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# On the Obligation to be Virtuous: Shaftesbury and the Question, Why be Moral?

GREGORY W. TRIANOSKY

RECENT DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTION, Why be moral? has centered to a large extent on the seeming conflict between the demands of morality and the demands of self-interest. Moreover, the conflict has been characterized primarily as a conflict between the demands of two sorts of guides or (sets of) rules for *action*. The strategy most often employed has been to try to show that the right action, required by the *moral action guide*, is always or almost always also the prudent action, required by the *self-interest action guide*. In this way, it has often been thought, “being moral” could be “justified.”

Without quarreling here with the general sort of approach exemplified in this strategy, it must be noted that the strategy itself has been quite unsatisfying in at least one important respect. For “right action,” and hence the justification of a “code” of right action, is surely not the whole of morality. Moral judgments about persons, character traits, mental states, attitudes, feelings, and so on, play just as prominent a role in our ordinary discourse as judgments about right actions. And, correspondingly, it seems that for many of us a sort of *moral life guide*, or “code of being,” is just as fundamental a part of our morality as the moral action guide.

But if this is so, then it is clear that, focusing as it has primarily on the “justification” of moral action guides, the recent discussion has not dealt squarely with the perhaps equally important issue of the “justification” of moral life guides: guides that tell us primarily what sort of person we ought morally to be; what sorts of character traits, attitudes, feelings, or desires we ought to have. Nor is it obvious that the arguments “justifying” adherence to the moral action guide serve to justify adherence to the moral life guide. For it seems plausible that someone might say, “Yes, I believe that I am justified in *acting* morally, outwardly; but ought I to *be*—am I justified in being—a moral person, inwardly, and not just in acting like one?”

Lord Shaftesbury’s discussion of the justification of moral guides, or of, as he calls it, the “obligation to be virtuous,” adopts the general sort of approach exemplified above. But Shaftesbury, we might say, uses a “virtue strategy” to answer the question, Why be moral? He focuses not primarily on the justification of a *moral action guide* but rather on the justification of a *moral life guide*.

It is for this reason that the doctrines and arguments of his *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* can play a useful and important role in contemporary discussion. A reconsideration and analysis of the arguments Shaftesbury presents there can serve as

a first step toward a fuller discussion of the role and “justification” of guides to moral life.

In this paper I want to try to bring some order into the rich and tangled complexity of Shaftesbury’s thought. Primarily, my purpose in so doing is to see whether his arguments for the obligation to be virtuous stand on their own merits, or whether they are logically dependent on certain other elements in his theory. I wish to show, specifically, that these arguments do stand or fall independently of the doctrine of the moral sense. If this can be shown, then the way has been paved for a useful discussion of these arguments, on their merits. Secondly, however, I think Shaftesbury’s thought is of great interest in its own right. An examination of my *claim of logical independence*, as I shall call it, will take us to the very center of his views on virtue, the moral sense, and the good life. And while I cannot here explore these views in sufficiently great detail, at least the broad outlines of an interpretation of some of the major lines of Shaftesbury’s thought will emerge along the way.

To establish the claim of logical independence, I will: (1) define Shaftesbury’s notion of the “natural affections”; (2) define the (dependent) notions of “virtuous action” and “the virtuous man”; and (3) offer an analysis of Shaftesbury’s own views on the claim of logical independence, and hence of the status of the claim itself. I will conclude by trying briefly to place his arguments for the obligation to be virtuous in a wider context, with respect to their impact on the question, Why be moral?

## I

To clarify the role Shaftesbury’s arguments on the obligation to be virtuous were designed to play, some preliminary remarks are in order. He was concerned to show that the following argument was unsound:

- P<sub>1</sub> If it is not in one’s own interest to be moral, then one ought not to be so.  
 P<sub>2</sub> It is not in one’s own interest to be moral.  
 Therefore, one ought not to be moral.<sup>1</sup>

He claims in particular that the minor premise is false: it is always or almost always in one’s own interest to be moral (28, p. 282). He offers in support of this claim the following argument:

- P<sub>1</sub> It is always in one’s own interest to be happy.  
 P<sub>2</sub> Having the natural affections to an appropriate degree is (at least) a necessary condition for being happy.  
 Therefore, it is always in one’s own interest to have the natural affections to an appropriate degree.

And from this conclusion, together with the additional premise that being virtuous or “moral” consists precisely in having the natural affections to such a degree (along

<sup>1</sup> *An Inquiry concerning Virtue*, in L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., *British Moralists* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), margin nos. 27–28; also in *Characteristics*, ed. J. M. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 281–282. Both editions hereafter cited, in the above order, by margin and page numbers.

with other conditions Shaftesbury holds to be satisfied by almost all rational creatures), it follows that it is almost always in one's own interest to "be moral" (26, pp. 280–81; 36, p. 292).

Shaftesbury does not seem to think that any argument is required to establish the truth of premise one. The arguments on the obligation to be virtuous, therefore, are directed to establishing premise two, and the definitions of "natural affection" and "virtue" provide support for both premise two and the additional premise mentioned above.

## II

Book 1 of the *Inquiry* is concerned primarily to define the notions of natural affection and virtue, and to defend those definitions. I will now offer in outline what I believe to be the most plausible reading of the definitions Shaftesbury there presents.

A. THE NATURAL AFFECTIONS: LOVE, GRATITUDE, GOOD WILL AND A SYMPATHY WITH THE KIND OR SPECIES<sup>2</sup> The natural or "good" affections (11, p. 251) are, like all affections, "sentiments" or "passions" (1, p. 243), or, in contemporary terms, desires, attitudes or mental states of a certain sort. I believe Shaftesbury holds the following to be necessary and sufficient conditions for an affection's being natural:

- (1) An affection is natural if and only if its operation tends to enhance the good of the kind or species. (10, p. 250; 33, p. 286; 1, pp. 243–244)

Now sometimes Shaftesbury seems to say the following:

- (2) An affection is natural if and only if its "immediate object" is the good of the kind or species. (5, p. 247; see 9–10, pp. 249–250)

Is this latter definition just a restatement of (1)? This depends on how it is interpreted, and there are at least two possibilities, depending on what the term "object" is taken to mean.

To begin with, (2) could mean:

- (2') An affection is natural if and only if its *intentional object* is the good of the kind or species.

Sometimes—indeed most of the time—when Shaftesbury talks of the "object" of an affection, desire, sentiment or passion, he seems to mean something like its intentional object: roughly, "that towards which the affection is directed." This sense of "object" is used, most importantly, to distinguish two sorts of affections:

'Tis impossible to suppose a mere sensible Creature originally so ill-constituted, and unnatural, as that from the moment he comes to be try'd by sensible Objects, he shou'd have no one good Passion towards his Kind, no foundation either of Pity, Love, Kindness, or social Affection. 'Tis full as impossible to conceive, that a rational Creature coming first to be try'd by rational

<sup>2</sup> 38, p. 293; see also, e.g., 25, p. 266; 22, p. 259.

Objects, and receiving into his Mind the Images or Representations of Justice, Generosity, Gratitude, or other Virtue, shou'd have no *Liking* of these, or *Dislike* of their contraries. . . . (22, pp. 259–260; see also 11, p. 251)

I take an affection to have a *rational or mental object*<sup>3</sup> when its intentional object is something on which the mind reflects: past action, affections, character traits, memories of events, states of mind, and so on (see 48, pp. 304–305). The fact that rational creatures can have affections that take mental objects makes it possible for them to be virtuous rather than merely natural or good (11, p. 251). And I take an affection to have a *sensible object*, simply, when it does not have a mental object.

But this sense of “object” cannot be the sense in which Shaftesbury uses the term in (2), as (2') claims. To begin with, (2') entails that no affection can be natural or “good” if its intentional object is not the good of the kind or species. But Shaftesbury clearly thinks there are affections that are “natural” and “good,” and whose absence is “unnatural,” “vitious,” and “ill,” which take as their intentional objects not the good of the kind or species but rather the “private” good, or the good of the self (7–8, pp. 248–249; 34, pp. 287–288). Furthermore, (2') entails that any affection whose intentional object is the good of the kind or species must always be a natural one. But Shaftesbury explicitly says that the natural affections, if present in too great a degree, can be “unnatural” and “vitious,” though “it may seem harsh” to call them so (33, p. 286).

Alternatively, when Shaftesbury elaborates the “immediate object” requirement (he speaks of “immediate affection” here), he seems to be saying that (2) means:

- (2'') An affection is natural if and only if it leads immediately and primarily and not secondarily and accidentally to the good of the kind or species. (10, p. 250)

Here there is suggested a second sense of the term “object,” in which, I think, an affection has as its immediate object the good of the kind or species if and only if its operation tends to enhance the good of the kind or species. For (2'') seems to mean that an affection, to be natural, must not lead merely to “one” good act or occasional ones, “accidentally”; rather, its usual or “primary” result must be the enhancement of the good of the kind or species.

That this second sense of the term “object” is in use when Shaftesbury offers (2) is further suggested by the example he offers in his explication of the notion of an “immediate object” (9, pp. 249–250). Here, he seems to claim that the creature that has a “tame and gentle carriage” but that “proceeds only from the fear of his keeper” is still “as *ill* as ever,” because when the fear of the keeper is “set aside,” “his predominant passion (fierceness) instantly breaks out.” And this remark seems to amount to nothing more than the claim that the creature is not motivated by natural affection precisely because his affections do not generally have good consequences.

In addition, there is some evidence independent of these passages that Shaftesbury sometimes uses the term “object” in this second sense. When he discusses at a more

<sup>3</sup> He sometimes speaks, equivalently, of “moral objects”, (20, p. 257), sometimes of “subjects” (12, p. 251). He suggests the phrase “mental object” (12, p. 252), which I will use.

general level the notion of the “object” of an affection and its relation to the naturalness of the affection he does seem sometimes to equate it explicitly with the “tendency” of the affection, which, I think, can be nothing other than the tendency of the operation of the affection to produce certain sorts of consequences. Thus, in discussing mathematics, he remarks that the passion for mathematical exercise “must either be esteem’d superfluous and *unnatural*, (as *having no tendency towards the Advantage or Good of any thing in Nature*) or it must be judg’d to be . . . ‘A natural Joy in the Contemplation of those *Numbers*. . .’” (42, p. 296; emphasis mine within the parentheses). If Shaftesbury is, then, accepted as using the term “object” in this second sense in (2), and (2) is thus analyzed as (2’), it is clear that (1) and (2) are *equiv- alent* at least extensionally, if not also in meaning.

To summarize: I have suggested that the notions of the intentional object of an affection and the “immediate object” of an affection are quite distinct. The intentional object is that toward which the affection is directed or aimed, whereas the immediate object is nothing more than those consequences the affection tends to produce. The natural affections are those whose “object” is the good of the kind or species in this second sense, as (1) indicates, and not necessarily those whose intentional object is the good of the kind or species, as (2’) suggests.<sup>4</sup> A good deal more needs to be said about Shaftesbury’s views here, but what I have offered is, I believe, a start in the right direction.

**B. VICE AND VIRTUE** The definitions of virtue and vice can now be stated, tentatively, by reference to the notions of natural affection and intentional objects:

- (3) A *creature* is virtuous if and only if (a) it has a moral sense and (b) the mental or intentional object of the approval of the moral sense is the natural affections and their consequences.<sup>5</sup>

And, presumably, though Shaftesbury is less explicit here:

- (4) An *action* is virtuous if and only if (a) it is performed out of the natural affections and (b) it (they) is (are) the mental or intentional objects(s) of the approval of the moral sense.

And creatures or actions are “vicious” just in case they are not virtuous. There are really three central features here that merit some comment. I will restrict myself for the moment to (4).

<sup>4</sup> I cannot forbear adding an observation that may be found of some importance. It does not follow from the fact that the natural and nonnatural affections are distinguished by virtue of their tendencies to produce certain sorts of consequences that Shaftesbury holds that an affection just *is* a disposition or tendency to act in a certain way.

In fact, Shaftesbury is not entirely clear about what an affection is. When he argues in book 2 that it is in our self-interest to have or perhaps to cultivate the natural affections, sometimes he seems to be arguing that it is in our self-interest to have or not to have certain feelings (57, pp. 317f.; 58, pp. 319–320); sometimes that it is in our self-interest to *act* in certain ways (40f., pp. 294f.; 49f., pp. 305ff.) or to have certain attitudes (50, pp. 306f.); sometimes to cultivate certain character traits (47, pp. 302f.); and sometimes to be in certain mental states.

<sup>5</sup> This definition actually requires modification for Shaftesbury’s treatment of excuses (see 13–16, pp. 252ff.)

1. It will be noted that by this definition Shaftesbury is neither an act- nor a rule-utilitarian. And indeed, his seeming definition of right or morally worthy action notwithstanding (32, pp. 285–286; 13, pp. 252–253), he clearly holds that the moral worth of one act or of a sort of action is not determined by its utility (see 13, pp. 252–253).<sup>6</sup>

2. Shaftesbury rather casts the necessary and sufficient conditions for an action's being virtuous as requirements, broadly speaking, about what must be true of the agent who performs it. The first condition, (4a), should be clear enough by now. It is necessary but not sufficient (11, p. 251). The second, (4b), raises the issues surrounding his doctrine of the moral sense and requires more extended comment.

In order to have a moral sense, Shaftesbury believes, a creature must be *rational*: he must be able to *reflect* on “what passes in [the mind], as well as in the Affections, or Will,” on his “Character, Conduct, or Behaviour” (48, pp. 304–305). Now any rational creature, on reflecting, will be aware that some of his affections and their consequences are natural—as contributing to the public good—and that others are not (21, pp. 258–259; 13, pp. 252–253). The moral sense is then that faculty which, upon reflection, generally will approve of those affections (and their consequences) that are natural and disapprove of those that are not. Not all rational creatures need have the moral sense, at least not in full, but Shaftesbury holds that in fact most do (50, pp. 306f.; 21, pp. 258–259; 22, p. 259. See also 25, pp. 265–266, and Sec. III below).

3. Shaftesbury remarks a number of times that the approving and disapproving attitudes of the moral sense are themselves really natural affections (11, p. 251; see 19, p. 256; 20, p. 257; 23, p. 261). Now they are natural affections of a different order from those so far discussed, because their intentional objects are moral, rational, or *mental* objects, and not *sensible* ones. (20, p. 257; see also 19, p. 256). But they are, nonetheless, desires or favorable attitudes directed toward certain sorts of things that can play a motivating role in action<sup>7</sup> and hence are properly classified as affections. And that they are natural is the premise underlying much of the discussion of the obligation to be virtuous, as the beginning sections of book 2 suggest.

### III

With these definitions established we can now assess (1) Shaftesbury's own views on the claim of the logical independence of the arguments for the obligation to be virtuous of his doctrine of the moral sense, and (2) the results for the status of the claim itself.

Now Shaftesbury's overall purpose in book 2 of the *Inquiry*, as I have indicated, is to show that “TO HAVE THE NATURAL AFFECTIONS . . . IS TO HAVE THE CHIEF MEANS AND POWER OF SELF-ENJOYMENT: And THAT TO WANT THEM IS CERTAIN MISERY AND ILL” (38, p. 293). In his second attempt to prove this conclusion Shaftesbury seems to try to show that it follows from the doctrine of the “moral sense,” or what he here calls “conscience” (46, p. 302).<sup>8</sup> Shaftesbury's view of the claim of logical independence unfolds as he develops this argument, and so I will proceed by examining it (reorganized for clarity's sake) step by step.

<sup>6</sup> If my definition of natural affection is correct, it does follow that he can plausibly be considered a sort of *trait-utilitarian*—one who thinks, roughly, that an affection is virtuous or morally good if and only if its cultivation or operation maximizes utility. I owe this notion to some remarks by W. K. Frankena.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g., the role of the false sense of conscience (50, pp. 307f.).

<sup>8</sup> I will not discuss here Shaftesbury's theological arguments for the obligation to be virtuous (pp. 265f., esp. p. 277). So far as I can tell, they stand independently of the issues and arguments surrounding the doctrine of the moral sense that are my primary concern.

A. All rational creatures introspect, in virtue of being rational. That is, the rational creature is “forc’d to endure the *Review* of his own Mind, and Actions; and to have Representations of himself, and his inward Affairs, constantly passing before him, obvious to him, and revolving in his Mind” (48, p. 305).

B. Upon introspection, either “unjust” and “foolish” actions, and so on, will generate feelings of disapproval—will be found “odious” and “ill-deserving”—or they will not.

1. Suppose that they do generate such feelings, as Shaftesbury believes is in some sense always the case. Now to have feelings of disapproval upon reflection on such actions is precisely to manifest possession of a moral sense or conscience. But there are, Shaftesbury says, at least two different *sorts* of conscience or moral sense, which seem for him to be distinguished primarily by the reasons why unjust and foolish actions generate feelings of disapproval in each case. The first I shall call the “peripheral” moral sense, or, alternatively, the “prudential” sense; and the second, the “moral sense proper.”<sup>9</sup>

In the case of the operation of the prudential or peripheral moral sense, feelings of disapproval are generated by such actions because we are aware of their “ill-deserving” nature.<sup>10</sup> We disapprove of the action, as I understand it, because we know—as all rational creatures would—that we cannot “do ill” without “deserving ill” (49, p. 306), and because we know further that “*what* they know they deserve from everyone, *that* they necessarily must fear and expect from all” (49, p. 306; see 21, p. 259). The knowledge that we have performed an action that almost surely in turn will cause *us* to be harmed—that will damage the pursuit of our self-interest—leads us to disapprove of the action in question.

I take this prudential or peripheral moral sense to be identical with what Shaftesbury later refers to as the second part of conscience, which generates feelings of disapproval because of the “remembrance of *what was at any time unreasonably and foolishly done, in prejudice of one’s real Interest or Happiness*” (51, p. 308). Thus, he notes,

even where there is no Sense of moral Deformity, as *such merely*; there must still be a Sense of the ill Merit of it with respect to God and Man. . . . ’tis evident that a Man of this unhappy Character must suffer a very sensible Loss . . . in his Interest and outward Happiness. Nor can the Sense of this Disadvantage fail to occur to him. . . . (51, pp. 308–309)

That it is not in our self-interest to perform acts of which we will later disapprove on reflection, Shaftesbury thinks is clear, presumably because to do so prevents a mind from being “*well compos’d and easy within it-self*” (48, p. 304). And, further, the disapproval of the prudential sense is followed by feelings of “regret” and “envy” (51, p. 309), which sentiments it is clearly not in our self-interest to experience, all things being equal.

In the case of the moral sense proper, however, feelings of disapproval are generated because of our awareness of the wrong act as “deformed” and “odious,” “in

<sup>9</sup> Shaftesbury might object to my terminology, although earlier in the *Inquiry* he does seem to use the term “sense” in this broad way.

<sup>10</sup> Shaftesbury seem primarily concerned in the arguments on conscience to show how it operates with respect to the mental review of *actions*, although his initial remarks on introspection indicate that it has a much wider scope—as indeed it should if Shaftesbury is concerned to justify some sort of moral life guide.

itself merely" (51, p. 308; see 21, p. 259; 49–50, pp. 305–306). Shaftesbury seems to mean here that those creatures who do have the moral sense proper (see 22–23, pp. 259–260) will disapprove upon reflection of all actions that, as not motivated by the natural affections, do not contribute to the public good, and that they will do so *merely because* this is the case. This view is quite plausible if we remember that for Shaftesbury the moral sense is, so to speak, merely a "second-order" natural affection: a favorable attitude or desire on reflection directed toward the first-order natural affections (i.e., those with sensible objects), and an unfavorable attitude or desire directed toward the first-order nonnatural affections.<sup>11</sup>

Again Shaftesbury seems to take it for granted that it is not in our self-interest to perform acts whose review gives rise to such feelings of disapproval, and he also remarks that disapproval here is followed in turn by rather different but equally unpleasant feelings: "*consequent Shame or Regret of incurring what is odious, and moves Aversion*" (49, p. 306).

For most rational beings, who do possess the moral sense, either peripheral or proper, the apparent conclusion is that it is not in their self-interest to perform "vitious" actions that will become objects of disapproval.<sup>12</sup>

My reference to "Shaftesbury's doctrine of the moral sense" is to his doctrine of the moral sense proper. The claim of logical independence, therefore, can be stated more precisely as the claim that Shaftesbury's arguments for the obligation to be virtuous stand or fall independently of the merits of his doctrine of the moral sense proper. And by that doctrine I mean the claims just discussed about the operation of the moral sense proper, as well as my earlier remarks on the foundation of the moral sense itself.

With this in mind, if we attempt to disentangle these arguments of Shaftesbury's for the obligation to be virtuous from his doctrine of the moral sense proper, we meet with little difficulty. For it would seem that he has shown that either the disapproval of the prudential sense or the disapproval of the moral sense proper, alone, is sufficient to provide a rational creature with good self-interested reasons for having or cultivating the natural affections. We can refuse to accept Shaftesbury's doctrine of the moral sense proper, therefore, and still find (thus far) some plausible argument for the obligation to be virtuous, based on the operation of the prudential sense.<sup>13</sup> What the precise impact of these arguments is will be discussed briefly in Section IV.

2. Suppose, on the other hand, that upon introspection "unjust" and "foolish" actions do *not* generate feelings of disapproval. Here the tangle is thicker, for Shaftesbury's doctrine of the moral sense proper leads him to make claims that seem to show that *none* of his arguments for the obligation to be virtuous stand independently of

<sup>11</sup> "Second-order desires" is a term used by Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971):5–20. My use of the term differs somewhat from his, however.

<sup>12</sup> It can now be seen that Shaftesbury's views on the moral sense support my analysis of (2) in Section II. The affections generated by the moral sense are repeatedly called natural, as I noted above, although their intentional objects are sometimes actions that work to the ill of the kind or species.

<sup>13</sup> Shaftesbury's discussion of the prudential sense is quite limited. In any case, all that we need to presuppose in order to be able to assess the arguments for the obligation to be virtuous here is that in fact all rational beings *do* have second-order desires to enhance their own self-interest, however weak they may be, and hence that they will tend to approve of affections, and so on, that have that goal as their "immediate" object and disapprove of those that do not. And this surely is not an implausible presupposition.

that doctrine. Here, then, we have found the heart of his views on the claim of logical independence.

(a) It is important to understand clearly the situation under discussion. Shaftesbury believes that it is impossible for any rational creature not to possess the prudential sense (21, p. 259; 49–50, p. 306). And I will not dispute this assumption here. The case under discussion, rather, is one in which a rational creature does not have the moral sense proper; one whom “Consciousness of Villany, *as such merely*, does not at all offend; nor any thing opprobrious or heinously imputable, move, or affect” (50, p. 306). For our interest is in the relation of the doctrine of the moral sense proper to the arguments for the obligation to be virtuous.

Now it should be clear that for Shaftesbury a creature lacking the moral sense proper cannot be virtuous or vicious, as the definitions in Section II above indicate (see also 25, p. 266; 13, pp. 252–253). And, indeed, in the passage I will now discuss, he notes that such a creature must be “absolutely indifferent toward moral Good or Ill” (50, p. 306).

(b) But Shaftesbury also makes a much stronger and more important claim about such a creature:

There scarcely is, or can be any Creature, whom Consciousness of Villany, *as such merely*, does not at all offend; nor any thing opprobrious or heinously imputable, move, or affect. If there be such a one; 'tis evident he must be absolutely indifferent towards moral Good or Ill. If this indeed be his Case; 'twill be allow'd he can be no-way capable of natural Affection: If not of that, then neither of any social Pleasure, or mental Enjoyment, as shewn above. . . . So that to want CONSCIENCE, or *natural Sense of the Odiousness of Crime and Injustice*, is to be most of all miserable in Life. . . . (50, p. 306)

Shaftesbury reiterates this claim in connection with a different point in the next paragraph. Concerning the case of a man who kills his companion in a passion, he observes that “if on the other side, we suppose him *not* to relent or suffer any real Concern or Shame; then . . . he has no Sense of the Deformity of the Crime and Injustice, no natural Affection, and consequently no Happiness or Peace within. . . .” (50, p. 307; see also 51, pp. 308–309). Shaftesbury’s argument here denies the claim of logical independence, as can be seen when it is laid out step by step.

1. Given a rational creature who fails to some degree to possess the natural affections.<sup>14</sup>
2. If that creature does not feel disapproval of the vicious actions that are consequently performed, in themselves merely, then he has no moral sense proper.
3. If he has no moral sense proper, then he is absolutely indifferent toward moral good or ill.
4. If he is absolutely indifferent toward moral good or ill, then he will be altogether incapable of natural affection.
5. If he is altogether incapable of natural affection, then he will be most of all miserable in life.

<sup>14</sup> The original premise of the discussion on conscience (48, p. 305). The conclusion he draws is of course much stronger than this premise. And it is only from the conclusion drawn in 4 that he seems to think he can move to 5.

Here it is clear that steps 3 and 4, taken together, amount to a denial of the claim of logical independence.

3. I take the views Shaftesbury expresses here as the most serious challenge to the claim of logical independence. I will now argue that he provides no good reason for accepting the views he offers in this passage and, consequently, for rejecting that claim.

Step 3 is unobjectionable. But it seems to me that Shaftesbury is either mistaken or confused in step 4. He seems to be thinking something like the following, in support of that step:

- (i) To say that a creature is absolutely indifferent to moral good or ill is to say that the creature feels neither favorably nor unfavorably inclined toward the good of the kind or species. (See 51, pp. 308–309)
- (ii) But to have the natural affections just *is* to have a favorable inclination or attitude toward the good of the kind or species.
- (iii) Hence, to be absolutely indifferent to moral good or ill entails not having the natural affections.

This argument in support of step 4 is certainly valid; but even if Shaftesbury can consistently accept premise (ii), premise (i) is most probably false.

To begin with, it seems to me that the following case is a possible one, for all that Shaftesbury has said here or elsewhere in the *Inquiry*. A rational creature might find it very much in his self-interest to have or cultivate the natural affections, but he may still lack the moral sense *proper*; that is, he may feel neither disapproval nor approval on the contemplation of the natural affections and their consequences in themselves merely.

Now such a creature might well disapprove of the nonnatural affections and consequent actions because such mental states, dispositions, character traits, and actions were injurious to his self-interest, as Shaftesbury has argued they in fact are. But this of course would show only that, like all rational creatures, he possessed a prudential or peripheral moral sense. He could nonetheless, it seems to me, be completely indifferent to the natural affections considered in themselves merely. Furthermore, even disregarding the notion of the prudential sense altogether here, it seems that Shaftesbury has in step 4, premise (i) forgotten the distinction between affections with mental objects and those with sensible objects.

The “second-order” or reflective natural affections—those with mental objects—are the attitudes or feelings of approval and disapproval generated by the moral sense. But from the absence of these (as in a creature that is utterly lacking in the moral sense, either peripheral or proper) it does not seem to follow that even the “first-order” or unreflective natural affections whose sensible object is (that are directed toward) the good of the kind will be absent. Just as nonrational creatures can be natural or good even though they lack reflective natural affections, so it seems to me that a rational creature could still desire the good of the kind or species even without a moral sense. And of course there seems no reason at all why those other unreflective natural affections whose sensible object is not the good of the kind could not continue to be present even in the absence of the moral sense.

Now Shaftesbury does repeatedly make remarks, in other connections, such as

“No natural Affection can be contradicted, nor any unnatural one advanc’d, without a prejudice in some degree to all natural Affection in general” (50, p. 308; see 41, p. 295; 44–45, pp. 299–300). Such remarks suggest that he may in the case at hand think that the absence of the reflective natural affections will weaken and ultimately destroy all the other natural affections. But this is a claim that needs proving, given the seemingly possible case I suggested above, and Shaftesbury nowhere even hints at such proof.

I conclude, therefore, that at least so far as Shaftesbury’s views are concerned, the claim of logical independence stands unrefuted. The arguments for the obligation to be virtuous can, in this respect at least, be considered on their merits, independent of one’s views on the doctrine of the moral sense proper.

#### IV

Let me make some closing remarks on the impact that Shaftesbury’s arguments for the obligation to be virtuous may have, thus disentangled and separated from his doctrine of the moral sense.

Many of Shaftesbury’s arguments seem designed to show that rational beings should order their mental processes, characters, and actions according to the dictates of natural affection, regardless of whether they “accept” a moral code embodying those dictates. Shaftesbury thus does not often focus on those self-interested considerations favoring being “well-affected” toward the public good that might arise from prior acceptance of a moral code. Rather, his arguments show that, being constructed as we are, the happiness derived from mental and physical pleasures (39f., pp. 293f.; 53f., pp. 309f.), even-temperedness (47f., pp. 302f.), and a mind at ease with itself (48f., pp. 304f.)<sup>15</sup> cannot be attained unless we are well-affected towards the public good.

It seems to me that the question to which Shaftesbury addresses himself—Why be moral?—can be asked and answered on at least three different levels, if we consider it a demand for the “justification” of either a personal life guide or a guide to action.

- (1) Why should I “be moral”? Why should I do and be what the moral code would require of me if I *accepted* it, regardless of whether or not in fact I do so accept it?
- (2) Why should I accept the moral code?
- (3) Why, having accepted the moral code, should I *conform* to it?<sup>16</sup>

If we distinguish these three ways of approaching the question, so conceived, then Shaftesbury’s arguments mentioned above address themselves primarily to the *first* question.<sup>17</sup> He does not seem to address himself to the second question at all, undoubtedly because his doctrine of the moral sense as innate or natural prevents him from seeing clearly the acceptance-conformity distinction and its application.

<sup>15</sup> So far as the arguments from conscience do not rest on the doctrine of the moral sense proper.

<sup>16</sup> See R. B. Brandt’s explication of the notions of acceptance and conformity in “Some Merits of One Form of Rule-Utilitarianism,” in K. Pahl and M. Schiller, eds., *Readings in Contemporary Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 291–292.

<sup>17</sup> This is not as obviously so with respect to the argument on the prudential or peripheral moral sense. It depends in part on how the term “ill-deserved” is taken. If to say that a rational creature knows that his evil

Those of Shaftesbury's arguments on conscience that rest upon his doctrine of the moral sense proper, however, seem most naturally to address question (3). Now if we read these arguments and keep in mind the claim that forms a fundamental part of that doctrine—that most though perhaps not all rational creatures are naturally endowed with the moral sense proper—then in terms of question (3) we can see Shaftesbury as claiming that most rational creatures by nature accept or have the capacity to accept a moral code. What he then can be taken to show here is that, because of the “lash of *real . . . Conscience*” (50, p. 308), it will always be in those creatures' self-interest to conform to that code which they by nature accept.<sup>18</sup>

But this way of reading Shaftesbury's arguments on the moral sense proper suggests a similar sort of argument that might stand independently at least of certain parts of his doctrine of the moral sense proper. Suppose we accept roughly his account of how the moral sense proper operates, and reject only those parts of the doctrine of the moral sense proper resting on the claim that if rational creatures have a moral sense, it is necessarily because they were naturally endowed with it, or in some sense at least with the capacity for it. It would then follow that if rational creatures had a moral sense (accepted a moral code), it might be because they had learned it or otherwise come to accept it, and not because they were born with it. Shaftesbury's arguments from conscience that address themselves to question (3) can then be taken to show that rational creatures who accept a moral code, however they came to do so, have an obligation to conform to that code—an obligation to be virtuous. Thus, even the arguments from conscience, which *are* logically dependent often on the doctrine of the moral sense proper, can be separated at least from certain elements of that doctrine and thus to some degree can stand on their own merits.

I conclude that Shaftesbury's arguments for the obligation to be virtuous, separated from his doctrine of the moral sense, can be considered an interesting and challenging first step toward an analysis of the justification of a moral life guide and thus a valuable contribution to the contemporary discussion of the question, Why be moral?

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acts are always “ill-deserving” is to say merely that he knows (others being as they are) that his evil acts are more likely than not to evoke responses that harm him (or some such statement of *fact*), then I think the arguments probably stand independently of whether or not the creature, or others, accepts a moral code. This is the easiest way to interpret the passage at 21, p. 259, I think.

<sup>18</sup> See 50, p. 306: “Where *Conscience*, or *Sense* of this sort, remains; there, consequently, whatever is committed against it, must of necessity, by means of Reflection, as we have shewn, be continually shameful, grievous and offensive.”