# FROM CAMBRIDGE PLATONISM TO SCOTTISH SENTIMENTALISM

MICHAEL B. GILL
*University of Arizona*

## ABSTRACT

The Cambridge Platonists were a group of religious thinkers who attended and taught at Cambridge from the 1640s until the 1660s. The four most important of them were Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More. The most prominent sentimentalist moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment – Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith – knew of the works of the Cambridge Platonists. But the Scottish sentimentalists typically referred to the Cambridge Platonists only briefly and in passing. The surface of Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith's texts can give the impression that the Cambridge Platonists were fairly distant intellectual relatives of the Scottish sentimentalists – great great-uncles, perhaps, and uncles of a decidedly foreign ilk. But this surface appearance is deceiving. There were deeply significant philosophical connections between the Cambridge Platonists and the Scottish sentimentalists, even if the Scottish sentimentalists themselves did not always make it perfectly explicit.

## INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Platonists were a group of religious thinkers who attended and taught at Cambridge from the 1640s until the 1660s. The four most important of them were Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More. The most prominent sentimentalist moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment – Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith – knew of the works of the Cambridge Platonists. But the Scottish sentimentalists typically referred to the Cambridge Platonists only briefly and in passing. The surface of Hutcheson,

The Journal of Scottish Philosophy, 8(1), 13–31
DOI: 10.3366/E1479665109000487

Hume, and Smith's texts can give the impression that the Cambridge Platonists were fairly distant intellectual relatives of the Scottish sentimentalists – great great-uncles, perhaps, and uncles of a decidedly foreign ilk. But this surface appearance is deceiving. There were deeply significant philosophical connections between the Cambridge Platonists and the Scottish sentimentalists, even if the Scottish sentimentalists themselves did not always make it perfectly explicit. Or so I will try to show in what follows.

## The Shaftesbury Connection

What was the influence of Cambridge Platonism on Scottish sentimentalism? It might seem that we can answer this question with a single word: Shaftesbury. It is clear and undeniable that Whichcote, Cudworth, and More exerted a direct and powerful influence on Shaftesbury.[1] It is clear and undeniable that Shaftesbury exerted a direct and powerful influence on Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith.[2] So one way to look at things is to hold that even if Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith were not intimately engaged with the Cambridge Platonist writings, their thought was nonetheless indebted to those writings through the mediation of Shaftesbury.

At the same time, one might also take Shaftesbury to constitute a pivot away from Cambridge Platonist ideas and towards the significantly different ideas of the Scottish sentimentalists. The Cambridge Platonists are often taken to be exemplars of early modern moral rationalism, while the central feature of the moral views of Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith can be taken to be something like the negation of moral rationalism. Shaftesbury offered a mélange – perhaps an ultimately incoherent mélange – of rationalist and sentimentalist ideas. So one might hold that what the Scottish sentimentalists did was clarify and extend the moral movement away from the rationalism of Cambridge Platonism, a movement that Shaftesbury initiated in only a desultory or confused manner.

Now there is something right about a view that emphasizes Shaftesbury and highlights the differences between the rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists and the sentimentalism of Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. But what's right about this is more narrow and shallow than it might initially appear, or so I believe. I hope to make plausible the idea that there are connections between the Cambridge Platonists and Scottish sentimentalists that are philosophically more important than the one that is entirely mediated by Shaftesbury.

In my discussion, I will use Hutcheson as my representative of the Scottish sentimentalism. There are, of course, highly significant differences between Hutcheson, on the one hand, and Hume and Smith, on the other, and some of those differences are relevant to the question of the relationship between Cambridge Platonism and Scottish sentimentalism, but I will not be able to address those more detailed points here.

## THE MORAL SELF-GOVERNANCE VIEW

The most philosophically important connection between the Cambridge Platonists and the Scottish sentimentalists was their shared commitment to the idea that each and every human naturally has within him or herself the capacity to realise completely the goals of virtue. Both groups insisted that morality and human nature are consonant with each other. Both groups believed that all humans, simply in virtue of their being human, are capable of successful moral self-governance. Following Schneewind, I will call this the Moral Self-Governance View (Schneewind 2008: 214).

More gives expression to the Moral Self-Governance View when he begins his 'Account of Virtue' by criticizing those who would confine morality 'to a few speculative Men and Philosophers, and shut out the bulk of Mankind, who could never be partakers thereof' (More [1667] 1930: 8). More insists that we must take the seat of morality to be something that 'is common to all men. For it is not above the Talent of the meanest, to love God, and his Neigbour very heartily' (More [1667] 1930: 8–9). Similarly, Hutcheson gives expression to the Moral Self-Governance View in the preface to his first book by maintaining that what is needed for virtue has been implanted in human nature as such – that all humans, simply in virtue of their God-given constitution, have the internal principles requisite for morality. He says that his 'principal Design is to shew, "That Human Nature was not left quite indifferent in the affair of Virtue . . . The Author of Nature has . . . furnish'd us for a virtuous Conduct"' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 9). Just as there is a sense of beauty common to all humans, Hutcheson tells us, so there is a moral sense 'natural also to Men' that enables each of us to judge morality (Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 10).

The Moral Self-Governance View has dominated our moral philosophy – and our political landscape – for upwards of two centuries now. As Schneewind says, it is 'now the "default" position in the West' (Schneewind 2008: 214). But just because of this dominance, people today are likely to take a commitment to the Moral Self-Governance View to be somewhat anodyne, trivial, unnoteworthy. That's a big mistake, at least when we're talking about the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For that was when the view that all humans were *not* capable of successful moral self-governance was still powerful, and when the crucial philosophical and political battles for the Moral Self-Governance View were just beginning to be fought. From this seventeenth and eighteenth century perspective, the differences between the Cambridge Platonists' rationalism and Hutcheson's sentimentalism are much less important – much more shallow – than the similarities. For both the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson argued that within each and every human can be found all the ingredients required for virtue. And from this philosophical position both drew practical implications that were exceedingly controversial at the time – positions that now, when the

Moral Self-Governance View is so widely, indeed often unreflectively, accepted, are taken to be obviously on the side of the angels. The Cambridge Platonists used the Moral Self-Governance View to argue for religious toleration as early as the 1640s, well before that position was anything like a safe one to hold.[3] Hutcheson used the Moral Self-Governance View to argue for the abolition of African slavery in the 1730s, well before that position had much currency in the Western intellectual world.[4] And, from this historical perspective, the fact that the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were so alive to the philosophical and practical importance of affirming the fundamental moral equality of all humans dwarfs their meta-ethical differences about whether moral judgments originate in reason or sentiment.

Moreover, in affirming the Moral Self-Governance View, the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were attacking remarkably similar opponents, even if those opponents were separated by about seventy years. Both the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were raised and trained by staunch Calvinists who held that humans were so thoroughly corrupted by sin that it was impossible for any individual to find within him or herself anything capable of directing him to righteousness. And the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson both rejected the Calvinist view of human nature that dominated their childhoods by affirming the ability of each human to achieve virtue based on the resources within him or herself.

Furthermore, both the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson cut their philosophical teeth by attacking egoist views that held that it was impossible for any human ever to act from non-selfish motives. For the Cambridge Platonists, the egoist *bête noire* was Hobbes; for Hutcheson, it was Mandeville. As both the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson saw it, if humans were actually as ineluctably selfish as egoists like Hobbes and Mandeville maintained, then humans could never be virtuous, as virtue essentially involves non-selfish motives. The Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were thus further alike in exerting a great deal of their philosophical energy – early and late – toward defeating egoism.

Their shared fierce opposition to egoism and Calvinism goes a long way toward explaining what would otherwise seem to be a very odd philosophical taxonomy that Adam Smith produces. In a chapter entitled 'Of those Systems which make Virtue consist in Benevolence' in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith writes

> This system [which makes virtue consist in benevolence], as it was much esteemed by many ancient fathers of the Christian church, so after the Reformation it was adopted by several divines of the most eminent piety and learning and of the most amiable manners; particularly by Ralph Cudworth, by Dr. Henry More, and by Mr. John Smith of Cambridge. But of all the patrons of this system, ancient or modern, the late Dr. Hutcheson was undoubtedly, beyond all comparison, the most acute . . . (Smith [1759] 1976: 301)

Now grouping Hutcheson and the Cambridge Platonists together in this way can seem odd because while it is plausible to interpret Hutcheson as holding a kind of benevolence-monism about morality, there seems to be clear evidence that the Cambridge Platonists recognised basic moral principles other than benevolence. More's account of morality begins from twenty-three 'moral noemas', which he takes to be distinct self-evident moral axioms. Many of the noemas focus on matters that can be reasonably construed as related to benevolence, but not all of them can. Noema XXII, for instance, reads: 'Tis good and just to give every man what is his due, as also the use and possession thereof without any trouble' (More [1667] 1930: 24) and while it may be possible to justify this proposition by pointing to the good for humanity that can be produced by giving each his due, we might at least as reasonably take More to be maintaining here that the duty to give each his due has a normative force that is independent of the goodness of benevolence. Similarly, Whichcote presents an account of morality based on four basic tenets:

> [1] to reverence and acknowledge the deity, [2] to live in love, and bear good will towards one another, [3] to deal justly, equally and fairly in all our transactions and dealings each with other, [4] to use moderation and government of ourselves, in respect of the necessaries and conveniences of this state. (Whichcote 1751(4): 351)

And while [2] does seem to be an expression of the basic moral importance of benevolence, the other three arguably express the basic moral importance of other considerations. Cudworth and Smith are less systematic in their descriptions of the content of morality, but Cudworth at least believes that 'justice', 'equity' and 'honesty' are morally fundamental (Cudworth [1731] 1996: 80), and it's far from obvious that he thinks the normative force of such things will in the end be reducible to or in some way dependent on benevolence.

But the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were all so greatly concerned to defeat egoism – all so greatly concerned to show that we do have ultimate concern for something other than ourselves – that Smith can perhaps be forgiven for taking them all to have placed benevolence at the base of morality. Smith's grouping Hutcheson with the Cambridge Platonists does capture the deep similarity of their opposition to egoism.[5]

Adam Smith's grouping also captures the deep similarity of the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson's opposition to Calvinism. Indeed, Smith himself introduces the Benevolence View as a fundamentally religious position. As Smith puts it, this view held that

> The whole perfection and virtue of the human mind consisted in some resemblance or participation of the divine perfections, and, consequently, in

> being filled with the same principle of benevolence and love which influenced all the actions of the Deity. . . . It was by actions of charity and love only that we could imitate, as became us, the conduct of God, that we could express our humble and devout admiration of his infinite perfections, that by fostering in our own minds the same divine principle, we could bring our own affections to a greater resemblance with his holy attributes, and thereby become more proper objects of his love and esteem; till at last we arrived at that immediate converse and communication with the Deity to which it was the great object of this philosophy to raise us. (Smith [1751] 1976: 300–1)

Even if the Cambridge Platonists were not benevolence-monists in the way Hutcheson was, everything else Smith says here is right on target as a description of Cambridge Platonism, as well as of Hutcheson. For central to the thought of Hutcheson and the Cambridge Platonists was opposition to the Calvinist stress on the unbridgeable distance between human nature and the nature of God. Their entire intellectual outlook grew out of confidence in the ways humans can successfully imitate, resemble, and participate with the Divine nature. John Smith thus explains how 'the soul of man' can behold God because it can 'be Godlike and hath God formed in it, and be made partaker of the divine nature' (J. Smith [1660] 1968: 77), and Hutcheson maintains that the benevolence of our moral and public senses reflects the universal impartial benevolence of the Deity (Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 197).

Now it's not incorrect to take the historical bridge between the Moral Self-Governance View of the Cambridge Platonists and the Moral Self-Governance View of Hutcheson to be Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*. Shaftesbury wrote the initial version of the *Inquiry* in the 1690s, when he was very much under the sway of Cambridge Platonism.[6] Hutcheson was very much under the sway of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry* when he began his philosophical career.[7] And Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*, like More's 'Account of Virtue' and Hutcheson's early works, advances a version of the Moral Self-Governance View. Like More and Hutcheson, Shaftesbury in the *Inquiry* argues that all humans are endowed with internal principles that can enable them to realise virtue. According to Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*, all humans, simply in virtue of having powers of reflection, have a moral sense, or a sense of right and wrong (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 172–5). So like More and Hutcheson, Shaftesbury in the *Inquiry* gives an account of virtue that is entrenched in human nature as such.

So isn't Shaftesbury's mediation all we really need to know to understand the connection between the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson? No, I don't think it is. And that's because while the Moral Self-Governance View is present in Shaftesbury's works, Shaftesbury's overall commitment to that view is significantly weaker, or at least more circumscribed, than that of Hutcheson or the Cambridge Platonists.

It's not that Shaftesbury ever came to deny that human nature is consonant with virtue. For a clear, late statement of that view, see his Miscellany 4, where he writes:

> The social or natural affections, which our author considers as essential to the health, wholeness or integrity of the particular creature, are such as contribute to the welfare and prosperity of that whole or species, to which he is by nature joined. All the affections of this kind our author comprehends in that single name of *natural*. (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 432)

But while Shaftesbury always maintained that virtue is consonant with human nature, he also believed that some people – indeed, probably most – are incapable of virtue. And that's because he thought that most people were incapable of being natural – that human nature, and thus virtue, was a goal or achievement that most people could never reach. Shaftesbury makes this point by contending, in an intentionally paradoxical-sounding passage, that one needs not only God-given abilities but also proper refinement and training in order to 'become natural' (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 151). It is, as he puts it in the *Inquiry*, 'so hard to find a man who lives naturally and as a man' (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 200). And the refinement and training necessary in order to 'become natural' and live 'naturally and as a man' is out of reach of most people: it is something that only well-bred children have the privilege of receiving. As Shaftesbury says,

> [T]he perfection of grace and comeliness in action and behaviour can be found only among the people of a liberal education. And even among the graceful of this kind, those still are found the gracefullest who early in their youth have learned their exercises and formed their motions under the best masters. (Shaftesbury 1999: 85–6)

In contrast to people with such fortunate early education are

> Those good rustics who have been bred remote from the formed societies of men or those plain artisans and people of lower rank who, living in cities and places of resort, have been necessitated however to follow mean employments and wanted the opportunity and means to form themselves after better models. (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 85)

Shaftesbury acknowledges that a particular rustic may achieve an elevated character, but he thinks that generally speaking an early education that is lacking – and most people's education is lacking in the relevant respects – makes true naturalness, and thus true virtue, inaccessible.

This elitist view is evident in Shaftesbury's portrayal of Theocles, the central character of *The Moralists*, which Shaftesbury took to be his most important work. Theocles is Shaftesbury's paragon of virtue. He is the person Shaftesbury wants to convince us we ought to strive to emulate. Importantly, however, Theocles possesses characteristics that are plainly out of reach of all but the very few. Theocles seems to have had the finest education and cultural background imaginable. Indeed, much of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* can be seen as directed at upper class gentlemen – as a guidebook for the conduct of the cultured elite.

For the rarified heights of Shaftesburean virtue, moreover, a refined upbringing is necessary but hardly sufficient. We can see this by noting that Theocles possesses characteristics whose extraordinariness goes above and beyond the advantages of class. Shaftesbury portrays Theocles as an astute philosopher and a truly gifted artist. We are supposed to realise that Theocles' greatest achievement is having made a work of art of his own character. And this is not mere metaphor: there is a real sense in which Shaftesbury equates virtue and beauty. He wants us to take the creativity of the great artist to be the archetype for morality. He models the conduct of the virtuous on the performance of the virtuoso. As he puts it, 'I am persuaded that to be a virtuoso (so far as befits a gentleman) is a higher step towards the becoming a man of virtue and good sense than the being of what in this age we call a scholar' (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 148). But virtuosos are rare. Most people are, always will be, and always have been incapable of the heights of artistic achievement. And Shaftesbury did not shrink from the morally elitist conclusion this virtue-beauty equation implies. Just as the creation of great art is impossible for most of us, so too is a truly natural and ultimately fully virtuous character inaccessible to most of us.[8]

In this respect, Shaftesbury belongs to a philosophical club that also has Plato and Nietzsche as members. Although they obviously disagreed about many things, Plato, Shaftesbury, and Nietzsche all shared the belief that there are differences between people that make the highest kind of life inaccessible to all but the very few.

The Cambridge Platonists were not part of that club, and neither was Hutcheson. The Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson did believe that people could corrupt their own nature and thus become ill-suited to virtue. But they did not seem to think that this was humans' typical fate. The Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson thought that all people – not only Christians and ancient Greeks, but Africans and Jews as well – retained within themselves principles that did not preclude them from virtue. And they thought that most of those who had become corrupted still had within themselves the capacity to undo the corruption. Shaftesbury, in contrast, seems at times to go out of his way to emphasize how irredeemably corrupt many humans end up being (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 194, 200, 214, 226).

So Shaftesbury advances a view according to which virtue is accessible to all humans only in that all humans originally have the potential to be virtuous – a potential that can, and usually is, irreversibly snuffed out by the time a person reaches adulthood. The Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson, in contrast, thought that virtue remained truly accessible to virtually all humans throughout their lives. And in this sense the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson were more deeply connected to each other – connected by commitment to a strong Moral Self-Governance View – than either of them was to Shaftesbury, even if Shaftesbury's works served to introduce them. And, given the significant philosophical and practical implications of a strong anti-elitist Moral Self-Governance View, this connection was of the greatest importance.

## THE PLATONISM OF THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS

Let us now turn to the role the Cambridge Platonists' *Platonism* played in their articulation and defense of the Moral Self-Governance View, and how some of those Platonist aspects of their view were transmitted to Hutcheson.

There is some irony in the Cambridge Platonists using the texts of Plato to advance the Moral Self-Governance View, for (as I've just noted) it's hard to imagine Plato himself countenancing such a thing. But in the context of their times, the Cambridge Platonists' use of Plato's texts was itself a significant statement against the prevailing rejection of the Moral Self-Governance View. Plato may have thought that some (indeed, most) people were incapable of achieving the highest virtue because of deficient intellectual capacities. But what the Cambridge Platonists were opposing with their Moral Self-Governance View was the belief that all humans are internally corrupt and sinful, and that the only way for anyone ever to gain any kind of correct view of things is through revealed scripture. In this context, quoting Plato – distinct from the content of those quotations – was a philosophically significant act in itself, as it carried with it the affirmation of an innate human ability to grasp important truths independent of the benefit of Christian revelation. And quote Plato the Cambridge Platonists did – with great frequency and ardor. Whichcote's Calvinist tutor criticized him for such quotation, advising him to focus exclusively on scripture instead. But Whichcote did not apologize, responding:

> The time I have spent in philosophers I have no cause to repent of, and the use I have made of them I dare not disown. I heartily thank God for what I have found in them; neither have I upon this occasion, one jot less loved the Scriptures. (Whichcote [1753] 1968: 44)

And More, in a self-conscious rejecting of the dominant lapsarian view of the his time and place, wrote:

> [I] very often, and most respectfully, had concurr'd with many of the Ancients: And had even produc'd their very Words and Sentences, that it might the more appear, how by comparing and fortifying them with [my] own, [I] had not so much affected Singularity in this Undertaking, as a restitution of Morals to their pristin State. (More [1667] 1930: seventh page of 'Epistle to the Reader' [no page numbers in original])

There is mischievousness here, as what More's Calvinist contemporaries would have meant by 'pristine state' would have been something prelapsarian – and decidedly *not* to be found in Ancient Greece.

Three moments in the Platonic corpus are particularly important for the Cambridge Platonists. Platonic Moment Number One is the point in Socrates' exchange with Euthyphro at which he distinguishes between a thing's being pious because it is loved by the gods and a thing's being loved by the gods because it is pious. The Cambridge Platonists insisted on the latter option, and they used it as the foundation of their attacks on all versions of voluntarism. God's goodness, they never grew tired of maintaining, is prior to God's will, not the other way around. This Platonic moment does not so obviously find any resonance in the work of Hutcheson, however. Indeed, one of the most significant charges rationalists leveled at Hutcheson was that his view had rebarbatively voluntarist implications – that he ended up on the wrong side of the Euthyphro dilemma. Whether this charge is fair is an interesting issue, but it is not germane to our purposes here.

So let's move on to Platonic Moment Number Two. Platonic Moment Number Two is the account of the virtues in Book IV of the *Republic*, in which Socrates contends that that the just person is the one who 'harmonizes' with himself and 'is his own friend' while the unjust person is the one who suffers 'turmoil' and has 'a kind of civil war' within himself (Plato 1992: 119–121). This view of the virtuous life as the harmonious life is typical enough in ancient Greek thought. But when the Cambridge Platonists affirmed it, it constituted a significant rejection of the Calvinist position prevailing in their immediate society and of the egoist position of Hobbes. The Calvinists believed that humans were so thoroughly corrupted that it was impossible for them ever to bring themselves entirely into harmony with their original, pristine nature. The best one could hope to do was continually fight the good fight against one's own sinful passions. According to the Calvinists, our soul will always harbor corruption and sin. People who are internally reconciled to their own character must, therefore, be profoundly misguided, either unaware of their own sinfulness or (what is worse) so far gone that awareness of their own sin no longer upsets them. According to Calvinism, consequently, we should not seek to be in complete harmony with ourselves nor to be our own friend. Our goal, rather, should be to gain a full awareness of the sinfulness of our nature and to feel a real hatred of it. It is not internal harmony

the Calvinists extol, but a kind of constant internal warfare waged against our inevitably sinful aspects.

Hobbes also thought conflict was an inevitable feature of human life. Hobbes might have thought that an individual can be unified around his or her desire for self-preservation. But between people the Hobbesian natural state is conflict, and Hobbes argued that this conflict can be managed only by the imposition of external control.

The Cambridge Platonists, in contrast, believed that it was possible for us to bring ourselves into harmony. As Christian ministers, they had to acknowledge that the Fall occurred and so that our nature was not completely in its original pristine state. But they nonetheless also offered the basically Pelagian view that it was possible for us to overcome or remedy the corruption of our nature, and once we accomplished this, we would create concord within ourselves, between ourselves and our fellows, and between ourselves and God. As Whichcote explains, it is possible for us to live in a way that allows us to 'own' and 'approve' our own actions. And such a way of life, one that includes enjoyment of our own character, is what religion truly consists of. Whichcote says, 'Religion doth lay the Foundation of mental Peace, Satisfaction, and Content' (Whichcote 1930: Aphorism 949). It gives us '*Serenity* of *Mind*, and Calmness of Thought' (Whichcote 1930: Aphorism 280) and makes our life 'all of a piece' (Whichcote 1930: Aphorism 1113). The Calvinist goal of constant self-condemnation is terribly misguided, according to this Cambridge Platonist view. For it is possible to live a life of 'innocency', 'truth of conscience', and 'self-justification' (Whichcote 1930: Aphorism 391 and 202); you can be happy with yourself. And it is just such a life that you ought to lead. As Whichcote rhetorically asks, 'Why should one deal roughly with his Bosom-Friend, the Sense of his Mind; which, if in Peace, is his Solace in all Solitaries?' (Whichcote 1930: Aphorism 1092).

Moreover, just as Plato took internal harmony to be the culmination of virtue, so too did the Cambridge Platonists take it as the highest goal of all. Indeed, Whichcote and Cudworth directly identified the state of internal harmony with heaven, and declared that this heavenly internal state was something that it was possible for each individual to achieve here and now, in this life. As Whichcote explains,

> It is a most gross mistake; and men are of dull and stupid spirits, who think that that state which we call *hell* is *an incommodious place* only, and that God by his sovereignty throws men therein: for hell arises *out of a man's self*; and hell's fewel is *the guilt of a man's conscience*. And . . . on the other side, when they think that heaven arises from any *place*, or any nearness to God or angels; this is not principally so: but it lies in a *refined temper*, in an *internal reconciliation to the nature of God, and to the rule of righteousness*. So that both hell and heaven have their foundation *within* men. (Whichcote 1751 (2): 139–140)

Or as Cudworth put it,

> Nay, we do but deceive ourselves with names. Hell is nothing but the orb of sin and wickedness, or else that hemisphere of darkness in which all evil moves; and Heaven is the opposite hemisphere of light, or else, if you please, the bright orb of truth, holiness and goodness; and we do actually in this life instate ourselves in the possession of one or other of them. (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 394)

Just as Plato thought a person could achieve full virtue, so too did Whichcote and Cudworth believe that a person could achieve a moral state that is truly heavenly, divine.

Hutcheson agreed completely with the idea that virtue involved harmony, both between oneself and others and between the different aspects of oneself. Through good habits and careful reflection, Hutcheson thought, we can bring all of our internal principles into line with each other, so that virtue, happiness, and the other fundamental things we care about will all converge on one and the same conduct. As he explains,

> [W]e feel in our selves so much *publick Affection* in the various Relations of Life, and observe the like in others; while we find every one desiring indeed his *own Happiness*, but capable of discerning, by a little Attention, that not only his external *Convenience*, or *worldly Interest*, but even the most immediate and lively *Sensations of Delight*, of which his Nature is susceptible, immediately flow from a *publick Spirit*, a *generous, human, compassionate Temper*, and a suitable *Deportment* . . . (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 202; see also Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 126–55 and Hutcheson [1728] 2004: 242–72)

Hutcheson acknowledges that, as a result of developing 'wild *Associations* of Ideas', people can distort their original nature so that their various internal senses can come into interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 95). But he also thinks that through careful reflection we can break those destructive associations and thus once again attain the internal harmony that Whichcote and Cudworth, following Plato, took to be the end of a virtuous life (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 123).

Platonic Moment Number Three is the slave boy's realization of geometrical truths in the *Meno*. The Cambridge Platonists – and Cudworth in particular – took this episode to constitute proof of just what Plato said it was: that humans possess innate ideas and that knowledge consists of recollection of those innate ideas. What's crucial for our purposes is that Cudworth applied this epistemological conclusion to the moral realm. A slave boy has within himself all the resources necessary to comprehend geometry; all he needs is prompting to attend to what is

already in his mind. And Cudworth extended that position to claim that every person also has within him or herself all the resources necessary to realise morality. The fundamental building block of Cudworth's Moral Self-Governance view was a moralized version of Plato's *Meno* (Cudworth [1731] 1996: 74–6).

Hutcheson does not accept the rationalist view of innate ideas (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 142; Hutcheson [1725] 2004: xv-xvi, 82–3, 200–4, 271–3). But his internal senses (by which I mean not only the moral sense but also the public sense and the sense of honor) serve the same purpose of establishing the Moral Self-Governance View as Cudworth's innate ideas. For Hutcheson's internal senses are also explanatorily basic features of every human constitution that enable each of us to realise morality (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 43, 105, 198–9, 240; Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 216, 270). From a purely epistemological perspective, Cudworth's innate ideas rationalism and Hutcheson's empiricist sentimentalism might seem to be in serious opposition to each other. But from the moral and political perspective of the period, both views are on the same side in affirming the Moral Self-Governance View.[9] I have heard some people criticize the sentimentalists for taking an overly epistemological approach to morality – for placing too much emphasis on the forming of third-personal moral judgments rather than on more practically salient first-personal questions of how to live. Such criticism is badly off-base. For, first of all, Hutcheson, for one, had plenty to say about first-personal questions of how to live. And secondly, as we have seen, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the affirmation of the moral claim that each person has the internal resources to form correct moral judgments brought with it the extremely weighty practical implications of the Moral Self-Governance View.

It is worth noting that Shaftesbury was quite aware that the epistemological difference between Cudworthian innate ideas and Hutchesonian moral senses was relatively insignificant for practical purposes. Shaftesbury eschewed innate ideas, but it doesn't seem that he did so because he thought the matter was of great importance (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 325–6). It seems that he just didn't want to get embroiled in the epistemological debates on which Locke, among others, had expended so much energy. Moreover, Shaftesbury's descriptions of the origins of morality flittered back and forth between rationalist and sentimentalist language (compare Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 172–3 and 175). And at least part of the explanation for that flittering is that Shaftesbury was interested, first and last, in practical matters – and he didn't think the epistemological distinction between innate ideas and internal senses had any serious implications for those matters.

## THE SENTIMENTALISM OF THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS

But it wasn't just Shaftesbury who straddled rationalist and sentimentalist ideas about the origin of morality. The Cambridge Platonists themselves were not

always clearly and unambiguously on the rationalist side. Rationalist moral positions certainly can be found in the Cambridge Platonist texts, but so can sentimentalist positions. And it seems very likely that these sentimentalist insights influenced Shaftesbury in the writing of just those works that exerted the greatest influence on Hutcheson's initial expression of his moral sense theory. This is why a view that takes Shaftesbury to be a pivot away from the meta-ethical ideas of the Cambridge Platonists is true only in a narrow sense. It's true only to the rationalist aspects of the Cambridge Platonist texts. But when we look more broadly at the Cambridge Platonist texts as a whole, we find other, more sentimentalist aspects that Shaftesbury seems to have transmitted to Hutcheson without altering much at all. Let us turn to a discussion of the proto-sentimentalist features of Cambridge Platonism now.

John Smith's wonderful essay, 'True Way or Method of attaining to Divine Knowledge', has numerous passages that seem to be much closer in spirit to Hutchesonian sentimentalism than to Clarkean rationalism. Here are but two representative examples,

> Were I indeed to define divinity, I should rather call it a *divine life* than a *divine science*; it being something rather to be understood by a *spiritual sensation* than by any verbal description, as all things of sense and life are best known by sentient and vital faculties. (J. Smith [1660] 1968: 77)

And:

> The soul itself hath its sense as well as the body. And therefore David, when he would teach us how to know what the divine goodness is, calls not for speculation but *Sensation*: 'Taste and see how good the Lord is'. That is not the best and truest knowledge of God which is wrought out by the labor and sweat of the brain, but that which is kindled within us by an heavenly warmth in our hearts. (J. Smith [1660] 1968: 78)

In his 1647 sermon to the House of Commons, Cudworth makes similarly proto-sentimentalist points. There he argues that the essence of religion lies in the 'heart' and not in the 'head' (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 278). Religion, according to Cudworth, is essentially a kind of 'love' that is not an external command but an internal spirit of action, a 'kindling' and 'warming' principle of the heart (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 387) which 'enliveneth and quickeneth . . . all our outward performances' (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 403). To be truly religious, Cudworth tells us, is not to be in mere 'outward conformity to God's commandments' (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 404) but to have a certain kind of motivation or character, a certain kind of 'temper and constitution of the soul'

(Cudworth [1647] 1968: 380). It is not simply to perform particular actions but for one's heart to be in the right place.

Now what is particularly relevant to the purpose of asking about Cudworth's relationship to the later dispute between rationalists and sentimentalists is that his sermon's emphasis on the internal motivational aspect of religion also led him to dismiss the religious importance of propositional knowledge in general. Over and over again in the sermons Cudworth says that it is wrong to focus our religious energies on 'speculations', 'beliefs', 'notions', 'knowledge', 'understanding' and other denizens of the 'brain' and 'head'. For none of these things 'kindles', 'warms', 'enlivens' or 'quickens' the 'heart', and within the heart lies the essence of religion. Propositional knowledge – knowledge that can be gained through discursive rational thought – is neither necessary nor sufficient for the 'divine temper and constitution of the soul' that is the heart of true religion (Cudworth [1647] 1968 380; see also 403–4, 406–7). As Cudworth puts it,

> [T]here is a soul and spirit of divine truths that could never yet be congealed into ink, that could never be blotted upon paper; which [is] able to dwell or lodge nowhere but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but a life and spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, express itself sufficiently in words and sounds, but it will best declare and speak itself in actions . . . Words are nothing but the dead resemblances and pictures of those truths which live and breathe in actions; and 'the kingdom of God (as the apostle speaketh) consisteth not in word', but in life and power. (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 389–90)

The essence of religion is 'a living principle in us' that cannot be captured by language (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 374). It is something that lies beyond the reach of discursive rational thought. '[W]ords and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a divine life . . . cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them' (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 374–5).

In the sermons, then, Cudworth elevates 'heart' over 'head' in a manner that leads him to marginalize propositional knowledge and discursive thought, claiming that in matters of religion such knowledge and thought can play a peripheral, non-essential role. Indeed, the sermon at times comes close to an outright condemnation of those whose primary focus is on rational thought as it contends that such people are liable to lose touch with the essence of religion by concentrating on matters that are neither necessary nor sufficient. But this is hardly what we would expect from a philosopher known as a 'rationalist'. The sermon seems to be, rather, the work of someone who is at least sometimes

drawn to the idea of insulating the essence of religion from the workings of the rational faculty.

But perhaps the most important Cambridge Platonist precursor to Scottish sentimentalism was Henry More's 'boniform faculty of the soul', which plays the starring role in his *Enchiridion Ethicum*. More maintains that the Boniform Faculty of the Soul is the origin of our most basic moral judgments. '[W]hat we hold to be the *absolute Good, or better thing*', he writes, 'is that which proves grateful, or more grateful, to the *Boniform Faculty of the Soul*' (More [1667] 1930: 14). It's noteworthy that More uses the word 'grateful' here, as this language is very similar to what Hutcheson would use to describe the positive feeling of approval produced by the moral sense (Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 15, 30, 74, 148–51). Later, More says that the Boniform Faculty of the Soul gives us 'relish and delectation' (More [1667] 1930: 28) (and 'relish and internal Feel' [More (1667) 1930: 157] of what is moral, which also clearly anticipates the language of Hutcheson's moral sense theory (Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 9, 166, 176; Hutcheson [1728] 2002: 74, 105)). More takes pains, moreover, to explain that the Boniform Faculty of the Soul is not pure rationality but essentially involves sense or affection. To make a moral judgment, More maintains, is '*as to make a Judgment of the Passions; namely, That by some Sense and Feeling of them, the Conjecture was to be made.* So that in short the final Judgment upon this matter, is all referred to *inward Sense* [i.e., the Boniform Faculty of the Soul]' (More [1667] 1930: 16). Or as he says elsewhere, the origin of morals is 'an *inward Sense*, or an *inward Faculty of Divination* [rather than] any certain and distinct Principles, by which a Man might judge that which in every thing were the best' (More [1667] 1930: 17). Morality, according to More, is 'not a matter of Sapience only, but [is] principally to consist in Love, Benignity, and in Beneficence or Well-doing' (More [1667] 1930: 18). More's Boniform Faculty of the Soul produces '*Intellectual Love*' which is nothing but 'an inward Life and Sense' (More [1667] 1930: 156) or 'Divine Sense and Feeling' (More [1667] 1930: 157). More says explicitly that it is a kind of 'Passion' (More [1667] 1930: 158). More also anticipates one of the main sentimentalist reasons for holding that morality originates in sentiment and not reason alone – namely, that morality necessarily motivates in a way reason does not. He writes,

> For tho Reason may cry aloud; yet we walk without Legs, and fly without Wings, if we are not quickened by [passions'] Instigations. Hence we may reflect, that *Theages* was not so much out of the way in saying, *That Virtue had its original from the Passions, and did associate with them, and was preserved by them*. (More [1667] 1930: 83)

I should, once again, affirm that More and Cudworth do have their rationalist moments. It's not a mistake to take them to be important precursors to later

rationalist moral philosophy. My point here is that they also had undeniably sentimentalist ideas, and that it's very reasonable to think that those ideas were transmitted by Shaftesbury to Hutcheson and the other Scottish sentimentalists. Of course, this raises questions about the consistency of the Cambridge Platonists' moral views – of whether their rationalist and sentimentalist ideas about morality can be brought into coherence. I believe that in the end their sentimentalist and rationalist ideas do not cohere, and that a split into separate rationalist and sentimentalist meta-ethical camps was philosophically inevitable. But that meta-ethical difference was minor in comparison to the difference between the Cambridge Platonists' positive view of human nature and the negative view of Hobbesians and Calvinists. For this difference (unlike the meta-ethical difference) had definite implications for how to structure interpersonal interaction, political society, and religious worship. At least that's what the Cambridge Platonists seemed to believe, and Hutcheson would agree with them.

## CONCLUSION

Central aspects of Hutcheson's philosophy – a fundamentally positive view of human nature that rejects egoism and Calvinism and that affirms the internal moral capacity of every human – are present in Cambridge Platonism. These similarities are not mere coincidence: Shaftesbury is a clear conduit between the Cambridge Platonists and Hutcheson. The Cambridge Platonists were not merely distant and foreign relatives of the Scottish sentimentalists. They were highly influential intellectual grandparents.

## REFERENCES

Carey, Daniel (2006) *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst (1953) *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, translated by James P. Pettegrove, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Cragg, Gerald R. (1968) *The Cambridge Platonists*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cudworth, Ralph [1647] (1968) 'Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons', in Gerald Cragg (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 369–407.

—— [1731] (1996), *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, edited by Sarah Hutton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, Michael B (2006) *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Griswold, Charles (1999) *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutcheson, Francis [1755] (1969) *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlungs.

—— [1728] (2002) *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, edited by Aaron Garrett, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

—— [1725] (2004) *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

More, Henry [1667] (1930) *Enchiridion Ethicum*, translated by Edward Southwell, New York: Facsimile Text Society.

Otteson, James R. (2008) 'Shaftesbury's evolutionary morality and its influence on Adam Smith', *The Adam Smith Review*, Volume 4, pp. 106–31.

Plato (1992) *Republic*, translated by Grube and Reeve, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

Schneewind, J.B. (2008) 'Critical Notice', *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, Volume 6, Number 2, pp. 209–17.

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of [1711] (1999) *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, edited by Lawrence E. Klein, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Adam [1759] (1976) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by Raphael and Macfie, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics.

Smith, John [1660] (1968) 'True Way or Method of attaining to Divine Knowledge', in Gerald Cragg (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 76–90.

Voitle, Robert (1984) *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press.

Whichcote, Benjamin (1698) *Select Sermons*, edited and with a preface by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, London: Awnsham and Churchill.

—— (1751) *The Works*, in four volumes, London: J. Chalmers.

—— [1753] (1968) 'Letters of Benjamin Whichcote to Antony Tuckney', in Gerald Cragg (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 37–49.

—— (1930) *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, edited by W.R. Inge, London: Elkin, Mathews & Marrot.

## NOTES

[1] Shaftesbury's first publication was a collection of the sermons of Benjamin Whichcote (Whichcote 1698). Shaftesbury had also been in close contact with Ralph Cudworth's daughter in the years prior to that, and the two of them almost certainly discussed Cambridge Platonism together. Voitle claims that Cudworth's thought influenced the structure of the *Inquiry* (Voitle 1984: 141–2), and Shaftesbury praises Cudworth in *The Moralists* (Shaftesbury [1711] 1999: 264–5). For further discussion of the Cambridge Platonists' influence on Shaftesbury, see Cassirer (1953).

[2] The first edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* declares on its title page the intention of explaining and defending the 'principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury' (Hutcheson [1725] 2004: 199). Hume, in the introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature*, cites 'my Lord *Shaftesbury*' as one of the 'late philosophers in *England*, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing'. Otteson (2008) elucidates the influence of Shaftesbury on Adam's Smith.

[3] The best example of the Cambridge Platonists' commitment to religious toleration is Cudworth's 'Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons' (Cudworth [1647] 1968: 369–407).

[4] See Hutcheson [1755] (1969) 209–11.

[5] For detailed discussion of Adam Smith's own anti-egoism, see Griswold (1999). For helpful discussion of Shaftesbury's attack on egoism and its influence on the Scottish sentimentalists, see Otteson (2008).
[6] See note 3.
[7] See note 4.
[8] Carey notes well the difference between Shaftesbury's 'aristocratic' or 'hierarchical' ethical thinking and Hutcheson's more 'democratized' view (Carey 2006: 5, 124–9, 150).
[9] For a helpful recent discussion of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on innateness, see Carey (2006) 105–19 and 162–72.

Copyright of Journal of Scottish Philosophy is the property of Edinburgh University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.