

Editorial: New Perspectives on Hutcheson's Moral Philosophy

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While Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) may not have the kind of standing in the history of philosophy enjoyed by David Hume or even Adam Smith, he is without a doubt a major figure in the history of ethics. In this narrower tradition, Hutcheson is best known for having offered a serious defence of sentimentalism, centered around the idea of the moral sense, for his opposition to egoism and insistence on the fundamentally benevolent nature of human beings, and for having offered the first formulation of the utilitarian ‘greatest happiness principle’ in English,ⁱ among other things. Despite his regular appearance in surveys of the history of ethics, him being recognized as having helped shape the character of subsequent Scottishⁱⁱ and even Germanⁱⁱⁱ philosophy, and the continued interest in his thought shared by many contemporary philosophers^{iv}, the secondary literature on Hutcheson’s moral philosophy focuses on a surprisingly narrow number of topics. These topics include: 1) whether Hutcheson is a non-cognitivist or realist about moral judgement, 2) the nature of his moral psychology, and 3) his position in the history of ethics as a sentimentalist.^v These are not the only topics discussed in the secondary literature, of course, but if one surveys the existing scholarship^{vi} it is obvious that a disproportionate amount of attention has been given to just a few topics.

The papers in this special issue were first presented at a workshop of the same name that took place online on June 3rd and 4th, 2021. As was the case for the workshop, the purpose of this special issue is to explore aspects of Hutcheson’s moral philosophy that have not received a great deal of attention in the past, and to thereby illustrate that his contributions to the history of ethics are far richer than the current secondary literature suggests. I believe that all the papers in this special issue do an excellent job of illustrating these points, and they each do so in their own way.

In ‘Hutcheson and His Critics and Opponents on the Moral Sense’, Ruth Boeker aims to shed new light on the dispute between Hutcheson and his rationalist critics and opponents. She focuses on three such figures: Gilbert Burnet, Samuel Clarke, and Catherine Trotter Cockburn. Boeker freshly examines Hutcheson’s replies to these figures, or in the case of Cockburn how he

might have replied, and makes three observations: Hutcheson's main point against Burnet is that exciting reasons presuppose affections and justifying reasons presuppose the moral sense; to Cockburn Hutcheson would say that the moral sense is not a blind instinct; and against Clarke Hutcheson argues that metaphysical relations (such as the fitness that is said to characterize moral actions) are not mind independent but are ideas that exist in the mind only. In all three cases, Boeker suggests, Hutcheson's strategy is not to reject the rationalism of these figures but to show that they must ultimately agree that a moral sense is fundamental. Boeker then proceeds to argue, against Patricia Sheridan (2007), that it is their respective moral metaphysics, namely their distinct understandings of the metaphysics of relations, that marks a foundational difference between Clarke and Hutcheson in particular. Not only this, but Boeker concludes with the suggestion that it is only by taking a closer look at their underlying moral metaphysics that the dispute between Hutcheson and his rationalist critics and opponents can be settled. Boeker thereby illustrates that positioning Hutcheson against his actual and possible opponents and comparing hitherto underexamined aspects of his thought with such figures can clarify their main points of disagreement.

Stephen Darwall's 'Hutcheson in the History of Rights' seeks to appraise both the nature of and some problems inherent to Hutcheson's theory of rights by situating it in relation to John Stuart Mill's. Although both Mill and Hutcheson share a broadly utilitarian theory of rights, Darwall argues that Mill's is more plausible because it contains a conceptually necessary companion to a theory of rights that Hutcheson's lacks, namely a corollary account of obligation. For Mill, on Darwall's reading, violations of right are morally wrong even if they maximize overall utility. But for Hutcheson, who Darwall argues is primarily a virtue ethicist, the violation of a right is not necessarily morally wrong, other things being equal, and this is because Hutcheson lacks a theory of obligation in the truly deontic sense of the term. Darwall concludes by sketching the Strawsonian character of Mill's theory of rights, namely that acts are wrong if blame is the appropriate response from third parties, resentment from victims, and guilt from the wrongdoers themselves. Darwall illustrates, however, that once we ask what justifies such attitudes, Mill encounters a problem similar to one Hutcheson also faces, namely that people will sometimes be justifiably blamed for respecting the rights of others, but not justifiably blamed for violations. Darwall's conclusion is that although Hutcheson anticipates many aspects of Mill's utilitarian theory of rights, making sense of their respective positions requires quite distinct philosophical resources: for Mill Strawsonian reactive attitudes, and for Hutcheson a scalar utilitarian theory of moral acts and a conventionalist theory of justice akin to Hume's. Darwall thereby illustrates that, by appreciating a rarely studied aspect of

Hutcheson's thought, namely his theory of rights, we can enrich our understanding not only of Hutcheson, but of the history of rights and its central figures.

In 'The Natural and the Publick Good: Two Puzzles in Hutcheson's Axiology', Dale Dorsey presents, as the title suggests, two puzzles that make it challenging to understand Hutcheson's axiology. The first concerns Hutcheson's hedonism. By analyzing several key passages from Hutcheson's major works (including some from the *System* and *Short Introduction*), Dorsey persuasively argues that it is unclear if Hutcheson is a quantitative or qualitative hedonist. Dorsey shows that neither reading can make good sense of how Hutcheson understands the combination of three axiological operators: duration, intensity, and dignity. While Dorsey suggests that the quantitative reading is the most consistent with Hutcheson's texts overall, it is still an exegetical puzzle of how to make sense of this reading entirely. The second puzzle concerns Hutcheson's theory of aggregation, that is, the idea that the aggregation of individual happiness makes a difference when determining the moral quality of actions. Dorsey identifies three variables: the degree of happiness each receives, the number of enjoyers, and the moral importance of persons who enjoy the goods. Dorsey examines several ways of combining these variables but argues that none of them make perfect sense of the claims Hutcheson makes about aggregation. While Dorsey acknowledges a solution to these puzzles might be forthcoming, he successfully, to my mind, accomplishes the aim of his paper, which is to bring these problems to light in order to encourage further work on these central but neglected issues in Hutcheson's normative moral theory.

Elizabeth Radcliffe's article, 'Hutcheson's Contributions to Action Theory', argues that the distinction between motivating and justifying reasons is not trivial, as Jonathan Dancy has suggested (2000). Radcliffe argues that the distinction is between propositions that have different presuppositions (motivating reasons: instincts and affections, justifying reasons: the moral sense) and different functions (identifying qualities in objects we desire and those we approve, respectively). She illustrates that Hutcheson initially made the distinction to undermine the moral rationalism of his day, and to argue that ignoring the distinction can lead to the mistaken view that actions are justified by the propositions explaining them. After sketching the nature of psychologism (the view that reasons are psychological states), factivism (the view that reasons are facts or states in the world), and hybrid views, Radcliffe argues that Hutcheson offers a psychologist theory of reasons, but one that overcomes certain problems associated with both psychologism and factivism, and which hybrid views were designed to avoid. Additionally, Radcliffe argues that Hutcheson's view circumvents the wrong reasons problem, that is, the idea that we can adopt a valuing attitude

because of the benefit we would receive from doing so. She thereby illustrates that Hutcheson's theory of action offers a unique option in the contemporary debate and deserves to be taken more seriously.

Finally, in my own contribution, 'Hutcheson's Theory of Obligation', I argue that Hutcheson has a theory of obligation that is different in important ways from the views of his predecessors and that his theory may not be as problematic as critics have claimed. I first sketch a brief picture of the views on obligation belonging to five Early Modern figures that Hutcheson explicitly references: Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, their French translator and commentator Jean Barbeyrac, as well as G. W. Leibniz and Richard Cumberland. I then offer an account of Hutcheson's theory of obligation and illustrate that not only does he have a view on what previous figures called the source, end, and object of obligation, he also focuses on the epistemological question of the origin of our idea of obligation as opposed to the metaphysical question of the efficient cause of obligation. Furthermore, I argue that Hutcheson conceives of the necessity involved in obligation in a unique way, namely in terms of the necessity of a perception. Finally, I defend Hutcheson's theory of obligation against three objections: 1. that it makes a sham of obligation by locating its source within the human being, 2. that it is reducible to divine command theory, and 3. that, in the end, Hutcheson has no real or meaningful theory of obligation. My hope is that by situating Hutcheson's view in its historical context and appraising the above objections, it becomes clear that Hutcheson has more to say about obligation than appearances first suggest.

I am extremely happy with the final form of this special issue. Thanks to all the contributors for their willingness to take part and for the time and energy they put into their papers. Special thanks to James Foster for giving me the opportunity to serve as guest editor, and for his kind advice and support throughout the process. I also wish to thank Sonja Schierbaum, the German Research Foundation, the University of Würzburg, and both the philosophy department and the Interdisciplinary Centre for European Enlightenment Research (IZEA) at Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg for sponsoring the workshop this special issue is based on. I hope readers find the papers as exciting as I do, and I sincerely hope others will use these articles as a springboard for future research.^{vii}

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ⁱ As Stephen Darwall notes in his contribution to this special issue, the honour of first formulating the principle in any language goes to Leibniz (see Hruschka 1991).

ⁱⁱ See Carey (1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Engbers (2001).

^{iv} Such as Dancy (2000), Darwall (2017), and Korsgaard (1996).

^v For similar appraisals of the literature on Hutcheson's moral philosophy, see Ahnert (2014, 51) and Chuang (2015).

^{vi} For a recent bibliography of the secondary literature, see the PhilPapers category on Hutcheson that I have recently updated: <https://philpapers.org/browse/francis-hutcheson>

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