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Hutcheson and Hume on the Color of Virtue

KENNETH P. WINKLER

"the colours or appearances of Good and Evil"
—Francis Bacon

Commentators have long debated whether Hutcheson's account of the moral sense, or Hume's account of moral judgment, can be classified as "subjectivist," "emotivist," "non-cognitivist," or "anti-realist." I myself have come to think that their accounts cannot usefully be described in these twentieth century terms, but I will not try to defend that suspicion here.¹ I will try instead to place their accounts of moral perception and moral judgment in an eighteenth century context, and to address a more narrow and, I think, better-defined question of interpretation, one raised not only by scholars of Hutcheson and Hume, but by contemporary philosophers seeking instruction or inspiration from their eighteenth century predecessors. Is there, according to Hutcheson and Hume, an illuminating comparison to be made between virtue (or its recognition) and the secondary qualities (or their recognition)? My aim in this paper is to show that there is.

The first three sections of my paper deal with Hutcheson. The first is a very brief sketch of Hutcheson's account of the moral sense, designed to show that Hutcheson modeled his account of moral perception on the Lockean account of the perception of secondary qualities.² In the second section I examine an interpretive proposal recently developed by David Fate Norton.³ According to Norton, Hutcheson treats virtue and vice as objective accompaniments, or "concomitants," of objective circumstances. And Hutcheson qualifies as a

moral cognitivist, Norton suggests, because he takes the *ideas* of virtue and vice, which are themselves concomitants of the ideas of the associated circumstances, to be *representations* of the objective concomitants. We have, on this interpretation, two sets of concomitants: *objective* concomitants (concomitants “in the object”) and concomitant ideas (concomitants “in the mind”). Norton rests his case on five texts in which, he thinks, Hutcheson discusses, or appears to discuss, concomitant ideas of morality.⁴ After studying these texts in their original setting, I am unconvinced that Hutcheson believes in either concomitant moral ideas or concomitant moral qualities, and the second section of my paper is an attempt to defend this reaction. The third section is a discussion of Hutcheson’s debt to Locke. A full discussion of their complicated philosophical relationship is beyond the scope of this paper, but I do want to call attention to a neglected work—Hutcheson’s Latin logic handbook—in which the influence of Locke, on the topic of perception in particular, is striking. The handbook lends support to my reading of the texts in section two.

In the fourth section of the paper I turn to Hume. Hume was the first to make an explicit comparison between moral qualities and secondary qualities, and he claimed (rightly, if what I say earlier in the paper is correct) to have found it in Hutcheson. Simon Blackburn has recently argued that Hume “did not rely upon the Comparison in his theory of ethics, [and] that he could not possibly have done so, for reasons lying deep within his philosophy.”⁵ I want to create room for a different view, in which the comparison lends support to conclusions that seemed to Hume, at least at one time, to be momentous.

1. Hutcheson’s Account of the Moral Sense

According to the Lockean account of (for example) the perception of color (as presented, for example, in Book II, chapter viii of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), there are three kinds of ideas that might be described as *ideas of color*: sensations caused by colored objects; ideas of an object’s power to cause such sensations; and ideas of whatever it is in objects in which that power is realized. We have, according to Locke, only very vague ideas of the third kind. Had we, for example, microscopical eyes, our ideas, like those of God or the angels, would be more revealing than they are now.

The distinction among the three kinds of ideas is essential to a proper understanding of Hutcheson. Hutcheson regards virtue and vice as qualities with the power to produce specifically moral sentiments of approbation and disapprobation. Like the sensation of red, moral approbation and disapprobation resemble nothing in the objects that give rise to them. “This approbation,” Hutcheson writes, “cannot be supposed an image of any thing external, more than the pleasures of harmony, of taste, of smell.”⁶ Thus moral approbation and disapprobation are ideas of the first kind. But we also have

ideas of virtue and vice as powers.

The word MORAL GOODNESS...denotes our idea of some quality apprehended in actions, which procures approbation....MORAL EVIL denotes our idea of a contrary quality, which excites condemnation or dislike.⁷

Just as, on Locke's view, we infer a power in the object to produce a sensation of red, so, on Hutcheson's view, we frame an idea of virtue as a power to procure the sentiment of approbation. This is an idea of the second kind. But on Hutcheson's account of moral perception we also have the kind of idea which, on Locke's account of the perception of color, we are said to lack: a clear idea of the quality in which the power to procure approbation is realized. This quality is the benevolent motivation or "kind affection" of the agent. It is this idea of virtue as it is in itself that Hutcheson has in mind when he speaks of "*kind Affections or Virtue*," and writes that "Virtue consists in Benevolence."⁸ We have, then, three ideas that can be described as *an idea of virtue*: the sentiment occasioned by a virtuous action or agent; the idea of the virtue as a quality responsible for the sentiment; and the idea of the quality as it is in itself—the idea of benevolence. Each "idea of virtue" corresponds to one kind of Lockean "idea of color," and none of the three qualifies as a representative idea owed to the moral sense. The idea of benevolence is a *natural* idea, an idea reason must be able to frame without the assistance of the moral sense because it is the idea that puts the moral sense in motion.

The comparison of Hutcheson's account of moral perception to the received (or Lockean) account of the perception of secondary qualities was put forward in the eighteenth century by Richard Price, among others. Price writes of Hutcheson's account:

Moral right and wrong, signify nothing *in the objects themselves* to which they are applied, any more than agreeable and harsh; sweet and bitter; pleasant and painful.⁹

Price's sentence echoes one in which Locke describes the secondary qualities as those which are "in truth nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their *primary Qualities*, i.e. by the Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of their insensible Parts, as Colours, Sounds, Tasts, etc."¹⁰ Taken in isolation, Locke's sentence is ambiguous. It can be read as saying that the secondary qualities are *nothing* (period) in the objects themselves, or it can be read as saying that they are *nothing but*—nothing other than—powers. The presence of a comma before the "but" may assist the first reading, but the context makes it clear that the correct one is the second.¹¹ Price apparently missed this, because he goes on to say that according to Hutcheson, moral right and wrong signify "only *certain effects in us*," making

it "improper to say of an action, that it is *right*, in much the same sense that it is improper to say of an object of taste, that it is *sweet*; or of *pain*, that it is *in fire*."¹² Once we make the distinction among the three kinds of ideas of virtue, we can see that there is nothing improper about calling an action right, or even in saying that there is virtue in the agent. In the same way there is no impropriety in calling a Lockean object sweet, or in saying that it has sweetness in it. Because he believes that there is a real difference between virtuous and vicious agents, Hutcheson counts as a moral realist in the eighteenth century sense of that phrase. But in much the same way, Locke is a realist about color, taste, and smell. As Locke writes, our simple ideas of secondary qualities "are all real and true," not because they resemble things themselves, but "because they answer and agree to those Powers of Things, which produce them in our Minds" (*Essay* II xxx 2), and there are (or are likely to be) real differences in the corpuscular constitutions of objects, underlying the steady differences in their powers.

2. The Evidence for Concomitant Ideas

I now turn to the five texts (labeled "A," "B," "C," "D," and "E") Norton offers in support of his view that Hutcheson recognizes concomitant ideas of morality. I will try to show that Hutcheson's concomitant ideas—ideas of duration, number, extension, figure, motion, and rest—are analogous to Lockean ideas of *primary* qualities, and that ideas of moral qualities are not among them.¹³

I begin with Norton's passage C, which appears in Hutcheson's *Synopsis Metaphysicae*:¹⁴

Of those [kinds of sensations] which are attained by means of the external sense, and would seem to be related to it, some are pleasing to a certain reflex sense, some unpleasing: since the mind attends not only to its external sensations, but also to the concomitant ideas [*ideas concomitantes*]; and is moved by a certain form which is different from the pleasant external sensations.

Norton assumes that the "concomitant ideas" (or forms or perceptions) mentioned here are moral concomitants, but I think it is clear from the context that Hutcheson is thinking either of two concomitant ideas already mentioned on 49 of the *Synopsis*—duration and number—or of a somewhat longer list of concomitants appearing on 48. The longer list includes (along with duration and number) extension, figure, motion, and rest. They are described on 48 as "concomitant affections" of sensation:¹⁵

In the first kind are *colors, sounds, tastes, odors, heat and color*. In the second are *duration, number, extension, figure, motion and rest*. These

can be perceived by more than one sense: indeed, certain of them are also perceived by an internal sense. Qualities of the first kind are properly called *sensible*; those of the second, are rather *concomitant affections of sensations*.

Passage C is telling us, I think, that the mind reflects not only on external sensations, but on duration, number, and the others: these concomitant ideas are important because the "forms" Hutcheson goes on to discuss once the passage ends—novelty, amplitude, similitude, harmony, and so on—all involve them. We cannot perceive any of these forms without first perceiving duration, number, and perhaps the others listed on 48.

My reading of Passage C is confirmed, I think, by a parallel passage in *A System of Moral Philosophy*.¹⁶ There Hutcheson identifies six concomitant ideas: duration, number, extension, figure, motion, and rest. He writes:

The simpler ideas of this class, which some call the Concomitant ideas of sensation, are not generally either pleasant or painful. It is from some complex modes of figure and motion that pleasure is perceived: beauty, from some proportions of figure with colour; harmony, from some proportions of time as well as of tones or notes. The proportions of numbers and figures are the field in which our reasoning powers have the most free and vigorous exercise. Of these hereafter.

My reading of passage C is also supported by the long passage from the *Essay* in which Hutcheson identifies three kinds of ideas: sensible perceptions, universal concomitants, and ideas such as extension, figure, motion, and rest. "These all arise," he writes, "without any previous *Ideas* assembled, or compared." "From *all* these [my emphasis]," he then explains, "we may justly distinguish 'the Pleasures perceived upon the previous Reception and Comparison of various sensible Perceptions, with their concomitant Ideas, or intellectual Ideas, when we find Uniformity, or Resemblance among them.' These are meant by *the Perceptions of the internal Sense*."¹⁷ Perceptions of the internal sense are distinguished from *all* ideas of the first three kinds, concomitant ideas included. Ideas of the three kinds arise without any *previous* ideas. Hutcheson seems to be drawing a deliberate *contrast* between concomitant ideas, which arise "directly," or without previous perceptions, and perceptions of the internal sense, which arise, as he elsewhere suggests, "subsequently." The internal senses are "subsequent senses" (and their objects, as Hutcheson writes on 52 of the *Synopsis*, are "*reflex or subsequent sensations*").¹⁸ Norton's reading seems to fuse the notion of a concomitant idea with the notion of a subsequent idea. But Hutcheson seems to be struggling to keep them apart.

A related point applies to passage B. Here Hutcheson doesn't use the word 'concomitant', but he does speak of perceptions that "have no relation to any external Sensation":¹⁹

We have multitudes of perceptions which have no relation to any external sensation; ...such as the ideas of number, duration, proportion, virtue, vice...

But after listing the five ideas Norton mentions when he cites the passage—number, duration, proportion, virtue, and vice—Hutcheson continues the list with items Norton omits: "the pleasures of honour, of congratulation; the pains of remorse, shame, sympathy, and many others." Norton assumes that the list is uniform—that every item on the list is there for the same reason. But the inclusion of pleasures and pains makes this assumption implausible. It is more plausible to suppose that the items on Hutcheson's list are there for diverse reasons. Number and duration are there because they are concomitant ideas in the sense identified on 49 of the *Synopsis*. And *virtue and vice seem to be there because they are subsequent ideas*, as are the pleasures of honor and congratulation and the pains of sympathy, shame, and remorse: they are ideas of reflection (or internal sense) as opposed to ideas of external sense.

Norton's passage A is from a letter to William Mace, first published in *The European Magazine and London Review* in 1788.²⁰ Norton writes:

In September, 1727, Hutcheson, in a letter to William Mace, argues that "Messrs. Locke and Molyneux are both wrong about the cube and sphere proposed to a blind man restored to sight." He goes on to defend his suggestion that there are representative and universal concomitant ideas, and he then turns to the subject of desire, and says that he "still cannot take *desire* to denote a complex idea." After further remarks to show that desire and prospect of interest are distinct, he adds: "Desire and volition are distinct from each other, and both distinct from what we commonly call perceptions; though we have also an idea or consciousness of volition and desire. Quere, Is there not here plainly an idea, viz. that of desire or volition, and an object, viz. the desire or volition distinct from this perception of it? May there not be the same as to the ideas I call the concomitant?" ("Hutcheson's Moral Realism," 408.)

But there is no reference in Hutcheson's letter to moral concomitants. Hutcheson first mentions concomitance when he describes how he differs from Berkeley. He tells Mace:

As to material *substrata*, I own I am a sceptic; all the phænomena might be as they are, were there nothing but perceptions, for the

phænomena are perceptions. And yet, were there external objects, I cannot imagine how we could be better informed of them than we are. I own I cannot see the force of the arguments against external objects, *i.e.* something like, or proportional, to our concomitant ideas, as I call extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity. (158. He refers to Berkeley earlier on the same page, where he writes that he “was well apprized of the scheme of thinking you are fallen into, not only by our Dr. Berkly’s books, and by some of the old academics, but by frequent conversation with some few speculative friends in Dublin.”)

This passage contains the only occurrence of the word ‘concomitant’ prior to the one Norton quotes. Hutcheson goes on to argue that extension can be perceived by more than one sense: this explains why a blind man is able to learn geometry, and why Locke and Molyneux were wrong to answer Molyneux’s famous question as they did.²¹ Hutcheson then writes that “duration and number seem to me as real perceptions as any” (159). When he asks, in the passage Norton quotes, whether what is true of the ideas of desire and volition (namely, that they are distinct from their objects) is also true “of the ideas I call the concomitant,” it is clearly duration and number (and perhaps also extension, figure, motion, rest, and solidity) to which he is referring. He is certainly not referring to moral qualities, which are mentioned nowhere in the letter.

This brings me to passages D and E. Here again Hutcheson does not use the word ‘concomitant’; Norton’s aim in quoting them is to call attention to Hutcheson’s willingness to describe the forms we approve as *goods* (or as *moral*). Hutcheson writes, for example (in Norton’s passage D), that “when we admire the virtue of another, the whole excellence, or that quality which by nature we are determined to approve, is conceived to be in that other.”²² I am inclined to read such passages in a more modest way: the form that prompts approbation is (as Norton rightly emphasizes) conceived to be in the agent, but it is (considered in itself) nothing but benevolence or kind affection. As Hutcheson writes in *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, “the Forms which move our approbation are, all kind affections and purposes of action.”²³ We can conceive of such a form *as* benevolence, and we can also approve of it, but there is no idea that “represents” its goodness.

I conclude that passages A through E provide no support for Norton’s conclusion that “Hutcheson thought that there are concomitant ideas of morality” (410). And when their contexts are restored, the five passages actually support a very different conclusion: Hutcheson *deliberately confined* the label ‘concomitant’ to non-moral ideas. Norton writes that “precisely how many of these [concomitant ideas of morality] there are, which they are, and just how they make moral perception possible, is not as clear as one would like” (410).

But the reason is that Hutcheson had no doctrine of moral concomitants. He *did* have a doctrine of non-moral concomitants, which explains why he is careful to tell us how many there are, which they are, and just how they make certain forms of non-moral perception possible (though Hutcheson's accounts of these things vary somewhat from work to work).²⁴

3. Hutcheson's Debt to Locke

A full discussion of Hutcheson's debt to Locke is beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to draw attention to a neglected work in which Locke's influence is striking. I believe this work supports my assessment of the textual evidence for concomitant ideas of morality.

The book is Hutcheson's *Logicae Compendium*, a handbook Hutcheson may have prepared for his students at the dissenting academy in Dublin.²⁵ Much of the *Compendium* is cribbed (at times *verbatim*) from Henry Aldrich's better-known *Artis Logicae Compendium*, or perhaps from a common source.²⁶ (Aldrich's compendium, first published in Oxford in 1692, appeared in numerous editions from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth.²⁷) There is no need to document the borrowings here. I want instead to explain why Hutcheson's *Compendium* can be described as "Lockean," even though it is, in its structure, doctrine, and vocabulary, far closer to Aldrich's compendium than it is to Locke's *Essay*. This is because it differs from the earlier compendium (and from more traditional texts such as Gershom Carmichael's *Breviuscula Introductio ad Logicam*) in ways that point to the influence of Locke.²⁸

Hutcheson's *Compendium*, for example, begins (as Aldrich's had) with a thumbnail history of philosophy. The history draws its overall structure, virtually all of its facts, and many of its sentences from Aldrich's own historical preface (or a common source). On the final page of the history, in one of his very few departures from Aldrich (whose own history ends with the fall of Constantinople), Hutcheson identifies recent figures who have, "not without great glory," marked out or set off on new roads. In physics he names Bacon, Descartes, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton; in ethics he names Grotius, Cumberland, Pufendorf, Pico, Ficino, and Shaftesbury. When he comes to logic and metaphysics he names only one: "Lockius" (11).

Locke's influence is strongest in Part I of the *Compendium*, on apprehension.²⁹ Hutcheson's presentation of this traditional body of doctrine, otherwise very faithful to Aldrich, contains a number of strongly Lockean elements:

- i. a distinction between primary and secondary qualities based closely on Locke's discussion in the *Essay*;
- ii. a Lockean account of the simplicity of ideas;

- iii. a Lockean account of the reality and adequacy of ideas, followed by the Lockean pronouncement that we have no adequate ideas of substances;
- iv. a doctrine of abstraction lifted almost *verbatim* from the *Essay*;
- v. a doctrine of internal sense that identifies it with reflection;
- vi. the announcement that all of our ideas take rise from reflection or external sense.

For example, Hutcheson divides ideas into sensations, images [*Imaginationes*], and pure thoughts [*Intellectiones puras*]. "Sensation is twofold," he then writes, "external and internal" (17). He explains that

The powers of bodies to excite ideas of colors, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, and cold are called secondary qualities, or proper sensibles: we perceive each of these by only one sense. Those which are perceived by more than one sense, that is by vision and by touch—extension, figure, situation, motion and rest—are the primary and true qualities of body. (17–18)

These qualities endow a thing with "the power to excite ideas of the secondary qualities, to which there is nothing similar in bodies themselves. There are also two ideas which can be perceived by both internal and external sense: namely duration and number." He then describes internal sense as that "which chiefly supplies pure thoughts" (18). This "is called consciousness, or the power of reflection," and its objects include "all the actions, passions, and modifications of the soul" (19). "Indeed all ideas," he concludes on 19, "take rise from reflection or external sense."³⁰

I suggested earlier that when Hutcheson (in passage B) includes virtue and vice on a list of perceptions that have no relation to external sensation—a list that begins with the concomitant ideas of number and duration—he needn't be indicating that our ideas of virtue and vice are "concomitant." I suggested that he may instead be saying that they are not ideas of external sensation. I believe my suggestion is confirmed by the *Compendium*. In the paragraph announcing that all ideas take rise from reflection or external sense, the *Compendium* gives a long list of the objects of consciousness or reflection. It begins with judgments, deductions, certainty, doubt, joys, sorrows, desires, aversions, love, and hate. They are on the list because they are objects of reflection. The last two items on the list are "virtues, vices." And it is natural to suppose that virtues and vices are on the list because they too are objects of reflection. This makes perfect sense in view of Hutcheson's claim (at *System* 24, for example) that we are conscious *in our own case* of "a certain temper, a set of affections, and actions consequent on them."³¹

The Hutchesonian doctrine that number and duration are not ideas of external sensation is, incidentally, a recurring theme in Book II of Locke's

Essay. Number and duration are among those ideas “suggested to the mind by all the ways of Sensation and Reflection” (*Essay* II iii 1). “Almost every Object that affects our Senses,” Locke writes, and “every Thought which employs our Minds, brings [them] along” (II x 6). In fact, Locke describes the ideas of time and place as “concomitant *Ideas*” in his account of abstraction at *Essay* II xi 9:

The use of Words then being to stand as outward Marks of our internal *Ideas*, and those *Ideas* being taken from particular things, if every particular *Idea* that we take in, should have a distinct Name, Names must be endless. To prevent this, the Mind makes the particular *Ideas*, received from particular Objects, to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the Mind such Appearances, separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence, as Time, Place, or any other concomitant *Ideas*. This is called ABSTRACTION....

‘Concomitant idea’ does not seem to be a technical expression for Locke. But he is using the expression in Hutcheson’s sense, and he is even applying it to some of the same ideas (or at any rate to closely related ones). Hence Hutcheson’s doctrine of concomitant ideas is, at least in outline, no departure from Locke. It may instead be further evidence of Locke’s influence.

I should not leave the topic of Hutcheson’s debt to Locke without saying a word about the apparent conflict between the Lockean empiricism of the *Compendium* and Hutcheson’s repeated suggestion that opposition to innate ideas has, as Thomas Mautner puts it, “been taken too far.”³² In his inaugural lecture at Glasgow, for example, Hutcheson writes that people should “cease objecting that there are no innate ideas, and that affections and desires cannot be conceived without prior ideas” (144). “For this would equally tend to show that the private affections and desires are not natural either, inasmuch as not even ideas of private pleasure or advantage are innate, in the sense in which recent writers call something innate” (144–45). Yet Hutcheson seems to agree with “the celebrated Locke and other writers” that “no ideas no knowledge, and no theoretical or practical judgements present in the mind...have their origin there” (143–44). “These were in their view,” he explains, “the only kinds of things that could be called innate.” But there are, he insists, “natural ideas, knowledge, and judgements, as well as the natural sense by which various kinds of things are perceived” (144). The sense in which these ideas are natural, however, seems to be consistent with the view that all ideas take rise from external sense or reflection. Perhaps the crux is the notion expressed by the words “take rise” (my favored translation of *oriuntur*; “originate in” is another possibility.) Perhaps ideas can be *prompted* by external sense or reflection even if they are not wholly *derived* from it. A later passage in the

Compendium suggests that Hutcheson would be receptive to a weak reading of *oriuntur*. On 21–22 he writes (no doubt thinking of Book II, chapter xxx of Locke's *Essay*):

Ideas are also either real or true, or fictive. Real are *ideas to which objects are similar*, or which arise [*oriuntur*] from natural causes according to the order of nature [*secundum naturae ordinem*]. Fictive ideas are *arbitrary conjunctions of ideas, not brought forth by true things*.

According to this passage, one thing *takes rise* from another if it follows it according to the order of nature. The effect need not resemble the cause, or be “present in it” in any other sense. Our ideas may take rise from experience, then, without being *copies* of experience in (for example) the way Humean ideas are copies of impressions. An empiricism of this sort can coexist with sympathy for nativism, because an innate disposition, activated by experience, may be the source of what is “new” (relative to the experience) in an idea. Hutcheson may have embraced such a liberal empiricism (he may even have found it in Locke's *Essay*), but this in no way compromises my earlier claims regarding his account of moral perception.

4. Hume on the Comparison

Hume compares virtue and vice to the secondary qualities in both the *Treatise* and his essay on “The Sceptic.”³³

When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favorable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.

Were I not afraid of appearing too philosophical, I should remind my reader of that famous doctrine, supposed to be fully proved in modern times, “That tastes and colours, and all other sensible qualities, lie not in the bodies, but merely in the senses.” The case is the same with beauty and deformity, virtue and vice. This doctrine, however, takes off no more from the reality of the latter qualities,

than from that of the former; nor need it give any umbrage either to critics or moralists. Though colours were allowed to lie only in the eye, would dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteemed? There is a sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners. And as it is certain, that the discovery above-mentioned in natural philosophy, makes no alteration on action and conduct; why should a like discovery in moral philosophy make any alteration?

In the very stimulating paper to which I referred as I began, Simon Blackburn observes that in these passages Hume maintains “a cautious distance from the modern philosophy” (274).³⁴ Blackburn argues that he has good reason to do so: Hume couldn’t make much of what Blackburn calls “the Comparison,” because the distinction between primary and secondary qualities was not a settled achievement that could be used to clarify a theory in ethics, but a “chapter of philosophy on which [Hume] could draw [only with] embarrassment” (283). Hume has no “useful point of contrast between primary and secondary qualities upon which to fall back, making the way secondary qualities or values lie in the mind particularly interesting” (283).

Blackburn says that apart from the two passages just quoted, “Hume never talks directly of the Comparison” (275), but Hume in fact returns to the comparison a third time, in a footnote appearing in the first two editions of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The passage (from section I) is especially interesting in the present context, because in it Hume refers to Hutcheson.³⁵

That faculty by which we discern truth and falsehood, and that by which we perceive vice and virtue, had long been confounded with each other; and all morality was supposed to be built on eternal and immutable relations which, to every intelligent mind, were equally invariable as any proposition concerning quantity or number. But a late philosopher has taught us, by the most convincing arguments, that morality is nothing in the abstract nature of things, but is entirely relative to the sentiment or mental taste of each particular being, in the same manner as the distinctions of sweet and bitter, hot and cold arise from the particular feeling of each sense or organ. Moral perceptions, therefore, ought not to be classed with the operations of the understanding, but with the tastes or sentiments.

The “late philosopher” is Hutcheson. This passage calls into question Blackburn’s dismissal of the evidence for Hume’s attachment to the compari-

son, because it allows us to see that the comparison is implicated in a passage that appears after Hume has (in T I iv 4 and EHU XII i) exposed the embarrassments of the primary/secondary quality distinction.³⁶ The passage appears, that is, after Hume has achieved the level—the “mezzanine level,” Blackburn calls it—at which Books II and III of the *Treatise*, and the third part of the final section of the *Enquiry*, take place. This passage is the penultimate paragraph of the *Enquiry*:³⁷

Morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived. Or if we reason concerning it, and endeavour to fix its standard, we regard a new fact, to wit, the general taste of mankind, or some such fact, which may be the object of reasoning and enquiry.

Notice the contrast between “the understanding” on the one hand and “taste and sentiment” on the other. It echoes the contrast, in the passage from section I in the first two editions, between “the operations of the understanding” and “the tastes or sentiments.” The comparison supports this contrast, as well as the conclusion that moral or natural beauty is more properly felt than judged of by reason.

I see no reason not to suppose that a distinction between primary and secondary qualities can, in Hume’s view, survive the excessive doubts of T I iv 4 and EHU XII i. A distinction between primary and secondary qualities was, after all, part and parcel of developments in natural philosophy that were presumably consistent with Hume’s mitigated skepticism. It is worth recalling here that *most* of the reasons for making such a distinction—those presented by Locke and Boyle, and by Newton (at least with respect to color) in the *Optics*—are untouched by Hume’s Pyrrhonian criticisms. I am not claiming that Hume was a dogmatic mechanist; his comments on Boyle and Newton in the *History of England* make it clear that he was not. My point is that when Hume, in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, catalogues the natural forces likely to be resistant to further reduction—elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse (EHU IV, 30)—it is no accident that he does not include color, taste, and smell. I wish I could produce a passage in which Hume explicitly endorses a distinction between primary and secondary qualities, but I can do no better than the following passage from *The Natural History of Religion*:³⁸

Could men anatomize nature, according to the most probable, at least the most intelligible philosophy, they would find, that these causes are nothing but the particular fabric and structure of the minute parts of their own bodies and of external objects; and that, by a regular and constant machinery, all the events are produced, about which they are so much concerned.

If a distinction between primary and secondary qualities does survive, it will permit, at the level of common life, a distinction between what is “really there” in things, taken by themselves, and what is there only in relation to us. This is a crude distinction that leads to plenty of trouble as soon as we look more closely into it. But it is no more crude (and no less serviceable) than the distinction Hume takes for granted when, in *The Natural History of Religion*, he explains that polytheists project their own sentiments and passions onto unknown causes in nature. And it is the distinction he needs to make what he took to be an interesting point about virtue and vice. We should remember that Hume presents the comparison in non-“metaphysical” settings: in Book III of the *Treatise*, in a popular essay on a philosophical type, and in the first section of the *Enquiry*, whose reader is being prepared for a later dose of abstruse philosophizing.

Consider one of Hume’s arguments against rationalism, the one inviting us to “take any action allow’d to be vicious: Wilful murder for instance” (T 468). “Examine it in all lights,” Hume writes, “and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case.” It is helpful to realize that Hume is not inviting us to *perceive* a case of willful murder. He is asking us to *consider* one. We are examining our *idea* of willful murder, rather than an impression of the corresponding act. Hume is in the midst of an argument that morality does not consist in any matter of fact discoverable *by the understanding*—any matter of fact, that is, whose existence “we can infer by reason” (T 468). The view he is attacking is one form of the opinion that we distinguish between virtue and vice by means of *ideas* as opposed to impressions (see 456). He is therefore relying on a pre-“metaphysical” sense of what a willful murder includes, and on a perfectly ordinary distinction between what is there in the object as it is in itself and what is somehow due to us.

It is at just this point, after examining our idea of willful murder, that Hume introduces the comparison.

The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but ‘tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heat and cold....
(T 468–69)

Pyrrhonian arguments take aim at the distinction between what lies in us and what lies in the object, but at this point in the *Treatise* we are safely beyond them. We can invoke the distinction to make a point, a crude point perhaps—one that may not deserve to be called a theory of ethics—but one that is fatal, Hume thinks, to the aspirations of the rationalists. It is a point Hume found in Hutcheson, to whom he wrote, in a *fourth* passage making the comparison, for advice on whether the *Treatise* passage should be revised:³⁹

I must consult you in a Point of Prudence. I have concluded a Reasoning with these two Sentences. *When you pronounce any Action or Character to be vicious, you mean nothing but that from the particular Constitution of your Nature you have a Feeling or Sentiment of Blame from the Contemplation of it. Vice & Virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to Sounds, Colours, Heat & Cold, which, according to modern Philosophy, are not Qualitys in Objects but Perceptions in the Mind: And this Discovery in Morals, like that other in Physicks, is to be regarded as a mighty Advancement of the speculative Sciences; tho' like that too, it has little or no Influence on Practice.* Is not this laid a little [too stro]ng? I desire your Opinion of it, tho I cannot entirely promise to conform myself to it. I wish from my Heart, I could avoid concluding, that since Morality, according to your Opinion as well as mine, is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature and human Life. This has been often urg'd against you, & the Consequences are very momentous....If Morality were determin'd by Reason, that is the same to all rational Beings: But nothing but Experience can assure us, that the Sentiments are the same. What Experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all? They have implanted those Sentiments in us for the Conduct of Life like our bodily Sensations, which they possess not themselves. I expect no Answer to these Difficultys in the Compass of a Letter. 'Tis enough if you have patience to read so long a Letter as this.

If the presence of a certain virtue is, like the presence of a certain color, somehow relative to us, it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to ascribe moral judgments and moral attributes to God.⁴⁰ The thought needs work, but its consequences may be as momentous as Hume suggests. It may, for example, “subvert all the vulgar [i.e., usual] systems of morality” in which moral conclusions are drawn from premisses about the being and attributes of God. It is not insignificant that the famous is/ought passage appears immediately after the comparison.

I conclude that the comparison was of considerable importance to Hume, and that he was right to find it (implicit though it was) in Hutcheson. Why, though, is the comparison absent from the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of*

Morals?⁴¹ There are at least two good reasons. The first is that the comparison as Hume presents it (at least in the *Treatise* and “The Sceptic”) is in one way very misleading. A central theme of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (a theme equally central in Hutcheson’s main works) is that virtue and vice are qualities in the object of approbation or disapprobation. “It is the nature and, indeed, the definition of virtue,” Hume writes in section VIII, “that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one who considers or contemplates it” (EPM 261; see also 289). The comparison, as Hume presents it, makes it sound as if virtue and vice are, like sensations of color, in the person who makes the moral judgment. This is not, of course, essential to the comparison, but the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*—a non-“metaphysical” work—is no place to pursue the matter. The second reason is that the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* differs from Book III of the *Treatise* not only in voice, and in the demands it places on the reader, but in its professed doctrine. In the *Treatise* Hume often minimizes the role that reason plays in moral judgment. (He is given to writing, for example, that moral judgment is “entirely” a matter of sentiment, even though this does not fairly represent his true opinion.) In the second *Enquiry* he judiciously maintains that both sentiment and reason have an important role to play. Now the tendency of the comparison is to downplay the role of reason (in the *Treatise*, for example, Hume introduces it after saying blankly, on T 468, that morality is not an object of reason), and it may have been left out of the second *Enquiry* on just this ground. This may explain why, after its first two editions, published in 1748 and 1750 (and 1751), the comparison disappears even from the first *Enquiry*. The second *Enquiry* was published in 1751; the next edition of the first *Enquiry* appeared, as part of a four volume set including the second *Enquiry*, in 1756.

Whatever the explanation, my main point in this closing section is that the comparison, even in its defective form, makes a point of considerable importance to Hume, vague though it was, and one that unites Hume with Hutcheson, alarmed as he must have been when he saw the consequences Hume proposed to draw from it.

NOTES

Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the Hutcheson Tricentenary Conference at the University of Glasgow in April 1994, and at a Hutcheson anniversary symposium at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in December 1995. I am indebted to Knud Haakonsen for an exchange of letters that led me to think once again about Hutcheson's views on concomitant ideas. And I am especially grateful to David Fate Norton for his thoughtful and very helpful comments on an earlier draft.

1 It is worth observing, though, that the expression "anti-realist" is less anachronistic than the others. "Realism" was an eighteenth century label for the view that there is a real distinction between vice and virtue. In this sense, largely forgotten in the present century, both Hutcheson and Hume are unhesitating realists.

2 I defend this claim at greater length in "Hutcheson's Alleged Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 179–194.

3 See "Hutcheson's Moral Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 397–418. This paper is a reply to my "Hutcheson's Alleged Realism," and it develops an interpretation of Hutcheson first presented in David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 55–93; concomitant ideas are discussed on 79–86. Norton returns to the topic in "Further Thoughts on Hutcheson, Ideas, and Moral Qualities," an unpublished response to a paper by Susan Purviance delivered at the 1989 Iowa Ideas Conference. I am grateful to Norton for supplying me with a copy of this paper.

4 The texts appear on 408–410 of "Hutcheson's Moral Realism."

5 Simon Blackburn, "Hume on the Mezzanine Level," *Hume Studies* 19 (1993): 273–288; the quoted passage appears on 273.

6 D. D. Raphael, ed., *British Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), vol. I, section 371. Quotations from Hutcheson are taken, whenever possible, from Raphael, but I also provide page references to Hutcheson's works. For the present passage see *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* IV, 288 in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 3rd ed. (London: A. Ward, 1742).

7 Section 303 in Raphael, and 105 in the Introduction to *An Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil*, in *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 4th ed. (London: D. Midwinter, 1738).

8 The quotations are from *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* IV, article v, 121 and 116.

9 Raphael, *British Moralists*, vol. II, section 657, and in Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, edited by D.D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), 15.

10 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), II viii 10.

11 Similarly, when Locke writes that "Light, Heat, Whiteness, or Coldness, are no more really in [objects], than Sickness or Pain is in Manna" (*Essay* II viii 17), he

does not mean that the *qualities* associated with what he here calls light, heat, whiteness, and coldness are not in manna. He *defines* a quality as a power in an object (*Essay II viii 8*). He means only that these qualities exist in manna in the same way sickness and pain do. And part of what *this* means is that the ideas of light, heat, whiteness, and coldness are not in the manna, but are among its effects (just as the ideas of sickness and pain are among its effects), as Locke states explicitly in *Essay II viii 18*.

12 Raphael, *British Moralists*, section 657; Price, *Review*, 15.

13 The analogy between concomitant ideas and ideas of primary qualities is developed in section 371 of Raphael (*Illustrations*, 286–87). See “Hutcheson’s Alleged Realism,” 186–187 and 189, and Wolfgang Leidhold, *Ethik und Politik bei Francis Hutcheson* (Freiburg: Alber, 1985), 158–159.

14 *Synopsis Metaphysicae: Ontologiam et Pneumatologiam complectens* (Glasgow: [R. and A. Foulis], 1744), 52, in Michael Silverthorne’s translation, as quoted by Norton. The words Silverthorne translates as “and would seem to be related to it” are *eique media viderentur*. I believe *media* here means indifferent—i.e., neither pleasing nor displeasing. (This is the translation given in John Finamore’s unpublished translation of the complete text. I am grateful to Finamore for allowing me to consult it.) In an earlier section of the same chapter of the *Synopsis* (48), Hutcheson had written that *idearum sensilium quaedam sunt gratae, quaedam molestae, aliae mediae, sive indifferentes* (“of sensible ideas, some are pleasant, some unpleasant, others intermediate, or indifferent”). The translation of *media* as ‘indifferent’ is also confirmed by the parallel passage from *A System of Moral Philosophy* that I quote in the next paragraph.

15 *Synopsis Metaphysicae*, 48, translated by Kenneth P. Winkler. Elsewhere duration and number are said to accompany, or to be able to accompany, all of the perceptions of the mind.

16 *A System of Moral Philosophy* (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, and London: A. Millar, both 1755), vol. I, 6.

17 *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, 4.

18 Adam Smith describes Hutcheson’s moral sense as a “consequent” sense. See *A Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 322, where Smith, incidentally, joins Price and Hume in emphasizing the analogy between moral perception (as Hutcheson portrays it) and the perception of secondary qualities (as Locke portrays that).

19 Raphael, section 355, from the Preface to the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, x.

20 The letter appears in 14 (1788): 158–160.

21 Hutcheson does not mention that Berkeley follows Locke and Molyneux, but his remarks indicate that he was familiar with Berkeley’s *Theory of Vision*.

22 *System of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 1, 53.

23 *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, 1753), 17.

24 Norton’s views on concomitant ideas are also discussed by Leidhold, *Ethik*

und Politik bei Francis Hutcheson, 156–157; by James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, edited by M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 44–45; and by Knud Haakonssen in "Natural Law and Moral Realism: The Scottish Synthesis," *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 75, and *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 74.

25 *Logicae Compendium* (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, 1756); all translations from the *Compendium* are my own.

26 I am grateful to Emily Michael for bringing home to me the possibility of a common source.

27 Oxford: Printed by S. Collingwood for Hanwell and Parker, 1692.

28 Carmichael was Hutcheson's teacher and his predecessor in the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow. A second edition of his *Introductio* was printed in Edinburgh by J. Mosman for J. Paton in 1722.

29 In his 1985 paper, Norton describes the *Synopsis* as Hutcheson's "one systematic discussion of perception in general" (410), but the discussion of perception in the *Logicae Compendium* is equally systematic, though admittedly less detailed.

30 In the Preface to *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, x–xi, Hutcheson takes issue with the way in which the Lockean maxim that all ideas arise from sensation or reflection has been *deployed*, but he does not quarrel with its truth.

31 I realize that questions can be raised about the interpretive weight of the *Compendium*. We do not know why Hutcheson wrote it, how he used it, or how it came to be published. Perhaps curricular demands forced Hutcheson to instruct his students in Lockean doctrines of apprehension even though he had grave doubts about them, much as curricular demands once forced me to treat informal fallacies as the standard textbooks do. But I do not think it is reasonable to dismiss the *Compendium* on such grounds alone, especially when the doctrines found in it cohere (as I contend they do) with those in Hutcheson's other writings. Perhaps we will one day learn more about the circumstances in which Hutcheson's Latin handbooks were composed and published. On the place of these writings in the body of his work see William Robert Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 115–119 and 244–56, and James Moore, "The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: On the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment," in Stewart, *Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 37–59.

32 See Mautner's edition of Hutcheson's *On Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121.

33 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); "The Sceptic," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 166.

34 I agree that he is at a cautious distance in the second passage, but I detect no distancing in the first.

35 Charles Hendel, ed., *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1955), 23. The first edition of the *Enquiry* appeared in 1748; the second, "with additions and corrections," appeared in 1750 and was reprinted in 1751.

36 Blackburn (277) identifies other passages in which the distinction is implicated, for example in the final paragraph of Appendix I in the *Enquiry concerning Morals*.

37 David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 165. The passage merits comparison to EPM 294.

38 § iii, 29 in H. E. Root's edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956).

39 *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), vol. I, 39–40.

40 Compare section XI of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and the last three parts of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

41 Blackburn notes this (275), and I agree that it is significant.

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