Hutcheson and Kant: Moral Sense and Moral Feeling

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The eighteenth century is a rich and fascinating period in the history of Germany philosophy for a variety of reasons. Not least among these is the fact that German authors of the period somewhat extensively engaged with the writings of those in other European countries and beyond. The extent to which German philosophers engaged with eighteenth century British philosophy is an excellent example. Describing the reception of British philosophy in eighteenth century Germany, Manfred Kuehn writes that

> The works of Locke, Shaftsbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, Ferguson, and almost every other British philosopher of note were full of problems that needed solutions and observations that needed to be explained, if German philosophy of the traditional sort was to succeed. (Kuehn 2001, 183-4)

Although many German philosophers of the period could read English, the wide reception of these British authors was made possible in large part by the, in some cases rapid, translation of their texts into German. This is certainly true of the Scottish philosopher who will be the focus of this paper: Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747). A translation of Hutcheson's posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy*, first published in 1755, was published just one year later in 1756. Translations of Hutcheson's *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* (1728) and *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) followed somewhat soon thereafter, appearing in 1760 and 1762 respectively. One of the "problems" that Hutcheson introduced to the German philosophical scene was the existence and nature of a "moral sense", a concept first introduced by Shaftesbury but given a much more systematic treatment by Hutcheson. As Jan Engbers has explained in detail, the German authors who were among the first to discuss the idea of a moral sense and the thought of Shaftesbury and

Hutcheson in general were Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769)[1], Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813)[2], and also Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86)[3], among others (see Engbers 2001, esp. 59-66). While not always positive[4], the extent to which moral sense theory was discussed during the middle to late eighteenth century makes it unsurprising that we find Kant mentioning Shaftesbury and Hutcheson as well. My aim in this paper is to discuss Kant's engagement with what is arguably the core feature of Hutcheson's moral sense theory, namely the idea that the moral sense is the foundation of moral judgement.[5]

It is of course no new discovery that British philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had an influence on Kant's thought. In his early 1804 biography of Kant, for example, Ludwig Borowski states the following: "In the years when I belonged among his [Kant's] students, Hutcheson and Hume were of exceptional worth, the former in subjects of morals, the latter in his deepest philosophical investigations. … He recommended both of these writers to us for a most careful study" (1804, 170). In the literature that currently exists on the subject, however, the extent to which the moral sense theorists in fact influenced Kant is a matter of debate. Some claim that Kant himself belonged to the moral sense school early on in his development (MacBeath 1973, 283), others that the moral sense theorists only made Kant realize that there is an emotional factor to ethical consciousness (Schilpp 1938, 39). Joseph Schmucker claims that the influence of the moral sense theorists is often overestimated compared to the influence of Crusius and Wolff (Schmucker 1961, 21-2) and others go as far as to say that Kant was in fact never really impressed with these

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[1] See esp. the tenth lecture of Gellert's *Moralische Vorlesungen* (Gellert 1989, Vol. 6, pg. 119ff.). See also Kuehn (2009) for a discussion of how these lectures may have played an important role in Kant's early development.

[2] See Wieland's 1755 *Ankündigung einer Dunciade für die Deutschen* (Wieland 1916, Vol. 4, esp. pg. 81).

[3] See Mendelssohn's *Verwandschaft des Schönen und Guten* (Mendelssohn 1844, Vol. 4, pg. 78-82), wherein he contrasts his view with that of Hutcheson (see also Engbers 2001, 86ff.). Furthermore, Kuehn argues (see 1987, pg. 41n) that Mendelssohn's *Philosophische Gespräche* are patterned off of a dialogue of Shaftesbury's, that other of his works show Shaftesbury's influence, and that Mendelssohn even began a translation of Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis*.

[4] Indeed, Engbers claims that the reception of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in Germany falls into two stages: (1) the period between 1750-56 wherein Shaftesbury's ideas are discussed and processed, and (2) the ten-year period after 1756 wherein Hutcheson's thought is largely criticized (see Engbers 2001, 8).

[5] This is of course not the only idea of Hutcheson's that may have intrigued Kant. One other main feature of Hutcheson's philosophy that likely caught Kant's attention was Hutcheson's conception of moral motivation. This topic deserves extended discussion on its own and space does not permit me to engage with it here. See however the contributions by Baxley, Deimling, and Sensen in this volume for more information.*

writers at all (see Henrich 2009, 31, though Henrich does not share this view). Given these differing appraisals of the situation, one main aim of the following is to re-evaluate the extent to which Kant agrees with Hutcheson early on in his development, and to see how Kant's opinion of the moral sense changes as his thought evolves. What is uncontroversial is that Kant eventually rejects the moral sense as the foundation of moral judgement. At the same time, in the small amount of literature that exists on this topic not much attention has been paid to what underlies Kant's main criticisms of the moral sense. Thus a second main aim of this paper is to uncover the way in which Kant understands the faculty of the moral sense so as to explain his main reason for rejecting the idea.

My discussion is divided into four sections. In section one I give an account of Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense. This sense is a perceptive faculty that explains our ability both to feel a particular kind of pleasure upon perceiving benevolence, and to appraise such benevolence as morally good *on the basis of* this feeling. Section two summarizes Kant's discussion of the moral sense during his pre-Critical period. Kant's appraisal of the concept changes during this time and culminates in the 1769/70 rejection of the moral sense as the foundation of moral judgement. In section three I turn to the main reason why Kant rejects the moral sense as the foundation of moral judgement, namely because it is incapable of issuing sufficiently universal and necessary judgements of moral good and evil. I argue that underlying Kant's rejection of the moral sense is the fact that he understands the faculty not as a "sense" proper, but as a "feeling" according to his technical understanding of these terms. In the fourth section I conclude by briefly evaluating what my analysis says about Kant's engagement with Hutcheson. I suggest that while Kant never accepted the existence of a moral sense, Hutcheson's position was a view with which Kant often contrasted his own, and as such it played an important role in the development and expression of Kant's mature moral philosophy.

I. Hutcheson's Moral Sense

Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense is based on his more general psychological theory, thus in order to understand the precise nature of the moral sense it will be beneficial to understand how Hutcheson conceives of "senses" in general. The senses, for Hutcheson, are faculties responsible for the production of sensations. Sensations are perceptions or ideas that are raised in the mind involuntarily such that "the Mind in such Cases is passive, and has not Power

directly to prevent the Perception or Idea, or to vary it at its Reception, as long as we continue our Bodys in a state fit to be acted upon by the external Object" (Hutcheson 2008, 19).[6] The senses, as the origin of sensations, are therefore the faculties that make it possible to be passively affected by external objects in particular ways. Sensations, i.e. what arises in the mind when passively affected by objects via the senses, do not merely consist of perceptions or ideas, but are often accompanied by feelings of pleasure and displeasure. This is not a feature unique to sensations, for Hutcheson believes that "[t]here is scarcely any Object which our Minds are employ'd about, which is not thus constituted the necessary Occasion of some Pleasure or Pain" (ibid., 8). Nonetheless, Hutcheson believes that the senses and sensations especially involve feelings of pleasure or pain, for in the Preface to the *Inquiry* he defines the senses in general as "Determinations to be pleas'd with any Forms, or Ideas which occur to our Observation" (ibid.).

As one might expect, Hutcheson believes in the existence of more than the five external senses. He claims: "When two Perceptions are intirely different from each other, or agree in nothing but the general Idea of Sensation, we call the Powers of receiving those different Perceptions, different Senses" (ibid., 19). It is when perceptions are of distinct kinds, then, that we are warranted in positing an additional sense that explains our ability to have such perceptions. In the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson claims that there are two other senses in addition to the five external ones in virtue of the distinct nature of the perceptions produced by them.[7] First, there is what Hutcheson calls the "Internal Sense" (ibid., 9), which is his technical term for the sense of beauty. Hutcheson believes this is a distinct sense because our sensations of the beautiful are of a distinct kind, namely they are accompanied by a particular kind of pleasure, i.e. the pleasure we feel only when perceiving beautiful objects. Just like the internal sense of beauty, Hutcheson believes we are warranted in positing the existence of yet another sense because of the distinctness of the perceptions we seem capable of having, and this is the moral sense.

According to Hutcheson, we have ideas of two distinct kinds of goods: natural goods and moral goods. A natural good is what is advantageous, i.e. what is in our private advantage or self-

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[6] Although I quote from modern editions of Hutcheson's works, in researching this paper I have primarily made reference to the 4th edition of the *Inquiry* (1738) and the 4th edition of the *Essay* (1756) because these are the editions that formed the basis of the translations that Kant owned. See Warda (1922, 50), Klemme and Kuehn (2001, vol. 4, v) and Hutcheson (1760, 2).

[7] In the *Essay* Hutcheson introduces a number of additional senses, such as the sense of honour and the "publick" sense (see Hutcheson 2002, 17f.). These other senses are not relevant to my aims here, so I leave them aside.

interest (Hutcheson 2008, 89), examples being: a fruitful field, houses, lands, gardens, strength, and wealth (see Hutcheson 2008, 89ff.). Moral good, on the other hand, is not associated with private advantage or self-interest, but is rather what is good *independently* of what is in our personal interest, examples being: kindness, friendship, generosity, and benevolence (see ibid., 90). A core tenant of Hutcheson's moral philosophy is the claim that the moral motive is benevolence, i.e. the "disinterested" (ibid., 103) desire for the happiness of others. The idea is that when we desire the good of another, such a desire is only true benevolence when we desire their good as an end in itself and not as a means to our own pleasure. Moral goods therefore consist in benevolent actions, affections, or characters[8], and since such things are good even when they are not in our interest, they are goods of a distinct kind. That we perceive moral good as distinct from natural good is evidence, Hutcheson believes, of a distinct sense that makes it possible for us to receive such sensations. If we did not have a moral sense then we would not distinguish between the goodness of a fruitful field and a benevolent friend – they would be good for the same reason (see ibid., 90).

Similar to the internal sense, sensing moral goods involves experiencing a particular kind of pleasure. Indeed, Hutcheson argues both that the pleasures and pains of the moral sense are different in kind from other pleasures, and that these pleasures are the highest in degree. According to Hutcheson, the pleasures "of the *external Senses*" (ibid., 164) are short-lived and do not give us any kind of durable pleasure or satisfaction (ibid.). The moral sense, on the other hand, both "gives us more Pleasure and Pain, than all our other Facultys" and these pleasures "are the most delightful Ingredient in the ordinary Pleasures of Life" (ibid., 163). The pleasure we experience when we perceive and reflect on moral objects is therefore distinct from as well as superior in kind to the pleasures of the external senses.[9] Most important about the pleasures of the moral sense, however, is the fact that it is *on the basis* of such feelings that we judge benevolence to be morally good. As Hutcheson states in the introduction to Treatise II of the *Inquiry*, one of his two main goals is to argue "That some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness; or, that by a superior Sense, which I call a Moral one, we perceive Pleasure in the Contemplation of such Actions in others, and are determin'd to love the agent … without any View of further natural Advantage from them" (ibid., 88). Thus, a basic reconstruction of Hutcheson's conception of the process of moral judgement

[8] According to Scott (1900, 190), although Hutcheson fairly clearly stresses that it is the affection or motive we approve of as morally good, he claims that Hutcheson is at times ambiguous whether it is one's character that we approve, or the properly motivated actions. It is my view that Hutcheson believes that actions, characters, as well as affections are capable of being morally good.

[9] See Scott (1900, 200) and Darwall (1995, 214) for a discussion.

might be as follows: when benevolent actions, affections, or characters (either in ourselves or others) are presented to us, passively perceiving these with the moral sense makes it such that we necessarily experience a particular kind of pleasure at the same time. The moral sense, on the basis of either the positive (benevolence) or negative (malevolence) associated feeling then judges the object in question (an action, affection, or character) as morally good or evil as a result.[10] In this way, the moral sense and the associated feelings associated with perceiving benevolence (and malevolence) are what ultimately ground or judgements of moral good and evil.[11]

An important feature of Hutcheson's moral sense that will come into play in the following sections is that it is "universal" (see ibid., 136) in two senses. First, everyone possesses the moral sense, and everyone is capable of making judgements of moral approval and disapproval. Second, Hutcheson is also committed to the view that human beings judge the *same things* to be morally good and evil, namely benevolence and malevolence. This might seem strange given moral judgements are made on the basis of purportedly 'subjective' feelings of pleasure and displeasure, but Hutcheson is not naïve and acknowledges that there is much variation among human beings with respect to *what* they judge to be benevolent. Nonetheless, Hutcheson makes an effort to show that this does not mean that all moral evaluation is relative to each individual's subjective feelings of approval or disapproval. As he claims in the *Inquiry*: "there does not seem to be any Ground to believe such a Diversity in human Minds, as that the same simple Idea or Perception should give pleasure to one and pain to another, or to the same person at different times" (2008, 22). According to Hutcheson, then, our feelings of approval and disapproval are linked to the simple ideas raised in us by various objects (see ibid., 21). This means that if the same simple ideas were to be raised in each individual by the same objects, we would all judge these objects the exact same way. In the case of moral judgements, if the same action, character or affection always raised the same simple idea in us, we would all judge such things as either morally good or evil. However, since it is often the case that

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[10] For more detailed discussions of how moral judgements are made, for Hutcheson, see Strasser (1990, 13 and 29) and Fowler (1882, 186)

[11] It should be noted that there is some debate in the literature over whether it is ultimately the moral sense or reason that is the foundation of moral judgement, for Hutcheson. I side with a number of interpreters who claim the moral sense plays the role of the foundation of moral judgement see Schneewind (1998, 341), Blackstone (1965, 18), Frankena (1955, 374), Jensen (1971, 59), Turco (2003, 141), and Gill (2006, 159). For the interpretation that Hutcheson is ambiguous about whether this role is played by the moral sense or reason, see Scott (1900, 209), Fowler (1882, 188 and 192-3), and Raphael (1947, 25). For the question of whether it is ultimately God who defines moral goodness since He gives us the moral sense, see Fowler (1882, 56) and Henrich (2009, 38).

many other simple ideas come to be associated with others, whether through education, custom, etc., this causes moral judgement to vary both between individuals, and even in the same individual at different times. Hutcheson's position is therefore an interesting one in that moral evaluation is objective in the sense that we all use the same standard and would judge similarly if we shared the same simple ideas, but variation occurs because of the ways in which different ideas become associated with one another. Moral judgements are thus not valid only for the individual subjects making them, but are valid for all of those who judge on the basis of the moral sense.

In this section I have offered a brief account of Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense and moral judgement. The moral sense is a perceptive faculty that makes it possible for us to experience a particular kind of pleasure when perceiving benevolent objects, and to judge them as morally good, as opposed to naturally good, as a result. In the next section I turn to Kant and discuss how he engaged with this idea during his early, pre-Critical writings.

II. Moral Sense Theory in Kant's Pre-Critical Writings

According to Dieter Henrich, "[t]he first explicit account of ethical problems that comes down to us from Kant's hands was written in the last months of 1762" (Henrich 2014, 15), and this is the *Prize Essay* or *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*. Not only this, but Paul Menzer claims that this is the first text in which we can see the effect of English moral philosophy on Kant (1898, 302). Kant's main purpose in the section of the essay discussing moral philosophy (the final section of the fourth reflection) is to argue that moral philosophy is currently incapable of achieving certainty, evidence for this being that the concept of obligation is still unclear. This leads Kant to put forward some of his own views on obligation. He claims, for example, that there is a fundamental distinction between what he calls here "the necessity of the means" and "the necessity of the ends" (2:298), where the former is conditional necessity, i.e. the necessity of an action under condition of an assumed end, and the latter is absolute necessity of an action in itself. Kant claims here that only this second kind of necessity, i.e. the necessity of an action in itself, is obligation properly, i.e. morally, speaking. In addition to this, Kant puts forward a view of which he claims to have convinced himself "after long reflection" (2:299). At this point in his development Kant believes that "[t]he rule: perform the most perfect action in your power, is the first *formal ground* of all obligation to act. Likewise, the proposition: abstain from doing that which will hinder the realization of the greatest possible perfection is the first *formal ground* of the duty to

abstain from acting" (2:299). Kant is therefore at least partially endorsing Christian Wolff's moral philosophy here. At the same time, he finds this principle problematic, for he states that "no specifically determinate obligation flows from these two rules of the good, unless they are combined with indemonstrable material principles of practical cognition" (2:299). In order to overcome this shortcoming of Wolff's position, Kant turns to moral sense theory.

Immediately following this criticism of Wolff's principle of perfection, Kant states that "[i]t is only recently, namely, that people have come to realize that the faculty of representing the *true* is *cognition*, while the faculty of experiencing the *good* is *feeling*, and that the two faculties are, on no account, to be confused with each other" (2:299). First, what is important to note about Kant's use of the term "feeling [*Gefühl*]" and "moral feeling [*das moralische Gefühl*]" in particular is that the latter expression is how Hutcheson's first German translator translated "moral sense" into German (see e.g. Hutcheson 1760). Similar to Hutcheson's moral sense, then, if "feeling" is the faculty of experiencing the good, this means this faculty provides us with "an unanalyzable feeling of the good (which is never encountered in a thing absolutely but only relatively to a being endowed with sensibility)" (2:299). Kant claims we have "simple" feelings of the good, which means that "the judgement: 'This is good,' will be completely indemonstrable" (2:299). This is so because the judgement that something is good "will be an immediate effect of the consciousness of the feeling of pleasure combined with the representation of the object" (2:299). In other words, if representing an object immediately brings with it the feeling of pleasure, the object is judged to be good, and this judgement is indemonstrable because it is based on an unanalysable feeling and no further justification for why such a feeling is good can be given. Kant claims that to immediately represent an action as good means that "the necessity of this action is an indemonstrable material principle of obligation" (2:300). Such a principle is precisely what the Wolffian principle needed in order for "specifically determinate" obligations to flow from them.

In this text we therefore have Kant endorsing the idea that human beings possess a faculty of "feeling" which makes them capable of having simple feelings of the good, which in turn lead to the "immediate effect" of a judgement of the kind "This is good" (2:299). In other words, feeling here is the basis for *judging* what is indemonstrably good and evil. Because Kant states that obligations "cannot be called obligations as long as they are not subordinated to an end which is necessary in itself" (2:298), feeling provides us with the information of what is indemonstrably good, i.e. good in itself. In claiming that no determinate obligations follow from Wolff's two principles, Kant was essentially saying they were indeterminate, or as he'll later say, tautological (see esp. Kant

2004, 60), i.e. the principles do not specify what perfection means, and we need to know what perfection means in order to know what does and does not contribute towards our perfection. At this point in time Kant appears to think that "feeling" is a viable way of knowing what is indemonstrably good, and therefore of knowing what perfection might consist in. Kant is therefore suggesting here that the idea that it is through feeling that we are made aware of what is morally good and evil can overcome the "indeterminacy" or "tautology" problem pertaining to Wolff's principles, and by pairing the principles of perfection with "feeling" we are able to know what our determinate obligations are.

The doctrine of feeling Kant discusses here, as one according to which feeling is the source for our knowledge of what is immediately good, sounds strikingly similar to the moral sense theory espoused by Hutcheson. It is for this reason that Kant claims here that, with respect to the problem of determining what is unconditionally necessary, "*Hutcheson* and others have, under the name of moral feeling [*des moralischen Gefühls*], provided us with a starting point from which to develop some excellent observations" (2:300). At the same time, it is important to point out that Kant does not seem to be outright endorsing or agreeing with Hutcheson that we have a moral sense. Indeed, in the final paragraph of this section of the Prize Essay, speaking of the fundamental principle of moral philosophy Kant claims that "*it has yet to be determined* whether it is merely the faculty of cognition, or whether it is feeling (the first inner ground of the faculty of desire) which decides its first principles" (2:300, my emphasis). Not only this, but Kant adds that he is sceptical of the idea that the moral sense can tell us what is indemonstrably good in that this might be "taking for indemonstrable that which in fact is capable of proof" (2:300). What this means, then, is that although Kant seems to think that Hutcheson (and others), with the idea of the moral sense, have provided a good option with respect to accounting for the origin of our judgements of immediate, indemonstrable goods, his mind is not yet made up as to whether these authors have it right. Although it is clear to Kant at this point that we need to determine what is indemonstrably good and what actions are unconditionally necessary in themselves as ends, at this early stage of his development he is only interested in moral sense theory as an option, but is not fully convinced that the moral sense is the faculty that provides such information.

Kant continues to conceive of a role for feeling in moral judgement in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime.* Appropriately given its title, Kant begins this text with a discussion of the "feeling" of the beautiful, and it becomes clear that Kant understands "feeling" as a capacity to feel certain kinds of pleasure and displeasures (see 2:208). In this text we also begin to see Kant

thinking of morality in terms of principles. He claims, for example, that "true virtue can only be grafted upon principles" (2:217). He makes this claim in the context of discussing sympathy and complaisance as "good moral qualities that are lovable and beautiful and, to the extent that they harmonize with virtue, may also be regarded as noble, even though they cannot genuinely be counted as part of the virtuous disposition" (2:215). Kant argues that grounding virtue on sympathy and complaisance is not the most reliable way to do so, for although they often "harmonize" with virtue, they do so only contingently and not necessarily, which means that following them is no sure way to act virtuously. It is for this reason that, speaking of complaisance in particular, "unless higher principles set bounds for it and weaken it, all sorts of vices may spring from it" (2:217).

Kant conceives of the nature of moral principles in this text in an interesting way. He claims here that the rules or principles for good conduct

> are not speculative rules, but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast and that extends much further than to the special grounds of sympathy and complaisance. I believe that I can bring all this together if I say that it is the **feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature**. (2:217)

Importantly, the feeling that Kant is talking about here is what he calls a few lines later "universal moral feeling [*das allgemeine moralische Gefühl*]" (2:217). Thus although Kant emphasizes the importance of principles in virtuous conduct, the content of the principles relies on a particular kind of feeling, namely "universal moral feeling" or the feeling of the beauty and dignity of human nature. This feeling, therefore, is at the foundation of the "rules for good conduct in general" and it seems to be the basis of acting virtuously in a reliable way.

We do not get many more details about the role that feeling plays in moral principle and moral judgement in this text, nor do we get more details about this peculiar feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature, but it is clear that Kant is still entertaining the idea that feeling is somehow involved therein. Not long after the publication of the *Observations*, however, we start to see Kant explicitly criticizing moral sense theory. In 'M. Immanuel Kant's Announcement of the Program of his Lectures for the Winter Semester, 1765-1766', Kant claims that moral philosophy only has the appearance of being a science and of being thoroughly grounded when in fact it is not. Part of the reason for this problematic state of affairs is that many believe "[t]he distinction between good and evil in actions, and the judgement of moral rightness, can be known, easily and accurately, by the human heart through what is called sentiment [*Sentiment*], and that without the elaborate necessity of proofs" (2:311). In other words, Kant is claiming here that he thinks it is problematic to

judge actions as good or evil without any proof, and presumably, therefore, that moral sense theory is mistaken in thinking it can do so. Indeed, as discussed above, Kant expressed reservations about moral sense theory on precisely this point when he cautioned against "taking for indemonstrable that which in fact is capable of proof" (2:300). On the basis of this appraisal, Kant claims in the 'Announcement' that "[t]he attempts of *Shaftesbury, Hutcheson,* and *Hume*, *although incomplete and defective*, have nonetheless penetrated furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of all morality" (2:311, emphasis added). Kant adds that the attempts of these authors lack "precision" and "completeness" and that he will supplement their attempts in his lectures (see 2:311). As such, what is new in this text in comparison to the *Prize Essay* is that Kant is explicit about the attempts of these authors being "incomplete and defective," whereas before he seemed to be on the fence about this.

We also find discussion of moral sense theory in the Herder lecture notes on moral philosophy, which originate from the mid-1760s, but unfortunately there is no appraisal of whether or not moral sense theory's conception of moral judgements is correct or not.[12] Towards the end of the 1760s we find Kant once again discussing moral feeling as performing the function of the foundation of moral judgement, but his appraisal of the idea is now decidedly negative.

In a reflection dated between 1776 and 1778, discussing what appears to be his "discovery" of the antinomies, Kant states: "I saw this doctrine at the beginning in a twilight, as it were. I attempted quite seriously to prove propositions and their contraries, not because I wanted to institute scepticism, but because I suspected an illusion of the understanding, and I wished to discover its source. The year 69 gave me great light" (18:69, translation from Kuehn 1995, 373). Not only did the year 1769 mark an advance of Kant's thinking on the antinomies, but it was also a shift in his thinking as a whole. According to Kuehn, 1769/70 marks the important point where Kant began to reject what he calls the "continuity thesis," i.e. the thesis that holds "the sensitive and the intellectual form a kind of continuum" (1995, 376). More specifically, the continuity thesis states that "the only difference between intellectual and sensitive cognitions is their degree of distinctness"

[12] Although the reliability of these notes as a source for Kant's own ideas is questionable (see Schneewind 2001, xiv and Gerhard Lehmann's discussion at 28:1353f.), it is interesting to note that these notes contain a discussion of moral feeling in much the same way as Hutcheson conceived of the moral sense. For example, moral feeling is "unanalyzable" and judgements of moral good and evil on the basis of moral feeling are "basic" (27:5, compare Hutcheson 2008, 85f.). Additionally, moral feeling is "unequivocal" or "unanimous" [*einstimmig*] (27:5), which presumably means every human being's moral feeling finds the same things worthy of approbation and disapprobation, a feature which we have seen in shared by Hutcheson's moral sense (see Hutcheson 2008, 136 ff.).

(1995, 376). In contrast to this view, Kant argues in the *Inaugural Dissertation* that sensation and intellect are two entirely different faculties, that they are independent and irreducible, i.e. that sensation and intellect are different *sources* of cognition, and that they are therefore different in *kind*, not degree. This of course has serious consequences when it comes to Kant's understanding of moral concepts. In this text Kant states explicitly that moral concepts "are cognised not by experiencing them but by the pure understanding itself" (2:395). Given the rejection of the continuity thesis, this means that moral concept can "belong to the understanding, even though they are confused" (ibid.). The points is that just because a discipline is currently confused does not mean it is a system of sensitive concepts. Therefore even if the concepts of moral philosophy are currently confused, as Kant thought at the time of the *Prize Essay,* this does not mean these concepts originate from sensibility, an idea he at least entertained at the time. This new understanding of things causes Kant to distance himself from those he earlier admired, claiming that "Epicurus, who reduced its [moral philosophy's] criteria to the sense of pleasure or pain, is very rightly blamed, together with certain moderns, who have followed him to a certain extent from afar, such as Shaftesbury and his supporters" (2:396). Thus, the significant turn that takes place in Kant's thinking at this point in time, and the one relevant to my purposes in this paper, is that he believes the attempts of Shaftesbury and his followers (i.e. Hutcheson) to furnish the first principle of moral judgement empirically, i.e. from a moral sense, are misguided. Kant now thinks moral concepts must be a priori, i.e. that "[a]ll morality is based on ideas" (19:108).

This negative appraisal of moral sense theory's conception of moral judgement continues into and throughout Kant's mature period of development. If Kant came to see moral philosophy as a rational enterprise, and thus found fault with theories like Hutcheson's, the next question to ask is what exactly Kant sees as problematic about moral sense theory. In the following section I venture to explain Kant's most important criticism of moral sense theory. Not only this, but I wish to offer a suggestion as to *why* Kant makes this criticism. My aim is to shed light on how Kant understood moral sense theory, in an effort to clarify his reasons for rejecting the view.

III. Kant's Main Objection to Moral Sense Theory

Dieter Henrich has rightly claimed that Kant's most important objection to moral sense theory concerns the extent to which the moral sense can issue properly universal moral judgements (see Henrich 2009, 34). Kant first presents a version of this objection around the same time as his

"Great Light" (see 19:120 and 20:116-7), but the definitive version can be found in both the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* where he classifies all other "heteronomous" moral theories. In the *Groundwork*, for example, Kant argues that all *empirical* moral principles, i.e. those that have a ground "taken from the *particular arrangement of human nature*, or the contingent circumstances in which it is placed," are not fit to be moral laws because such principles cannot yield "universality," i.e. they are principles that cannot hold "for all rational beings" (4:442 and see 5:41). Kant classifies the principle of "moral feeling" as empirical, and it is not difficult to see why: as we saw above, Hutcheson believes that moral judgements are grounded in the moral sense's pleasurable and displeasurable feelings of approval and disapproval (see Hutcheson 2008, 89). As based on feelings, Hutcheson holds that moral judgements are indeed based on a feature of human nature. As such, Kant believes the moral sense is incapable of issuing sufficiently universal moral principles.

On the one hand this criticism is easy enough to understand: feelings are a feature of human nature and are thus incapable of issuing moral principles to a sufficient degree of universality. On the other hand, it might seem strange that Kant calls the objectivity of the moral sense into question, for as we saw above there is a sense in which Hutcheson believes the judgements of the moral sense are objective. As noted, the moral sense is "universal" (see ibid., 136) for Hutcheson in the sense that everyone with a moral sense finds the same things worthy of approbation and disapprobation, namely benevolent and malevolent actions respectively. Furthermore, Hutcheson believes that there is no reason to suppose that human beings are so different from person to person such that we would not all be able to perceive the benevolence in an action, feel pleasure, and judge it to be good so long as we all posses the same simple ideas (see ibid., 21). If Kant read Hutcheson closely, Kant surely would have been aware of this "objective" status of judgements of the moral sense. Why, then, we might ask, does Kant claim that the moral sense is incapable of providing objective moral judgements?

In order to answer this question, we need to take a close look at how Kant understands Hutcheson's moral sense. I have already noted that Kant predominantly refers to the moral sense as a *moralisches Gefühl*, i.e. a moral "feeling", in line with Hutcheson's first German translator. Although part of the explanation for Kant's dominant usage of moral *feeling* is surely that he is remaining consistent with the accepted terminology of his day, there are in fact philosophical reasons for Kant's usage. According to Kant's theory of the mind, the three fundamental powers of the mind are the faculty of cognition [*das Erkenntnißvermögen*], the faculty of desire [*das Begehrungsvermögen*], and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure [*das Gefühl der Lust und Unlust*] (see 5:177). I wish to suggest

that Kant refers to the moral sense as a moral feeling because he believes this capacity belongs under the heading of the faculty of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure rather than the faculty of cognition, to which sensibility and the senses (both inner and outer) belong (see e.g. 7:153ff.). This is significant, for Kant conceives of the senses and of feeling as quite distinct, as can be gleaned from a remark he makes in the *Critique of Judgement*:

> If a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is called sensation [*Empfindung*], then this expression means something entirely different than if I call the representation of a thing (through sense [*Sinne*], as a receptivity belonging to the faculty of cognition) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is related to the object, but in the first case it is related solely to the subject, and does not serve for any cognition at all, not even that by which the subject **cognizes** itself. (5:206)

In this passage we see Kant making a distinction between two kinds of sensation [*Empfindung*], namely those of feeling [*Gefühl*] and those of the senses [*Sinne*]. As Kant says here, the senses belong to the faculty of cognition, and as such they are representations related to an object and contribute to the cognition of an object. On the other hand, representations of the faculty of feeling do not relate to objects, but refer "solely to the subject" and thus do "not serve for any cognition at all" (5:206). The essential difference between feeling and sense, for Kant, is therefore that only sense relates to objects and cognition, whereas feeling cannot ground cognition and relates only to the subject.

This basic difference between sense and feeling results in there being an important difference between a moral "sense" and a moral "feeling". Kant acknowledges that Hutcheson seems to have understood the moral sense as a proper "sense" according to Kant's technical understanding of the term. This is accurate given the moral sense, for Hutcheson, perceives a specific "object," namely moral good and evil in contrast to natural good and evil (see Hutcheson 2008, 89).[13] At the same time, Kant also appears to think that, whether Hutcheson realized it or not, the involvement of feelings of pleasure and displeasure in Hutcheson's conception of moral judgement makes it such that it is more appropriate for the moral sense to belong under the heading of feeling than sense. As Kant says in the *Powalski* lecture notes on moral philosophy (1782-3):

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[13] Indeed, that Hutcheson understood the moral sense as concerned with the cognition of objects and not only the state of the subject is at part of the reason why there is so much debate concerning his moral realism. See Frankena (1955), Norton (1985), Darwall (1995, 213), Gill (2006, 169, and 297), and Irwin (2008, 399ff.) for a discussion.

"Nobody has explained the system of moral feeling more than Hutcheson. He says one can perceive many characteristics of *objects* through feeling [*Gefühl*] that one cannot cognize through the mere understanding" (27:108, my emphasis). As is clear in this passage, Kant seems to think that, according to Hutcheson's idea of the moral sense, it is ultimately a "feeling," and not a sense, that cognizes certain aspects of *objects* that the understanding cannot.

Whether Kant was right to understand the moral sense as a feeling as opposed to a sense proper is not a question I can pursue here.[14] What is important for my purposes are the consequences of Kant understanding the moral sense as a feeling. Given Kant's technical understanding of sense and feeling, it is problematic to say that a feeling makes us aware of morally good and evil objects, because feeling can tell us nothing about the objects of cognition. Perhaps for this reason, Kant claims that "[a] moral sense is a contradiction" (15:353). However, if Kant is correct in thinking that Hutcheson's moral sense should more properly be understood as a moral feeling, such that it only provides us with information about the subject, this is where its unsuitability as the foundation of moral principles arises. As Kant claims in the *Groundwork*: "feelings, which by nature differ infinitely in degree from one another, can do little to yield a uniform measure of good and evil, and one by his feeling cannot validly judge for others at all" (4:442 and cf. 5:41). Indeed, as concerned only with a given subject rather than an object, feelings, for Kant, differ both between themselves and also from subject to subject. As Kant says in an early reflection on anthropology: "judgement concerning good and evil does not take place through feeling, because its [feeling's] judgements have only private validity" (15:237). This signals an important difference between Hutcheson's and Kant's understanding of feeling and sense: whereas Hutcheson believes that the feelings associated with approval and disapproval are uniform across human nature because they are linked to the same simple ideas commonly raised in all human beings

[14] On the one hand, Kant is right to understand the moral sense as a feeling: the characteristic feature of the moral sense is that it allows us to *feel* pleasure or displeasure based on what we perceive, and we make judgements of moral good and evil on the basis of these feelings. Although Hutcheson says that the moral "sense" as a capacity allows us to perceive morally good and evil objects in the first place (see 2008, 88), what is central to this perceptive capacity, indeed what is central to any sense, for Hutcheson, is the precise nature of the perceptions, ideas, and sentiments, i.e. feelings of pleasure and displeasure, to which a given sense gives rise (see Hutcheson 2008, 8). On the other hand, Hutcheson explicitly states that the moral sense, as a sense, is a passive capacity that produces sensations in the mind when presented with external objects (see ibid., 19). In any event, what is clear is that, regardless off whether or not Kant *should have* understood the moral sense as a feeling, he *did* understand it as such and this has important consequences for what he finds problematic about moral sense theory.

by the same objects, it is clear from the above that Kant disagrees and believes that feelings relate only to each individual subject. In contrast to Hutcheson, then, Kant believes the moral sense is fundamentally based upon (subjective) feeling and is thus incapable of grounding judgements, principles, or laws valid for all rational beings, let alone human beings. Indeed, it is important to note that even if the moral sense *could* issue judgements valid for all human beings, Kant disagrees with Hutcheson that the application of moral demands on all human beings is sufficient for the universality required by morality. For Kant, moral laws must apply to all *rational* beings, and for this reason:

> the universality with which they [moral laws] are to hold for all rational beings regardless of differences … vanishes if their ground is taken from the *particular arrangement of human nature*, or the contingent circumstances in which it is placed. (4:442)

As soon as laws are grounded on feelings of any kind, the universality and necessity of such laws are compromised, even if these feelings were uniform across human nature. In this way, Kant argues that the moral sense, as moral feeling, is incapable of issuing sufficiently universal and necessary moral judgements, i.e. ones applicable to all rational beings, and for this reason it is not suited to function as the ground of moral judgement.

IV. Conclusion

I have illustrated that Kant eventually rejects the moral sense as the foundation of judgements of moral good an evil, and I also hope to have shown *why* Kant rejects it in the way he does. We still have the question, however, of what is to be said of the influence of moral sense theory during Kant pre-Critical period. Beginning from at least around the time of the *Prize Essay* onwards, it is clear that Kant is interested in determining not only how we are aware of what is morally good and evil, but also in determining how we are aware of what is morally good and evil *in itself*, i.e. what is unconditionally good, and not simply good for a given purpose. Based on the analysis above, I think it is clear that Kant never wholeheartedly accepted the idea that human beings possess a moral sense understood as a capacity that makes us capable of distinguishing moral good from evil. In the early to mid 1760s we can therefore say that he was *interested* in, albeit not fully convinced by, this idea. With his claim in the *Prize Essay* that "*Hutcheson* and others have, under the name of moral feeling, provided us with a starting point to develop some excellent observations" (2:300), Kant appears to be saying that the idea of a moral sense is on to something with respect to

explaining where our ideas of immediate, i.e. unconditional, goodness come from. The idea of unconditional goodness was important for Kant at this time because in order for certain actions to be unconditionally necessary, we need to first recognize them as good in themselves, i.e. unconditionally. Hutcheson and others, therefore, with their way of explaining the immediate goodness of actions, explained an essential element required for explaining unconditional obligation. Thus Kant was not, even early on in his development, an adherent of moral sense theory. Kant gradually became more sceptical of the idea, and from the time of the "Great Light" onwards explicitly criticized it. The moral sense nonetheless provided Kant with an interesting answer to some questions in moral philosophy that occupied Kant's thinking relatively early on in his development. Even in his Critical writings, the moral sense as the foundation of moral judgement is a position with which Kant continually contrasted his own. Thus although Kant was never positively influenced by Hutcheson's conception of the moral sense in the sense that Kant adopted Hutcheson's views, the development of Kant's thinking on the ultimate principle of morality was certainly shaped by his engagement with Hutcheson and this should not be ignored by anyone seeking to understand the intricacies of Kant's moral philosophy.[15]

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