argument for (3).

conclude, that (a) such a Conduct is *Reasonable*, for this Reason, because our *Natural Affections* and *Moral Sense* move us to it. But, if we examine more closely, I believe (b) we shall find the Reverse to be the Truth, *viz.* That we deem our *Affections* and our *Moral Sense* to be *Reasonable Affections*, and a *Reasonable Sense*, from their prompting us to the same Conduct which *Reason* approves and directs. And thus *Reason* is the Measure of the *Goodness* or *Badness* of our *Affections*, and *Moral Sense*, and consequently of the Actions flowing from them, and not *vice versa*. (Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 34–35)

This passage lends itself to a reconstruction that makes it roughly equivalent to the argument for (3). Its first three sentences are background; the meat of the argument begins with assertion (b). Thus, as a step toward reconstructing the argument, let me comment briefly on (b).

According to (b), “we shall find the Reverse [of assertion (a)] to be the Truth.” Taken in context (e.g. given the clause that precedes it), this means two things rather than one: first, the relation of dependency to which (a) refers does not exist; and second, what does exist is the reverse of that relation. Hence, the following seems to be the nub of (b):

The actions that comport with our moral sense and our natural affections—that is, the actions that please our moral sense and promise to satisfy our natural affections—owe their reasonableness to something other than their agreeable relation to that sense or to those affections. They comport with that sense and those affections only because, antecedently to doing so, they are reasonable.

However, if this thesis is the essence of (b), we should avoid a literal reading of the abbreviation ‘*viz.*’ which precedes the assertion following (b): that “we deem our *Affections* and our *Moral Sense* to be *Reasonable Affections*, and a *Reasonable Sense*, from their prompting us to the same Conduct which *Reason* approves and directs.” Although this assertion is closely related to the above thesis, it is not equivalent to it. Rather, it is putative support for it. In other words, some might say that because we judge our natural affections and our moral sense to be reasonable, and because we base this judgment on our view that the deeds that comport with those things are reasonable, we have reason to accept the essence of (b): that the deeds just mentioned owe their reasonableness to something other than their relation to our moral sense and natural affections. They agree with that sense and those affections only because they are antecedently reasonable.

Two more things deserve notice. The first concerns the conclusion of the argument, according to which “*Reason* is the Measure of the *Goodness* or *Badness* of our *Affections*, and *Moral Sense*, and consequently of the Actions flowing from them, and not *vice versa*.” This conclusion employs the word ‘goodness’ rather than ‘reasonableness,’ where ‘goodness’ presumably denotes *moral* goodness. Thus, it is fair to formulate the premises of the argument so that they explicitly mention moral goodness. For instance, in those premises it is fair to replace ‘reasonable’ with ‘reasonable and morally good.’

Second, the core of the conclusion, which is that reason is the measure of goodness and badness, is not entirely clear. Does it mean simply that reason is the *faculty* of moral approval, or does it mean, in part, that an act is morally good only if it meets reason's standards—that is, only if it conforms to reason? I will not try to settle this question; the important point is that the second reading is both feasible and charitable. This is true especially in light of the first sentence in the quotation and the many similar sentences in Burnet's letters.

In view of these remarks, the following is a plausible reconstruction of the argument. Its second premise is the thesis expressed by (b); its first premise is what I mentioned a bit ago as putative support for that thesis.

We judge our natural affections and moral sense to be reasonable and morally good. We do so on the grounds that the deeds that comport with them—that is, the deeds that please our moral sense and promise to satisfy our natural affections—are reasonable and morally good.

It stands to reason, therefore, that those deeds owe their reasonableness and moral goodness to something other than their agreeable relation to our moral sense and natural affections. They comport with that sense and those affections only because, antecedently to doing so, they are reasonable and morally good.

So it must be that *reason*, not an affection or a moral sense, is the measure of moral goodness and badness. This means, in part, that conformity to reason is the essence of virtue.

Before I say more about this argument, let me attend to the second passage in Burnet's letter, meaning the second of the two passages that approximate the argument for (3):

It is from this Perception [treated earlier in the letter] of the *Reasonableness* of regarding the *Happiness* of *Many* more than the *Happiness* of a *Few*, that we discern and admire the *Wisdom* of our Maker, in implanting *Social* and *Publick Affections* in his Creatures, to be subservient to this *wise* and *reasonable* End. Whereas, if we had not this previous Apprehension of *Reasonableness*, antecedent to, and independent on, any *Affections*, or *Sense* of them, we could not judge it to be more *wise* or *reasonable* to have bestowed such *social Affections* on Men, than to have given them only *selfish Affections*, prompting them to take care of themselves alone, without any respect to the *Cruelty of the Means*, or the *bad Influence on a Community*. (Burnet, *Burnet vs. Hutcheson*, 36–37)

The most important assertion here is the second one: "If we had not this previous Apprehension ... we could not judge it to be more ..." Owing partly to the contraposition rule, we can rewrite this assertion as the following conditional statement:

If we judge our social and public affections to be wise and reasonable, i.e. to derive from a wise and reasonable choice on the part of the being who

bestowed them on us, then our apprehension of reasonableness in their product—their product being our preference for the happiness of many over the happiness of a few—is antecedent to any agreeable relation between an action, a preference, etc., and a sense or affection.

Also, since Burnet takes the antecedent of this statement for granted (see the first sentence in the quotation), he almost surely is advancing not a conditional statement but an argument—an argument in which the antecedent of the statement is the premise; the consequent the conclusion. At first, that argument seems quite different from the three-step argument set out a bit ago. However, we must keep in mind its context. It comes shortly after the argument just mentioned, and the letters in which it appears have the same point as that argument. Hence, we can assume that its conclusion is only an intermediate conclusion; its main conclusion is the same as that of the previous argument. Given this, the argument goes as follows:

We judge our social and public affections to be wise and reasonable, i.e. to derive from a wise and reasonable choice on the part of the being who bestowed them on us.

Thus, our apprehension of reasonableness in their product—their product being our preference for the happiness of many over the happiness of a few—is antecedent to any agreeable relation between an action, a preference, etc., and a sense or affection.

So it must be that *reason*, not an affection or a moral sense, is the measure of moral goodness and badness. This means, in part, that conformity to reason is the essence of virtue.

We now have two arguments, each derived from Burnet's letter, for the view that reason is the measure of goodness, and conformity to reason the essence of virtue. Clearly, these arguments resemble the three-step argument Hutcheson addresses in his treatment of reasons for action. This is true whether we focus on Hutcheson's abbreviated version of that argument or on the amplified version. I believe, therefore, that in constructing that argument Hutcheson is trying to approximate the two arguments just discussed. This is not *all* he is trying to do; I suspect that he is trying to accommodate many passages and implications in Burnet's letters. The argument he constructs is a composite of those passages and implications. Even so, I believe that he has the two passages recently quoted very much in view.

In section 5 I showed that Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons is part of his defense of the falseness assertion and the conflict assertion. Let me now sum up sections 6 and 7, first by recalling those two assertions. The latter say, respectively, that we do not have a "standard" antecedently to sense and affections; and that the opposite view (that we have such a standard) conflicts

with, rather than supports, the rationalists' view that virtue is conformity to reason. More precisely, it conflicts with that view if the latter has its E- or its J-reading, a reading that ties virtue either to exciting reasons or to justifying reasons. In sections 6 and 7 I have argued that in defending the falseness and conflict assertions, Hutcheson means to refute the argument that consists, in its amplified form, of statements (1) through (3). Also, there is evidence that he aims to do more than this. He aims to refute the argument on the assumption that the argument is Burnet's.

8.

So, what is the function of Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons? What role does it play in his *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*? My answer stems mainly from sections 5 through 7. It also recalls some points from sections 3 and 4.

First of all, we can describe the immediate aim of Hutcheson's discussion as follows:

Hutcheson is trying to show that reason recommends an act, and hence exciting reasons exist for the act, just in case the act agrees with an antecedent affection. He is contending, further, that no affection is produced or required by reason alone.

This aim subserves a few others:

Hutcheson is trying to show that the thesis "Reasonableness in an action is sometimes a motive" is uninformative at best. It fails to inform us that every action springs from a belief combined with a desire—a desire that reason alone can neither require nor create.

Hutcheson is defending elements of what I labeled, in section 5.3, the falseness and conflict assertions. The elements in question are the following. First, the Antecedence Claim, the claim that we have a "standard" antecedent to sense and affection, is false on the following count: reason cannot recommend an act unless the act agrees with a pre-existing affection. Second, on its E-reading, according to which the virtue of an act amounts to there being exciting reasons for the act, the normative thesis of rationalism draws no support from, but rather conflicts with, the Antecedence Claim.

Hutcheson intends his treatment of exciting reasons not only to further the previous aims, but to do so as part of a larger task: that of answering Burnet's objections of 1725. He intends it as part of his comeback to the objection I reconstructed as statements (1) through (3). As just indicated, Hutcheson intends his treatment of exciting reasons to establish the

following points about that objection. First, statement (2), the Antecedence Claim, is false owing to what it says about the conditions under which reason recommends an act. Second, on the E-reading of the thesis that virtue is conformity to reason, statement (3) (which endorses that thesis) draws no support from, but rather conflicts with, statement (2).

Possibly, Hutcheson wants not only to refute Burnet's objection, but also to refute an element of the moral philosophy from which Burnet draws some of his premises. That moral philosophy is Samuel Clarke's, which many interpret (whether accurately or not)⁷⁵ as including the view that moral perceptions are intrinsically motivating.

Obviously, Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons is not limited to one purpose; it figures in several tasks. Among them, however, is not the most prominent task of the *Illustrations*: that of arguing that moral rationalism implies, contrary to one of its elements, that moral ideas spring from a sense.

9.

My topic in this paper has been Hutcheson's discussion of exciting reasons, particularly its role in the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*. Of course, on interpretive matters of this kind, especially those that involve scrutiny of many passages, conclusive arguments are unavailable. I believe, however, that I have made a strong case for the following two claims. First, Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons has not one, but several functions. Mainly, it is part of his response to Burnet's objections of 1725. Second, it is not part of the most salient task of the *Illustrations*, the execution of which Hutcheson calls "the Design" of his essay. That task is his effort to show that the rationalists' normative thesis commits them to a moral epistemology similar to his own.

Clearly, my goals have been limited. For instance, I have focused not on evaluating Hutcheson's essay, but on understanding the role of a key part of it. My animating assumption has been that if a text has classic importance, any effort to shed light on it has value. The same goes for *concepts* that have such importance, and Hutcheson's notion of exciting reasons is such a concept. Not only is his treatment of it one of the most oft-cited passages in his works, but many current debates in metaethics involve concepts (e.g. that of "motivating reasons") that descend directly from Hutcheson's. It is thus worthwhile, historically at the very least, to investigate the role of that concept in Hutcheson's *Illustrations*.

But the investigation has more than historical interest. For example, it crucially involves clarifying and distinguishing some of the chief aspects of Hutcheson's essay. In the absence of this clarification, misunderstandings are easy. For instance, to think that Hutcheson's project with respect to exciting

⁷⁵ See note 51.

reasons, his argument that such reasons presuppose affections, is somehow part of his main project with respect to rationalism is to risk distorting both of those projects.

Such a distortion can have further unwanted results. If, for example, one assumes that Hutcheson's two projects are of one piece, then Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons may lead one to doubt the results of the projects *in toto*. I say this because Hutcheson's treatment of exciting reasons has a noticeable flaw. It assumes that the view it opposes stems from confusion, that those who hold it overlook the separate offices of reason and affection, and thus fallaciously conclude that motivation can occur without desire.⁷⁶ However, some philosophers come to that conclusion through no simple fallacy. They are challenging, rather than neglecting, the traditional division of the faculties.

Let me add that my investigation has a side benefit. For if I am right in my interpretation of Hutcheson, to understand the role of his treatment of exciting reasons we must look carefully at the original stimulus of the *Illustrations*, namely, Burnet's letters to the *London Journal*. I would be pleased if this paper led to an increased interest in those letters, especially in the relation between the Burnet-Hutcheson exchange and the positions, arguments, and other elements of Hutcheson's essay. Such an interest would be most welcome, for that relation is a largely neglected topic that deserves further study.⁷⁷

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⁷⁶ See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Essay & Illustrations*, 139.

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