Shaftesbury’s Two Accounts of the Reason to be Virtuous

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The founder of the moral sense school, or the first British philosopher to develop the position that moral distinctions originate in sentiment and not in reason alone, Shaftesbury thus struck the initial blow in the battle waged by sentimen
talists such as Hutcheson and Hume against rationalists such as Grotius and Clarke.

Such is a common view of Shaftesbury’s place in the history of moral philosophy. But while this common view is accurate in a very general sense, it also oversimplifies in a manner that threatens to misrepresent the develop
dent of modern ethical theory and obscure what is most interesting about Shaftesbury: The view suggests, in particular, that the most important distinc
tion in early modern British moral philosophy was between sentimentalism and rationalism. There was, however, a distinction ontologically deeper than

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1 See, for instance, H. Sidgwick, Outline of the History of Ethics (Boston: Beacon, 1914), 194; J. Martinich, Types of Ethical Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), volume 2, 504; E. Albee, A History of English Utilitarianism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), 58; and N. Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan, 1943), 165 and 169. R. Selby-Bigge, in his anthology British Moralists, probably did more than anyone else to promote this view both by choosing the selections that he did and by dividing his anthology into a volume of the “principal texts of the sentimental school” and a volume of “representatives of the intellectual school” (Selby-Bigge, British Moralists [New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963], xxxiii).

2 This point has been amply demonstrated by S. Green in Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1967), 5. Darwall in chapter 7 of The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and J. Schneewind in chapter 14 of The Invention of Autonomy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), to whose work I am much indebted. I believe, however, that in emphasizing the weaknesses of the traditional view, these three sometimes understate the kernel of truth in it. My purpose here is to situate what is right about the traditional view within the more accurate and nuanced context detailed by Green, Darwall, and Schneewind.

[529]
that, which explains how Shaftesbury, even while developing his moral sense theory, could at times be much closer to his rationalist predecessors Cudworth and Clarke than to his sentimentalist followers Hutcheson and Hume.

In this paper I will elucidate this deeper ontological distinction by examining two different accounts that Shaftesbury gives of the reason to be virtuous. Both of Shaftesbury's accounts are in a sense sentimentalist, but only the second of them constitutes a sharp break from his rationalist predecessors. Shaftesbury himself does not seem fully aware of the radical implications of his second account, but the implications are there nonetheless. And by exposing them we will gain a view not only of a crucial ambiguity in Shaftesbury's thought but also of a central faultline in the history of British moral philosophy. We will also come to see that while Shaftesbury does pave the way for a new ontology of morals, he does so more by accident than by design.3

Shaftesbury believes that to be virtuous is to have a benevolent character or a deep non-derivative commitment to promote the "publick Interest." He also believes that a person who has a benevolent character will always be happier than a person who does not, and that this constitutes a sufficient reason for each of us to "embrace" virtue (Inquiry 48).5 But of course some will deny that the benevolent person is always happiest and so Shaftesbury sets out to prove that there exists between benevolence and happiness a natural and necessary connection.

How does Shaftesbury establish the connection between benevolence and happiness? In two different ways.6 The first way of establishing the connection...
can be called the teleological account, and the second way can be called the mental enjoyment account. Let us first examine the teleological account.

The initial claim of Shaftesbury's teleological account of the reason to embrace virtue is that benevolence is what is most natural for humans, or their proper end or telos. As he puts it just after explaining "what Virtue is,"

It has been already shown, that in the Passions and Affections of particular Creatures, there is a constant relation to the Interest of a Species, or common Nature. This has been demonstrated in the case of natural Affection, parental Kindness, Text for Posterity, Concern for the Propagation and Nuture of the Young, Love of Fellowship and Company, Compassion, mutual Succour, and the rest of this kind. Nor will any one deny that this Affection of a Creature towards the Good of the Species or common Nature, is as proper and natural to him, as it is to any Organ, Part or Member of an Animal-Body, or mere Vegetable, to work in its known Course, and regular way of Growth. 'Tis not more natural for the Stomach to digest, the Lungs to breathe; the Glands to separate juices, or other Intrails to perform their several Offices; however they may by particular Impediments be sometimes disorder'd or obstructed in their Operations. (Inquiry 48)

A human's "natural Affections" are those that benefit other humans, and it is as "proper and natural" for a human to live by these benevolent affections as it is for "the Stomach to digest." Just as digestion is the purpose of the stomach or the end for which it was designed, so too is the promotion of the good of humans the purpose of humans or the end for which they were designed.8

Shaftesbury offers this claim about the "proper and natural" end of humans as a specific instance of the general claim that the proper and natural end of every creature is to promote the good of the members of the system (or species) of which it is a part. As he explains it, the "design or end of Nature in each animal system is exhibited chiefly in the support and propagation of the particular species," and so affections of a creature are "natural" just to the extent that they "contribute to the welfare and prosperity of that whole or species, to which he is by Nature joined" (Characteristics II.203). Shaftesbury also maintains that the system that is the human species is itself just one part of the larger system of everything on Earth, and that the system of everything on Earth is in turn just one part of the even larger system of everything in the galaxy. In this way Shaftesbury eventually arrives at the conclusion that there is one "general System" or "System of all Things" (Inquiry 11). And he holds that

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8See fully aware of the difference, as is clear from Chapter II of Miscellaneous IV in "Miscellaneous Reflections" (see especially Characteristics II.287–8, which we will examine in section 4 below).

8What I am calling Shaftesbury's teleological account has obvious Aristotelian roots. For more evidence of Shaftesbury's belief in such an account, see his "Natural Affection" and "The End" (The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Writings of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 1–12 and 48–52, respectively).

8See also Characteristics I.74.
the more members of this general system one benefits the greater one's virtue, and that the greater one's virtue the greater the harmony between one's conduct and the order of the universe (Characteristics II.294-5).

Now the claim that it is the proper and natural end of each human to be benevolent is not the same as the claim that each human will be happier if he is benevolent. But according to Shaftesbury's teleological account, the step between these two claims follows ineluctably from obvious facts. All our observations of everything else in the world show that a creature will be happiest if it fulfills its proper and natural end. And so, since naturalness and happiness are connected in the life of every other creature, there is every reason to think that they are connected in the lives of humans as well. To think otherwise is to hold the

extraordinary Hypothesis "That in the System of a Kind or Species, the Interest of the private Nature is directly opposite to that of the common one; the Interest of Particulars, directly opposite to that of the Publick in general."—A strange Constitution! in which it must be confess'd there is much Disorder and Untowardness; unlike to what we observe elsewhere in Nature. As if in any vegetable or animal-Body, the Part or Member could be suppose'd in a good and prosperous State as to it-self, when under a contrary Disposition, and in an unnatural Growth or Habit as to its Whole. (Inquiry 50)

Shaftesbury believes that only sophistical skeptics and egregious blockheads would ever doubt that creatures are happiest when they fulfill their natural ends. Thus, he ridicules the "sportly" or "airy gentlemen" who deny the connection between nature and happiness in humans while plainly affirming it in all other species.

Ask one of these gentlemen, unawares, when solicitously careful and busied in the great concerns of his stable or kennel, 'whether his hound or greyhound-bitch who eats her puppies is as natural as the other who nurses them!' and he will think you frantic. Ask him again, 'whether he thinks the unnatural creature who acts thus, or the natural one who does otherwise, is best in its kind and enjoys itself the most?' and he will be answer'd: 'the other, and in that case by far.' (Characteristics II.290)

That these "gentlemen" deny the connection between happiness and nature in humans just goes to show that for all their knowledge of horses, dogs, gamecocks, and hawks, they "never had it in their thoughts to study Nature in their own species" (Characteristics II.290).

So Shaftesbury's teleological account establishes the connection between happiness and benevolence on the basis of two claims. The first claim is that benevolence is the natural and proper end for humans. The second claim is that humans will be happiest if they pursue their natural end and miserable if they do not. Both of these claims are offered as particular instances of general claims that Shaftesbury believes follow obviously from our observations of the world: the first, of the general claim that the natural end of every creature is to
promote the good of the system of which it is a part; and the second, of the
general claim that a creature will be happiest if it pursues its natural end.

What marks this teleological account as closer to the view of a moral rationalist such as Cardwolfe and more distant from the view of a moral sentimentalist such as Hume is its commitment to an order of value—which Shaftesbury
calls the "universal system" or the "system of all things"—that is independent
of human affections. For Shaftesbury holds that a creature is good if it fulfills
its natural or proper end, and he also holds that a creature fulfills its natural or
proper end just in case it promotes the interests of the members of the system
of which it is a part. But the fact of whether a creature is promoting the
interests of the member of the system of which it is a part is independent of
human affections. It is true that Shaftesbury goes on to say that a creature
cannot be virtuous unless it possesses a moral sense (Inquiry 16–21). But that
sentimentalist position on virtue is built upon a non-sentimentalist account of
goodness.9 For the goodness of the conduct one’s moral sense approves of is
inherent in "the System of the Universe" and thus ontologically prior to the
approval itself.10 The origin of value, in other words, lies in the universal
system, not in our approval.

For Hume, in contrast, all value does originate in our sentiments. Our senti-
ments, on Hume’s view, do not correspond to antecedent value distinctions but
rather give rise to those distinctions. Humean moral sentiments are thus ontol-
ogically prior to any Humean system of value.11 Indeed, Hume would claim

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9Charlotte Brown criticized an earlier version of this paper for failing to appreciate fully
Shakespeare’s distinction between natural goodness and moral goodness. I tend to think that Brown
drew too sharp a distinction between the two types of goodness, insofar as she suggested that for
Shakespeare moral goodness and natural goodness always have different ontological origins, while I
believe that within Shakespeare’s teleological account the former type of goodness is a subset of
the latter. Brown was certainly correct, however, to point out that the value inherent in the non-
human parts of the “universal system” is not virtuous (as human sentiment is required for that),
and I have thus claimed here only that within the teleological account there is an affection-
dependent system of value, and not (as I had it in the earlier version) that there is an affection-
dependent moral order.

10This is what Schmeckmel has in mind when he says that the moral affection is “special
because through it we become aware of an objective order” (Schmeckmel, op. cit., 902). David Fate
Norton makes the same point in his discussion of Shakespeare’s “cognitive moral sense” (Norton,
David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1982), 41–2.

11This is not to say that Hume denies reason any role in moral judgment. Indeed, Hume
explicitly maintains that correct moral judgment often requires “much reasoning” (David Hume,
Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals (Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1975), 175). But Hume also explicitly maintains, in both the Treatise (David Hume, A Treatise
290–9) that this reasoning merely “paves the way” (Enquiry, 175) for the sentiment that is constitutive of the
moral judgment, and that this sentiment is non-representative (Treatise 115) insofar as it does not
discover “objects as they really stand in nature” (Hume, Enquiry 294). Now it should be noted that Hume’s account of justice in the Enquiry does resemble in some
that Shaftesbury's notion of a "Universal System," which is the very foundation of the teleological account, results not simply from observation but from the projection of internal sentiments onto the external world.  

Shaftesbury's teleological account, then, presupposes that the origin of value lies not in human affections but in the mind-independent structure of the universe, which constitutes an ontological commitment continuous with the moral rationalists and fundamentally at odds with Hume. That is not to say that the rationalists would agree with every aspect of Shaftesbury's teleological account. They would, of course, disagree with Shaftesbury's distinctly sentimentalist claim that "no Animal can be said properly to act, otherwise than thro' Affections or Passions" (Inquiry 53) and that consequently a being can be virtuous only if it possesses certain affections (Inquiry 16–18). But Shaftesbury's teleological account is one according to which virtuous conduct corresponds to a system of value that is independent of human affections. And with this basic ontological framework the rationalists would agree. 

This commitment to an independent system of value explains well the very rationalist-sounding language that Shaftesbury occasionally uses. He speaks, for instance, of "the eternal Measure, and immutable independent Nature of Worth and VIRTUE" (Inquiry 21), as well as of a "fitness and decency in actions" (Characteristics II. 137). And he contends that "PARTIAL AFFECTION, or social Love in part, without regard to a compleat Society or Whole, is in itself an Inconsistency, and implies an absolute Contradiction," as well as maintaining that an affection that is "apply'd only to some one Part of Society, or of a Species, but not to the Species of Society itself . . . has no Foundation or Establishment in Reason" (Inquiry 68–89). These rationalist-sounding statements might sound surprising coming from the philosopher who is often called the founder of the moral sense theory. They fit perfectly well, however, with Shaftesbury's teleological account. 

But the teleological account is not Shaftesbury's only attempt to show that we have reason to embrace virtue. He develops another one as well, which we can call the mental enjoyment account.  

ways Shaftesbury's teleological account (as well as Hutcheson's view), as Hume there argues that the origin of justice is its "utility" or tendency to benefit humanity (Inquiry 185–209). But even in the Inquiry, Hume makes it clear that utility pleases us only because we have the sentiment of benevolence and that we cannot give any reason for our possessing this sentiment—that this is where we must "stop . . . in our examination of causes" (Inquiry 219–220). Shaftesbury's teleological account, in contrast, seeks to suture our sentiment of benevolence within the benevolent design of the universe, which Hume never countenances.

*See Hume's Inquiry, op. cit., 294.

*For more evidence of Shaftesbury's belief in what I am calling the mental enjoyment account, see Characteristics II. 28–44 and "Good and BE" (Philosophical Essays, op. cit., 53–59).
Shaftesbury begins this second account by stating that all "Pleasures or Satisfactions" are either "of the Body, or of the Mind" (Inquiry 62). The pleasures of the body are typically those of eating, drinking and sex. The pleasures of the mind—which Shaftesbury calls "mental Enjoyments"—are of two main types, the first consisting of the "immediate operation" of certain affections and the second consisting of the "effects" of the operation of those affections (Inquiry 63). Shaftesbury next shows that the particular affections that produce the mental enjoyments (either immediately or by their effects) are just those that are characteristic of virtue. He also argues that the mental enjoyments are far superior to the pleasures of the body, that living by the former is in fact "the only means" of procuring "a certain and solid Happiness" (Inquiry 64). He can then conclude that one can be happy if and only if one lives by the affections that are characteristic of virtue.\(^4\)

The particular affections that produce the mental enjoyments are "Benevolence and Goodness" (Inquiry 65–66). We can be sure that the operation of these affections is immediately pleasurable to an extent far superior to eating, drinking and sex, Shaftesbury argues, since being benign and good is the essence of love and friendship, and one has only to experience love and friendship to realize that they are much more pleasurable than mere bodily sensation (Inquiry 65–66). These "social Pleasures," moreover, unlike the pleasures of the body, never go stale but continue to grow the more we partake of them. As one of Shaftesbury's characters in the Monarist puts it,

Tell me, my friend, if ever you were weary of doing good to those you loved? Say when you ever found it unpleasing to serve a friend or whether you first proved this generous pleasure you did not feel it less than at this present, after so long experience? Believe me, Phileas, this pleasure is more delectable than any other. Never did any soul do good, but it came readier to do the same again with more enjoyment. Never was love, or gratitude, or bounty practised but with increasing joy, which made the practitioner still more in love with the fair act. (Characteristics II. 36)\(^5\)

But to "do good" is to be benevolent, which, according to Shaftesbury, is just to be virtuous. It follows, then, that the more virtuous one is, the more one will experience the superior social pleasures of love and friendship.

What common sense tells us about "the compleat immoral State" confirms the importance of this first kind of mental enjoyment (Inquiry 54). Everyone realizes that a person "wholly destitute of a communicative or social Principle" will be perfectly miserable, constantly suffering "dark Suspicion and Jealousy," "Fears and Horrors" and "continual Disturbance, even in the most seeming

\(^4\) This account of Shaftesbury's is very similar to Mill's view of the higher pleasures (in J. S. Mill, Utilitarianism [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979], 8–11).

\(^5\) This character of Shaftesbury's goes on to argue that the pleasure we feel when we do good will grow greater and greater as we come to feel friendship towards more and more of humanity (Characteristics II. 36–39). See also Inquiry 66–70.
fair and secure State of Fortune, and in the highest degree of outward Prosperity" (Inquiry 50–1). But since we acknowledge that "this absolute Degeneracy, this total Apostacy from all Candour, Equity, Trust, Sociableness or Friendship" leads to complete misery, it is unreasonable to deny that some degree of degeneracy will lead to at least some misery (Inquiry 51). Thus he dismisses as absurd the notion that

to be absolutely immoral and inhumane, were indeed the greatest misfortune and misery; but that to be so, in a little degree, shou’d be no misery nor harm at all. Which to allow, is just as reasonable as to own, that to the greatest ill of a Body to be in the utmost manner distorted and maim’d; but that to lose the use only of one Limb, or to be impair’d in some one single Organ or Member, is no Inconvenience or ill worthy the least notice. (Inquiry 51)

Just as anyone with even the slightest knowledge of biology should realize that a person is harmed by losing a limb, so too should anyone with even the slightest knowledge of "our inward Constitution" realize that a person sacrifices happiness to the extent that he forgoes benevolence (Inquiry 52).

The second type of mental enjoyment Shaftesbury describes is an "effect" one experiences as a result of having been benevolent, which is the pleasure of having a "Mind or Reason [that is] well compos’d, quiet, easy within it self, and such as can freely bear its own Inspection and Review" (Inquiry 71). If, conversely, one is not benevolent one will be unable to bear freely his own inspection and review—i.e., one will inevitably experience the mental pain of self-condemnation (Inquiry 74). Why will the benevolent person be able to bear freely his own inspection and the non-benevolent person not be able to do so? It is because, first of all, every person "is, by his Nature, forc’d to endure the Review of his own Mind, and Actions; and to have Representations of himself, and his inward Affairs, constantly passing before him, obvious to him, and revolving in his Mind" (Inquiry 74). And it is because, secondly, every person has a "moral or natural Conscience" or moral sense, which causes him to like or approve of that which incurs others and dislike or disapprove of that which harms others (Inquiry 75). So a benevolent person is bound to like or approve of himself and a non-benevolent person is bound to dislike or disapprove of himself.

Throughout both his published works and his unpublished journals Shaftesbury takes great pains to emphasize the superior pleasure of being able to bear freely one’s own inspection and the "grievous" pain of not being able to

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46See also Characteristics I, 115.
47And if you don’t remind yourself of your past actions, others will do it for you. As Shaftesbury puts it, "Or shou’d be of himself unapt; there are others ready to remind him, and refresh his Memory, in this way of Criticism" (Inquiry 75).
do so. At times he gives the impression that these self-reflective mental pleasures and pains are more important to one’s happiness than even the immediate social pleasures of love and friendship, as for instance when he says that this aspect of the mental enjoyment account is "the chief principle of philosophy" (Characteristics I.121). I think part of the explanation for Shaftesbury's emphasis on this point is that he happened to be an intensely self-critical person, one whose obsessive scrutiny of his own conduct regularly occasioned terrible pangs of shame, guilt, and disgust. Another part of the explanation is that Shaftesbury was deeply impressed by the idea that one’s ability to bear one’s own inspection is entirely within one’s own control, perfectly insulated from the vicissitudes of “fortune, age, circumstances, and humour” (Characteristics II.148). As one of Shaftesbury’s characters rhetorically asks, “How can we better praise the goodness of Providence than in this, ‘That it has placed our happiness and good in things we can bestow upon ourselves?’” (Characteristics II.149). This stress on our control over the outcome of our self-reviews grows out of Shaftesbury’s commitment to Epictetus’s injunction to concern oneself only with what is in one’s own power, and constitutes a very conspicuous strand of stoicism in his thought.

A third part of the explanation of Shaftesbury’s emphasis on this self-reflective pleasure is that he seemed to think that being able to bear freely one’s own inspection is a condition for having a unified self at all. Identity of self, Shaftesbury suggests, is not something that we all have as a matter of course. It requires resolution of will from one moment to the next, and resolution of will is forged only through one’s own internal “Inquisition” or self-review (Characteristics I.122). It is this internal Inquisition that will

keep us the self-same persons, and so regulate our governing fancies, passions, and humours, as to make us comprehensible to ourselves, and knowable by other features than those of a bare countenance. For ‘tis not certainly by virtue of our face merely that we are ourselves. ‘Tis not we who change when our complexion or shape changes. But there is that, which being wholly metamorphosed and converted, we are thereby in reality transformed and lost. (Characteristics I.184)

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19 In “Good and III,” Shaftesbury notes that the pleasures of friendship can have the same kind of constancy (Philosophical Regimen, op. cit., 54–55). I believe that in the end the immediate mental enjoyments of benevolence collapse back into the reflective mental enjoyment of being aware of having conducted oneself virtuously.


21 Compare “Self” (110) and “Natural Self” (135–39) in the Philosophical Regimen, op. cit. Kenneth Winkler has given a trenchant and fascinating analysis of Shaftesbury’s view of personal identity in his “‘All is Revolution in us’: personal identity in Shaftesbury, Berkeley and Hume,” delivered at the 26th Hume Society Conference, Cork, Ireland, 1999.
So when Shaftesbury says that virtue is necessary for “self-enjoyment” (Inquiry 87), we can take him to mean not merely that the virtuous will find life more enjoyable than the vicious, but also that virtue—because it is necessary for successful self-reflection—is something one needs in order to be one self at all.\footnote{See also Characteristics I.83 and I.208–209.}

Shaftesbury, then, presents a well-developed and emphatic version of the mental enjoyment account. But what is the relationship between it and his equally well-developed and emphatic version of the teleological account? Do they fit together?

From one point of view, the two accounts appear to fit together very well indeed. Both accounts conclude that a human will be happiest if he is benevolent. The teleological account reaches this conclusion on the basis of the teleological claims that creatures are happiest when they live in the manner for which they were designed and that humans were designed to be benevolent. The mental enjoyment account reaches this conclusion through an examination of specific human affections. But the examination of human affections, so it might seem, just constitutes further confirmation of the teleological principles. The relationship between Shaftesbury’s two accounts looks, in other words, to be analogous to the relationship between two ways of arriving at the conclusion that, say, wallabies will be better off if they climb into their mothers’ pouch immediately after birth. Suppose that before discovering wallabies we had studied all the other Australian marsupial species and found that in every one of those other cases the marsupial infant was better off if it climbed into its mother’s pouch immediately after birth. We then discovered the wallabies, realized that they too were Australian marsupials, and so formed the belief that they too would be better off if they climbed into their mothers’ pouch immediately after birth. To confirm this belief we then examined the particulars of wallaby development, which examination revealed that in fact the wallabies did do better when they climbed into their mothers’ pouch immediately after birth. Thus our study of the wallaby established independently the particular claim about what is best for wallabies while at the same time constituting further confirmation of the general claim about what is best for Australian marsupials.

Shaftesbury himself suggests at times that the relationship between his two accounts is complementary in just this way: as reaching the same conclusion through consistent and mutually reinforcing channels. But there is one claim he makes that tends this tidy package.
The claim is that the mental enjoyment account will be equally compelling whether our perceptions of the external world are truthful or illusory. As Shaftesbury puts it in the conclusion of the Inquiry, just after maintaining that vice leads to misery and virtue leads to happiness,

For let us carry Scepticism ever so far; let us doubt, if we can, of every thing about us; we cannot doubt of what passes within ourselves. Our Passions and Affections are known to us. They are certain, whatever the Objects may be, on which they are employ'd. Nor is it of any concern to our Argument, how these exterior Objects stand, whether they are Realities, or mere Illusions; whether we wake or dream. For all Dreams will be equally disturbing: And a good Dream (if Life be nothing else) will be easily and happily pass'd. In this Dream of Life, therefore, our Demonstrations have the same force; our Balance and Oeconomy hold good, and our Obligation to VIRTUE is in every respect the same.

(Inquiry 108–9)

We will experience the mental enjoyments if we are benevolent even if everything we believe about the external world is false. So since the mental enjoyments are the only means of procuring a certain and solid happiness, our reason to be virtuous, according to the mental enjoyment account, is entirely independent of the truth of any of our beliefs about the external world.

As Shaftesbury sees it, then, his mental enjoyment account constitutes a reason to embrace virtue that is insipid to even the most extreme forms of skepticism. He calls this account "the inward way" because it relies entirely on "our very perceptions, fancies, appearances, affections and opinions themselves, without regard to anything of any exterior world, and even on the supposition that there is no such world in being." (Characteristics II.287). Shaftesbury makes it very clear, moreover, that this inward way differs from his teleological account, as the latter is grounded in claims about the way the world really is. As he puts it in a section entitled "Passage from terra incognita to the visible world," just after recounting "the inward way,"

[Our late dry task [has been] to prove morals without a world, and establish a conduct of life without the supposition of anything living or extant besides our immediate fancy and world of imagination. But having finished this mysterious work we come now to open day and sunshine... We are henceforward to trust our eyes and take for real the whole creation, and the late forms which lie before us. We are to believe the anatomy of our own body, and in proportionable order the shapes, forms, habits, and constitutions of other animal races... To deny there is anything properly natural (after the concessions already made) would be undoubtedly very preposterous and absurd. Nature and the outward world being owned existence, the rest must of necessity follow. The anatomy of bodies, the order of the spheres, the proper mechanism of a thousand kinds, and the infinite ends and suitable means established in the general constitution and order of things; all this being once admitted and allowed to pass as certain and unquestionable, 'tis as vain afterwards to except against the phrase of natural and unnatural, and question the propriety of this speech applied to the particular forms and beings in the world, as it would be to except against the common appellations of vigorous and
decay in plants, health or sickness in bodies, sobriety or distraction in minds, prosperity or degeneracy in any variable part of the known creation. (Characteres II. 287–8)

Once we allow that our perceptions inform us accurately of an external world, we will then be able to show that virtue is an end as proper and natural to humans as vigor is for plants and health is for bodies. But we cannot show this if we cannot take for granted that there is external world. So while the mental enjoyment account is compatible with extreme skepticism, the teleological account is not.22

Shaftesbury’s attitude toward the difference between his two accounts is nonchalant. But this is inappropriate. For as we noted earlier, the teleological account, with its commitment to the correspondence between benevolence and the “universal system,” implies that value exists in the world independent of our affections. But the mental enjoyment account, since it can proceed on the assumption that there is no external world for our conduct to correspond to, must be compatible with the position that value does not have any kind of affection-independent existence. The mental enjoyment account thus constitutes a sharp turn away from Shaftesbury’s rationalist predecessors and towards the moral ontology of Hume.23

It will be helpful to put the difference between Shaftesbury’s two accounts in terms of Hume’s distinction between representations and original existences.24 When the teleological account is on line, we should attribute to Shaftesbury’s moral sense a representational character, since on that account

22Grean, Darwall and Schneewind each present a unified picture of Shaftesbury’s view, and thus do not seem to think that what I am calling Shaftesbury’s two accounts are distinct in the manner presented here. I believe Darwall (Darwall, op. cit., 156) and Schneewind (Schneewind, op. cit., 303) underestimate the strength of the skeptical hypothesis, while Grean simply misinterprets it (Grean, op. cit., 15). Voile attributes two different positions to Shaftesbury, but they are not the same two that I have in mind here (see Voile, op. cit., 160). Voile also claims that Shaftesbury’s views shifted over the course of his lifetime (Voile, op. cit., 915–666).

23One is another prominent reading that expels away any inconsistency on Shaftesbury’s part. This reading takes Shaftesbury to be concerned with the practical task of persuading people to be virtuous, and not with the philosophical task of advancing a systematic value ontology. On this reading, when Shaftesbury presents the “unsound” way of the mental account, he is not committing himself to any philosophical position about the origin of morals but simply advancing a reason to be virtuous that will convince even the extreme skeptic, whose assumptions Shaftesbury himself does not accept. Shaftesbury, in other words, has a single goal—that of convincing people to be virtuous—and the pursuit of that goal necessitates using different strategies when talking to different audiences. This would take Shaftesbury to be what Hume calls a “painter” or “moralist” and not an “anatomist” or “philosopher” (Hume’s Treatise, op. cit., i. 69–11). But even if this reading is accurate (and certainly there is something to it), it is still important to draw out the incompatible implications of the different arguments Shaftesbury presents, as this enables us to see an important divide in early modern British philosophy.

the affections of the moral sense accurately reflect the world. Shaftesbury himself strongly suggests the moral sense has such a representational character when he speaks of a "Misconception or Misapprehension of the Worth or Value of any Object" (*Inquiry* 19), implying that the worth or value is grounded in the affection-independent universal system and that the job of the moral sense is to represent that worth or value accurately. But Shaftesbury claims that according to the mental enjoyment account, our moral affections will still ground "our Obligation to Virtue" even on the assumption that we fail in all our attempts to produce truthful representations of the external world (*Inquiry* 109). Now this claim does not on its own imply that according to the mental enjoyment account the affections of the moral sense are non-representative original existences, as it is compatible with the view that the moral sense represents accurately the moral status of types of affections, even though we may always be in error about when and where the tokens of those affections exist.\(^6\)

But Shaftesbury's claim that the mental enjoyment account allows us to maintain confidence in our moral judgments even if all our judgments about the external world are false does at the very least nudge moral sentimentalism towards non-representationalism. For if moral judgments are attempts to give an accurate representation of certain features of certain objects in the external world, the supposition that those objects do not exist would at the very least suggest (even if it did not strictly speaking imply) the diminution of the importance of those judgments.\(^7\)

And an obvious way to forestall this diminution is to hold that moral judgments are not attempts to represent the world after all, that what is important about moral judgments is something other than representation. Shaftesbury states, moreover, that even "[i]f there be no real Amiability or Deformity in moral Acts, there is at least an imaginary one of full force"—he says, that is, our moral affections will still have full force even if they come from "Imagination or Fancy" and not from a faculty that tells us how things are "in Nature"—and it is quite difficult to see

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\(^6\) As an anonymous *HP* referee put it, "In supposing that all is a dream, Shaftesbury is not supposing that there are no objects for the affections, but only that we cannot confirm that what appear to be the objects of the senses really exist. The affections would still have objects... Shaftesbury seems to argue that we can reach conclusions about the nature of moral affections by examining the nature of their objects, just as Descartes, in *Meditation II*, could reach conclusions about the nature of the wax, even while supposing that it might not exist."

\(^7\) It would suggest the diminution of our moral judgments about other people, in any event, although one might wonder whether it would suggest the same diminution of our moral judgments of our own conduct (although even in the case of one's own conduct, the sceptical hypothesis might threaten to diminish the importance of moral judgments conceived of as representations, as one's own conduct will usually involve the treatment of other people, about whom one would supposedly be in error). Note, however, that despite his emphasizing concern with one's own character, Shaftesbury does also talk about moral judgments of others (see *Inquiry* 17–8).
how that statement could be reconciled with a representative view of the moral sense (Inquiry 26).  

Of course it is somewhat anachronistic to read the Humean distinction between representations and original existences back into Shaftesbury. For Shaftesbury did not draw the distinction himself and, as we've just seen, his claims about the moral sense turn out in fact to straddle it. I think, though, that the distinction reveals a crucial divide that exists in nascent form in Shaftesbury's thought. And Shaftesbury's failure to place the moral sense clearly on one side of this divide may have been part of the motivation behind Hume's deployment of the distinction. So it might not be at all anachronistic to read Shaftesbury's claims about the moral sense forward onto Hume's distinction between representations and original existences. Focusing on how this distinction cleaves Shaftesbury's conception of the moral sense also helps to make clear that what is at issue here is not principally the threat of extreme skepticism. What is at issue, rather, is the origin of value and the ground of our reason to be virtuous. And while the hypothesis of extreme skepticism can bring this issue into a helpfully stark light, the issue will nonetheless remain pressing even after the skeptical hypothesis has been dismissed.

But must the distinction between representations and original existences really separate Shaftesbury's teleological account from his mental enjoyment account? Is there no way of interpreting Shaftesbury's moral sense that brings these two accounts into harmony? One might think that Green and Darwall's discussion of Shaftesbury's "reasonable enthusiasm" offers just such a reconciliation. According to this line of interpretation, to feel moral affections is to come into "sympathetic union" with the rational principle that orders the universe, just as to contemplate beauty is to share in or come into sympathetic union with "the creative intelligence that formed the beauty contemplated." The moral sense thus turns out to be neither a perception of a mind-independent moral order nor a non-corresponding original existence, but rather that which brings one into correspondence with the mind that has created the universal system. This enthusiastic way of reading Shaftesbury is intriguing and appealing. But I am unconvinced that it offers a fully satisfactory way of reconciling his two accounts of virtue. For it seems to me that while Shaftesbury's reasonable enthusiasm does greatly enrich his teleological account, it still does not make that account compatible with the extreme sceptical hypothesis. Shaftesbury's enthusiasm consists of

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27 The passage from which I draw this quotation was added by Shaftesbury to the 1711 edition of the Inquiry (which might explain what seems to me to be its odd location in Book I).
29 Darwall, op. cit., 190.
coming into union with the mind of God, whose existence we can infer from
our perceptions of the design of the world. But extreme scepticism implies
that all our perceptions could be illusory and that consequently we could be
wrong about the design of the world and the mind of God. On the sceptical
hypothesis, then, we cannot be sure whether our enthusiasm is of the reason-
able kind that Shaftesbury endorses or of the superstitious kind that Shaftes-
bury condemns, as we cannot be sure if we are really joining the rational
principle that orders the universe or simply embracing figments of our own
imagination. So although Shaftesbury’s reasonable enthusiasm does suggest
that even the teleological account involves a mind-dependent view of the
origin of virtue, the mind upon which virtue is dependent (i.e., the mind of
God) is still independent of us. And for this reason it seems to me that even
the enthusiastically enriched teleological account would be endangered by
the hypothesis of extreme scepticism in a way in which the mental enjoyment
account would not be.

This difference between the two accounts can also be put in Shaftesbury’s
own terms of moral realism. For while Shaftesbury calls himself a “realist in
respect of virtue” (Characteristics II.52) and attacks those who deny the reality
of the difference between virtue and vice, the realism associated with his teleo-
logical account will differ significantly from the realism associated with his mental
enjoyment account.

The teleological account, grounded as it is in the existence of a value-laden
“universal system,” can fund a realist view according to which moral distinc-
tions are eternal and immutable, prior to the nature of God and human. This is
what Shaftesbury has in mind when he speaks of “the eternal Measures, and
immutable independent Nature of Worth and Virtue” (Inquiry 21) and when he
declares that virtue “is really something in itself, and in the nature of things;
not arbitrary or factitious (if I may so speak); not constituted from without, or
dependent on custom, fancy, or will” (Characteristics II.52–3). Now when
Shaftesbury makes these claims, it is natural to think that he believes that our
reason to be virtuous originates in the eternal and immutable mind-
independent structure of reality—that he believes that if virtue did not have
such an origin our reason to be virtuous would be undermined. Certainly this is
what the anti-voluntarist rationalists believed, and when Shaftesbury says that
virtue is eternal and immutable he is clearly echoing them. It would, moreover,
seem odd in itself for someone to make such elevated claims about the nature
of virtue, and then to say that those features have no bearing on our reason to
be virtuous.

But then again, odd though it may seem, it appears that Shaftesbury does
say just that—that our reason to be virtuous will not be weakened if it turns
out that virtue is not real. As he puts it, “If there be no real Amiableness or
Deformity in moral acts, there is at least an imaginary one of full force" (Inquiry 26). But if virtue is not real—if it is "only a name" (Characteristics II.55) and "shou'd not be allow'd in Nature" (Inquiry 26)—shouldn't Shaftesbury think that our reason to be virtuous will evaporate?

The explanation for Shaftesbury's belief that our reason to be virtuous will not evaporate even on the assumption that virtue is not "in the nature of things" is that he is working with two different senses of the reality of virtue. There is the anti-voluntarist sense we have looked at above, according to which virtue is real only if it exists in the eternal and immutable mind-independent structure of reality. But there is another sense as well, according to which virtue is real if the motives of the virtuous differ from the motives of the vicious. This second sense of the reality of virtue allows Shaftesbury to distinguish between his mental enjoyment account and an egoistic account such as that advanced by Mandeville. For the egoist will claim that all people are always motivated by the same selfish desires, and that therefore there is no real difference between the character of the saint and the character of the knave. But the mental enjoyment account implies that people possess fundamentally non-selfish or other-regarding sentiments, and that it is these sentiments that motivate the saint and thus distinguish his character from that of the selfishly motivated knave. It is this second sense of the reality of virtue that underlies the following passage from Shaftesbury:

Therefore if thru such an earnest and passionate Love of Virtue, a Creature be accidentally induc't to do Good (as he might be upon the same terms induc't to do Ill) he is not more a good Creature for this Good he executes, than a Man is the more an honest or good Man either for pleading a just Cause, or fighting in a good one, for the sake merely of his Fee or Stipend. Whatsoever therefore is done which happens to be advantageous to the Species, thro an Affection merely towards Self-Good, does not imply any more Goodness in the Creature than as the Affection it-self is good. Let him, in any particular, act ever so well; if at the bottom, it be that selfish Affection alone which moves him; he is in himself still-vitious. (Inquiry 14)

If a person benefits humanity but does so only out of self-interest, then there is no real difference between his character and the character of someone who harms humanity out of self-interest. But if one person is motivated by other-regarding affections and the other by selfishness, then there is a real difference between the character of the two of them.

Virtue can be real according to this second anti-egoist sense, however, and still be unreal according to the first anti-voluntarist sense. For according to the first sense, virtue is real only if it exists in the eternal and immutable mind-independent structure of reality. But according to the second sense, virtue can be real even if it does not have any mind-independent existence but only marks a difference between persons' motives. Now the eighteenth century
rationalists, in their response to moral sentimentalism, explicitly denied that there would be any reason to be virtuous if virtue were mind-dependent, maintaining that this second sense of the reality of virtue is not robust enough to ground confidence in morality. And when Shaftesbury says that virtue is “is really something in itself . . . not arbitrary or factitious . . . or dependent on custom, fancy, or will” (Characteristics II.52–53), he sounds the same note as those rationalists. But Shaftesbury also maintains that virtue will still have its “full force” even if it exists only in our “Imagination or Fancy” (Inquiry 26), and such a claim is one that the rationalists would adamantly oppose. Indeed, it was extremely important to the rationalists to defeat the hypothesis of extreme scepticism, in part because they believed that the denial of (moral) knowledge that the hypothesis implied undermined our reason to act on our (moral) beliefs.

By putting these ideas in terms of the self we can bring into even sharper focus the contrast between the rationalists and Shaftesbury of the teleological account, on the one hand, and Hume and Shaftesbury of the mental enjoyment account, on the other. Shaftesbury, the rationalists and Hume all believed that one must be virtuous in order to have a fully realized self. As Shaftesbury, as we’ve seen, even suggests that without virtue one cannot be one self at all. Now as the rationalists see it, the fully realized self that virtue enables us to acquire corresponds to the mind of God. This rationalist view is grounded in the belief that God’s conduct is determined by His ideas of virtue, and that our ideas of virtue derive directly from God’s mind. Thus, we become God-like just to the extent that our conduct is determined by ideas of virtue; or as the rationalists put it, by being virtuous we come to participate in a limited but nonetheless real way with the Divine Nature itself. Now Shaftesbury’s teleological account is in its fundamentals entirely consistent with this rationalist view. For Shaftesbury maintains that our “original ideas of goodness” have been “implanted in us” by the “Divine Being, or Nature under him” (Characteristics I.25) and that to “love the public, to study universal good, and to promote the interest of the whole world, as far as lies within our power, is surely the height of goodness, and makes that temper which we call divine” (Characteristics I.27). And these two claims—that our ideas of virtue originate in God, and that we thus become God-like when our conduct is determined by our ideas of virtue—are just those that consti-

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tute the rationalist view that through virtuous conduct we can come to participate with the Divine Mind. 35

Shaftesbury’s mental enjoyment account, however, must involve a conception of self that is significantly different. For the self that virtue enables us to realize, on the mental enjoyment account, will not necessarily correspond to or participate with the Divine Mind, since that account can allow that there may be nothing external to the self to correspond to or participate with. It must be possible, that is, for the conception of self that the mental enjoyment account invokes to be unthethered from all theological belief, left to float free in a world without design.

This divide in Shaftesbury’s thought can also be charted by the idea of integrity. Shaftesbury says on numerous occasions that a virtuous person will have integrity while a vicious person will not. He points out, as well, that the word “integrity” is derived from “intire” or entire. There are, however, two different ways of understanding this idea of being entire. On one understanding, one’s affections are entire when they constitute a concern for the well-being of the entire system of which one is a part. This is what Shaftesbury has in mind when he says that “Rectitude, Integrity, or Virtue” consists of agreement with “that System in which [one] is included, and of which [one] constitutes a Part” or having “one’s Affections right and intire, not only in respect of one’s self, but of Society and the Publick” (Inquiry 48). It is also what he has in mind when he contrasts “narrow or partial Affection”—i.e., concern for only some of those within the system of which one is a part—with “intire Affection”—i.e., concern for all those within the system of which one is a part (Inquiry 70). And this understanding of integrity fits perfectly well with the teleological account of virtue, as it equates the possession of integrity to the state of being in harmony with the system of the universe, or to living “according to Nature, and the Dictates and Rules of supreme Wisdom” (Inquiry 71).

But on the other understanding of integrity, one’s affections are entire simply when they correspond with one another or form the self-contained whole. One’s integrity, on this understanding, concerns how one’s parts relate to each other, not how one relates to things outside of oneself. And this second understanding coincides with Shaftesbury’s mental enjoyment account of virtue, as that account relies simply on internal consistency and not on any correspondence between one’s internal principles and the external world.

This ambiguous notion of integrity, I believe, marks Shaftesbury as a harbinger of contemporary moral thinking, for the same ambiguity continues to surround our use of the term today. Sometimes we use “integrity” to describe that which is possessed by a person who lives according to independently

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35 See also Characteristics II, Ios–6. This line of thought is the same one I referred to above as Greco and Burnell’s view of Shaftesbury’s “reasonable enthusiasm.”
determined moral principles, and sometimes we use the same word to describe that which is possessed by a person who lives in a manner consistent with her own principles, whatever they may be. And like Shaftesbury, we usually don’t bother to disambiguate these two senses of integrity, letting the word slide back and forth between them. Perhaps we don’t draw the distinction clearly because of a hopeful belief that the two senses are co-extensive. But while early modern rationalism involved theological commitments that ensure such a co-extension, positions that do not attribute human nature to purposive design (such as Hume’s and Shaftesbury’s mental enjoyment account) must face the possibility that the two senses of integrity will diverge.

The line between Shaftesbury’s two accounts of virtue will gain even more definition when we consider the different responses they allow us offer to someone who asks why he shouldn’t try to rid himself of his moral sense. Someone might ask such a question because he is tempted by vice but knows that if he is vicious his moral sense will disapprove. He wants to avoid self-condemnation, but wonders why this goal is better served by avoiding vice instead of by quashing his moral sense. Now Shaftesbury believes that the moral sense is so deeply ingrained in each of us that eradicating it entirely is almost impossible (although he does think it can become corrupted by superstition and false religion [Inquiry 23–31]). When the teleological account is on board, however, Shaftesbury can say to the person tempted by vice more than simply that his attempts to quash his moral sense are bound to fail. Shaftesbury can go on to tell this person that his moral sense is in fact aligned to the system of the universe, and that living in accord with it will bring him in harmony with the rest of creation. But when he is relying on the mental enjoyment account, Shaftesbury will not be able to call on such considerations. He will be able to say only that it is a brute fact that we are instinct-driven to approve of one kind of conduct and disapprove of another, and that consequently we will be happy if we live a certain kind of life and unhappy if we do not. He will not be able to situate this fact in an affection-independent universal value system. 34 With the claim that humans happen to be constituted in a certain way, Shaftesbury’s account of the reason to be virtuous will—like Hume’s—simply bottom out. 35

In the first section of the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume writes,

34 See Inquiry 46.
the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense; whether, like all sound judgment of truth and falsehood, they should be the same to every rational intelligent being; or whether, like the perception of beauty and deformity, they be founded entirely on the particular fabric and constitution of the human species. . . . Such confusion reigned in these subjects, that in opposition of the greatest consequence could prevail between one system and another, and even in the parts of almost each individual system; and yet nobody, till very lately, was ever sensible of it. The elegant Lord Shaftesbury, who first gave occasion to remark this distinction, and who, in general, adhered to the principles of [sentimentalism], is not, himself, entirely free from the same confusion.  

The common view of the history of this period might lead us to believe that what Hume calls Shaftesbury's "confusion" consists simply of the unconsidered use of some surface-level rationalist-sounding language, and that in all important respects Shaftesbury is in fundamental agreement with Hume's sentimentalism. We have seen, however, that the ambiguity in Shaftesbury's thought runs deeper than that.

This ambiguity results from Shaftesbury's being powerfully attracted by two different pictures of our reason to be virtuous. On one picture, our reason to be virtuous is grounded in the mind-independent value system of the universe. On the other, our reason to be virtuous is grounded in our internal constitution. Shaftesbury believed that a single view could contain both these pictures. But his use of the extreme sceptical hypothesis brought the second picture into a focus so sharp that it became impossible to combine it with the first. Shaftesbury's work is thus one of the first to force the choice between what is called in contemporary discussions an "externalist" and an "internalist" moral theory.  

And in the end Shaftesbury's "confusion" consists of his failure to realize that this was a choice with which he himself was faced.

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5 Hume's Enquiries, op. cit., 170-1
6 For the most in-depth discussion of internalism and the British moralists, see Darwall, op. cit., passim.
7 An earlier version of this paper was given at the 46th Hume Society Conference in Cork, Ireland, 1999. I have benefited greatly from the comments of Charlotte Brown, Rachel Cohon, Jan Coover, Stephen Darwall, Manfred Knehn, Arthur Krelk, and two anonymous JHP readers.