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Hutcheson's Aesthetic Realism and Moral Qualities

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Abstract

Hutcheson's theories offer an objective referent for beauty linked with a subjective determination to be pleased. As Kenneth Winkler's terminology suggests, Hutcheson is an eighteenth-century aesthetic realist, a beauty realist, because the aesthetic object need not be identified with the natural object. I argue that this aesthetic realism helps to settle key disputes concerning moral qualities in the moral sense theory. The natural and automatic operation of the aesthetic and moral senses allows a role for new experiences of beauty and virtue beyond their root forms, and permits a cultural refinement that remains true to a widely held, even if not universal, set of moral parameters for virtuous motivation.

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) was born in what is now Northern Ireland and received his education at the University of Glasgow. After university, he returned to Ulster and later went on to Dublin to establish a dissenting academy. While in Dublin, he became interested in the philosophy of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and joined a circle of intellectuals led by Lord Molesworth (1656-1725). During this period, Hutcheson developed a theory of the internal and moral senses and of moral judgment, publishing some of his most important works: *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725); and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1728). He later became professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, remaining an influential teacher of what became the moral sense theory of moral judgment. The moral sense theory developed into distinct forms in the work of David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1790).[1] Hutcheson's philosophy had culturally significant impacts in North America. One of his students educated in Glasgow, Francis Alison, "drilled" Hutcheson's philosophy of consideration for others and concern for the common good into the men he taught. Three of these men became future signers of the Declaration of Independence, and another was a Secretary to the Continental Congress of 1774.[2] The

[1] See: James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," in M.A. Stewart, ed., *Hume and Hume's Connexions* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 23-57; and Daniel Carey, "Method, Moral Sense, and the Problem of Diversity: Francis Hutcheson and the Scottish Enlightenment," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 5, 2 (1997): 275-296.

[2] Archie Turnbull, "Scotland and America," in David Daiches, Peter Jones, and Jean Jones, eds., *A Hotbed of Genius: The Scottish Enlightenment, 1730-1790* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), 140. On Hutcheson's contribution to discourse on sociability, see Susan M. Purviance, "Intersubjectivity and Sociable Relations in the Philosophy of Francis Hutcheson,"

Scottish Enlightenment was a phenomenon of North Atlantic culture generally, and Hutcheson was a powerful influence upon it.

Hutcheson's account of the idea of virtue differs from that of the early utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill. He also stands against the rationalist intuitionism of Samuel Clarke and Richard Price. For both the naturalists and non-naturalists, the primary goal of ethical theory was to identify and defend a principle of right action. Utilitarians and rational intuitionists argue that morality applies to us in virtue of our status as agents, and if they are right, the primary task of moral philosophy is to develop and defend guidelines for correct action. From the guidelines point of view, Hutcheson's concern with moral perception is puzzling and the resulting theory is difficult to understand, which may be a function of unfamiliarity with questions about beauty, aesthetic quality, and the aesthetic perspective. For Hutcheson, aesthetic perception is a natural starting point for considering the moral phenomena of character, choice, and action.[3] Hutcheson's systematic view of aesthetics helps to locate key problems with the moral sense theory and even suggests possible solutions to them.

Hutcheson calls the aesthetic response one of internal sense. Internal sense finds unity within the multiplicity or variety of sensible properties when it grasps those sensible properties in their cumulative relation to one another. The consequent pleasure (or pain, as there are ugly objects too) is the functioning of internal sense in finding unity (uniformity) in combination with variety. The internal sense has its own proper aesthetic sensibility in this agreeable relationship:

> The figures which excite in us the ideas of beauty, seem to be those in which there is uniformity amidst variety.[4]
>
> But in all these instances of beauty let it be observed, that the pleasure is communicated to those who never reflected on this general foundation; and that all here alleged is this, 'That the pleasant sensation arises only from objects, in which there is uniformity amidst variety.' We may have the sensation without knowing what is the occasion of it.[5]

In *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1742), Hutcheson claims that the harmony of notes is more graceful than simple sounds.[6] Since what counts as aesthetic perception also shapes the moral sense's theory of virtue, we can elucidate a concept of moral beauty in character. The phrase "moral sense of beauty in actions and affections" is used to introduce the two treatises of beauty and virtue, and he notes that the moral sense of beauty in characters is a particular "relish" of mankind: "Our gentlemen of good taste, can tell us of a great many senses, tastes and relishes for beauty, harmony, imitation in painting and poetry; and may not we find too in mankind a relish for

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Eighteenth Century Life 15, 1 & 2 (1991): 23-38.

[3] In this study, Hutcheson's work, *An Inquiry Into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue,* is divided into two inquiries: the *Inquiry into Beauty*, and the *Inquiry into Virtue.* Some other scholars use "Treatise I" for *Inquiry Into Beauty* and "Treatise II" for *"Inquiry Into Virtue."* All references to the two inquiries are to the fourth edition (1738) with original pagination of the facsimile reprinted by Gregg International Publishers (Gainesville, Florida, 1969).

[4] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty*, II.III, 17.

[5] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty*, II.XIV, 29.

[6] Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections,* third edition (1742), with an Introduction by Paul McReynolds (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), II.II, 3.

beauty in characters, in manners?"[7] We need this in order to defend Hutcheson's contention that a true account of the origin of the idea of virtue will best guide our inquiry into moral principles.

By building from the strong base of his works in aesthetics as well as ethics, an acceptable elaboration of the moral sense theory becomes possible. For Hutcheson, it will turn out that beauty, in ethics as well as aesthetics, is not in the individual eye of the beholder (subjectivism); nor is it in the concurrence of perceivers (conventionalism);[8] nor is it in the micro-structure of the object so perceived (reductionism).[9] Neither his account of aesthetic judgment, nor his account of moral judgment, is subjectivist. In the case of each type of judgment, Hutcheson seeks an empiricist middle position.

To start with a core controversy leveraged by an understanding of his aesthetics, consider the question whether Hutcheson is a subjectivist or objectivist about moral qualities. In his works, some evidence argues for each view and supporting conflicting interpretations. The studies by D.F. Norton, Kenneth Winkler, Elizabeth Radcliffe, Stephen Darwall, and P.J.E. Kail show that two main sources of evidence are in play.[10] On the one hand is the background of Locke's account of primary qualities, secondary qualities, and powers. Many theorists believe that this Lockean scheme serves as an unmodified basic ontology for Hutcheson. Here the moral quality of virtue seems mind-dependent, thus subjective to the perceiver. On the other hand are the important new readings of Hutcheson's *Inquiry Into Beauty.* Naturally, these take the explicit discussion of the quality of beauty to be the ontological and perceptual template for the moral qualities of virtue and vice. Here, the reality of beauty as given in formal features of the object suggests a more objectivist reading of its moral correlate, virtue. To complicate matters further, Radcliffe's recent interpretation of the *Inquiry Into Beauty* reaches back into Locke to flesh out the remarks on aesthetic perception. One might hope that the discussion of aesthetic perception will leverage the question as to what extent we can take Locke as a guide to Hutcheson. But what do moral and aesthetic qualities show us?

Moral realists argue that moral features of the world exist which are to be understood either as natural facts or non-natural ones. Moral non-realists dispute the independent, external, objective existence of moral goodness.[11] In two important works, Norton argues for a common-sense moral

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[7] Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty*, "Preface," xv.

[8] On why Hutcheson is not an aesthetic conventionalist, see P.J.E. Kail, "Function and Normativity in Hutcheson's Aesthetic Epistemology," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, 4 (2000): 450.

[9] Mark Strasser ("Hutcheson on Aesthetic Perception," *Philosophia* 21, 1-2 [1991]: 107-119) has taken issue with the interpretation of Hutcheson's aesthetics put forward by Peter Kivy ("Hume's Neighbor's Wife: An Essay on the Evolution of Hume's Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23 [1983]: 195-208). Like those of Elizabeth Radcliffe's "Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3, 4 (1996): 407-421, and Kenneth Winkler's "Hutcheson's Alleged Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 179-194, Kivy's interpretation relies heavily on a Lockean reading of Hutcheson which minimizes the use of reason in appraising the aesthetic object. By contrast, Strasser takes the apprehension of the aesthetic object to be a complex process involving judgment and discernment so that what the sentiment of beauty approves may be a simple product of sensation or a more complex object which has been refined through a process of reflection or "reason." This disputes Kivy's view, which takes Hutchesonian aesthetic perception to be non-epistemic and automatic, not amenable to refinement in discerning its objects and their natural features. Strasser argues that reflective discernment, even refinement, of the object to be assessed is most evident in comparative beauty, but he believes it occurs with apprehensions of absolute beauty. In either case, the discernment of the structure of the object occurs by reason, but below the level of awareness.

[10] D.F. Norton, *David Hume: Common-sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), Chapter 2: 55-93; Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal "Ought": 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapter 8: 207-243; Kail, "Function and Normativity in Hutcheson's Aesthetic Epistemology," 441-451.

[11] On moral sense qualities as natural facts, see for example Stephen Darwall: "Moral good, on the other hand, is something we recognize in disinterestedly approving these motives when we contemplate them. Moral good is irreducible to natural good. Nevertheless, Hutcheson is keen to argue, moral goodness is a *natural property*. Whether a motive is morally good is determined by facts of nature and is no less open to empirical investigation than is any issue concerning natural good" (*The British Moralists*

realism, claiming that Hutcheson makes use of a non-Lockean concept of concomitant ideas to secure the idea of virtue as a moral concomitant idea of a real feature of our world that is not mind-dependent.[12] Although Norton continues to defend Hutcheson's moral realism in these terms — ones that other critics have not adopted — he notes that "[t]he belief that there are real and essential differences between virtue and vice does not rest upon choice of a particular theory of moral knowing: one need not subscribe to a particular theory of moral perception in order to be a moral realist."[13]

J. Martin Stafford thinks it unlikely that Hutcheson conceived the problem of the cognitive function of the moral sense in terms of Norton's sharp dichotomy between moral realism and skepticism.[14] However, it is consistent with Hutcheson's being a naturalist about moral qualities that they be understood solely as psychological phenomena. That is, although the apprehension via sentiment makes the moral qualities mind-dependent, the internal senses present to us real objects of moral and aesthetic assessment. Winkler, who strongly challenges the evidence for concomitant ideas in Hutcheson's writings, agrees in that there is an historically valid sense in which both Locke and Hutcheson count as realists about secondary qualities.

> 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).[15]

In this sense, then, a real (and natural) constitution of the object and of the subject come together so that both the active power to produce a sentiment in us and the passive power in us to be so affected are realized. Subjectivist and objectivist elements coexist. But does this theory of the origin of ideas tell us much about the ontological status of their objects?

A different approach to moral realism can be seen in Elizabeth Radcliffe.[16] A counterfactual condition is proposed to decide the matter. Briefly, if it should turn out that moral qualities disappear/fail to exist with the non-emergence of the moral sense in human evolution or the non-creation of the moral sense in the divine creation of human nature, then the moral qualities are internal to the constitution of humanity and not external to it in an independent moral reality. If the qualities are internal, then the moral sense theory is subjectivist; if external, objectivist. Here, Radcliffe's equation of moral realism with mind-independent objectivity is problematic. Radcliffe argues that if the conditions for the "looking virtuous" of benevolent acts are mere stipulations for conventional or pragmatic reasons, then the account is subjectivist. But for the moral objectivist, the "looking virtuous" conditions are "the circumstances under which one may *discover* the *real* properties

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and the Internal "Ought," 211-212).

[12] On Norton, see *David Hume*, Chapter Two, and Norton's reply to criticism from Kenneth Winkler in Norton's "Hutcheson's Moral Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 397-418.

[13] Norton, "Hutcheson's Moral Realism," 406.

[14] J. Martin Stafford, "Hutcheson, Hume, and the Ontology of Morals," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 19 (1985): 137.

[15] Kenneth Winkler, "Hutcheson and Hume on the Color of Virtue," *Hume Studies* XXII, 1 (1996): 6.

[16] Radcliffe, "Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism." Radcliffe relies systematically on a reading of the *Inquiry Into Beauty*, arguing that "parties to the dispute over the nature of Hutcheson's moral sense theory must either support or (at least) test their respective interpretations by considering their fit with Hutcheson's claims about aesthetic perceptions" (409).

of things."[17] She concludes that since the constitution of a real perceiver with some sort of moral sense — his or her particular approval responses — can change or could have been different, virtue may have been different. The moral sense is subjective, but authoritative.

This interpretation appears flawed in two ways. First, it can be reasonably argued that moral realism need not take the form of mind-independence. In a naturalist theory which relies upon sentiments, this condition would beg the question against moral realism in Hutcheson. Secondly, it is problematic to attribute semantic conventionalism to Hutcheson. Hutcheson does not assert that, "that act is virtuous," is to be counted as an accurate utterance only on pragmatic, stipulative grounds. Concern with errors in communication or with the definition of virtue in terms of benevolence simply do not arise for his theory. Radcliffe's maneuver may be motivated by an inappropriate fear of the skeptical refutation of moral claims. With no moral blindness to head off here, the ordinary mistakes in moral judgment do not pose a risk of skepticism about moral qualities.

Aesthetic Realism: Objective Referent, Subjective Determination

Since Radcliffe is led in this direction by Hutcheson's own remarks upon beauty which take the idea as a perception of the mind rather than as a quality of natural objects, we need to know Hutcheson's account of aesthetic perception. The key concepts of his theory of judgments of beauty and account of aesthetic perception have in most cases a parallel in the moral sense theory. I shall argue that he offers an *objective referent for beauty* linked with a *subjective determination to be pleased*.[18] As Winkler's terminology suggests, then, Hutcheson is at least an eighteenth century *aesthetic realist*, a beauty realist, because the aesthetic object need not be identified with the natural object. Further, the natural and automatic operations of the aesthetic and moral senses do not preclude a role for expanded experience and cultural refinement in our judgments of beauty and virtue, with the objective referent of those judgments remaining the same over time and through the refinement of taste. Thus, there is a definite trajectory for cultivation of both aesthetic and moral judgment with "beauty" and "virtue" remaining univocal terms.

The aesthetic model is able to raise and address questions about the implications of taste as a key concept in moral theory. By examining Hutcheson's conception of what a theory of taste in beauty consists of, one can derive a standpoint from which to examine critical standards for a project of justifying judgments of taste. For if there is to be such a thing as *moral taste* in the beauty of virtue, there must be some account of what is required to justify a judgment of taste. For example, in Kant's aesthetic theory, in order for a person's response to an object to be a judgment of its beauty, it must be shown that the pleasure in the object can be validly imputed to others experiencing the same object.[19] Similarly, the pleasure which the moral sense gives us when we perceive benevolence leads to the

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[17] Radcliffe, "Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism," 412.

[18] Hutcheson's aesthetic theory has been extensively studied by aesthetic theorists. It will become increasingly important for moral philosophers to consult the considered judgments of such theorists such as David E.W. Fenner (*The Aesthetic Attitude* [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1996]): "First and foremost, Hutcheson [unlike Shaftesbury] was not a neo-Platonist but a *relational realist* . . . he thought that the seat of that real property was in the relationship between the object and the subject. This is, perhaps, for what he is best known" (31).

[19] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*. First Book, *Analytic of the Beautiful* James Creed Meredith, translator (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 56: "The judgement of taste does not *postulate* the agreement of every one (for it is only competent for a logically universal judgement to do this, in that it is able to bring forward reasons); it only *imputes* this agreement to every one, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrence of others."

judgment that benevolence is virtuous. Then can this pleasure in the motive of the action be validly imputed to others? More interestingly, can such imputation succeed even where the subjects differ in their personal experiences and cultural development? Here, the problems might seem insuperable; perhaps they are. However, given that Hutcheson is an aesthetic universalist, both holding Hutcheson to this standard and looking at his resources for addressing the issue is reasonable. At the very least, the identification for a common line of refinement in judgments of ordinary beauty and moral beauty suggests that an expectation of agreement with other viewers is not misplaced, even if it should be disappointed.

Treatise I of *An Inquiry Into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* shows that the idea of beauty is dependent on external sense perception, but it is not reducible to the perception of sensible qualities. External sense is different from internal sense. Without external sense, the capacity to perceive the beauty of an object which Hutcheson calls *internal sense* cannot operate.[20] Internal sense gives the pleasurable response to the arrangement of sensible qualities in an object. Pleasurable perception is the aesthetic approval of the object: wherever the pleasurable perception of an arrangement of sensible qualities occurs, we have a judgment of beauty. The pleasure is immediate and disinterested, not later upon reflection, and not as a perception of the utility or cash value. Still, attending to the natural features of the object is necessary.[21]

Hutcheson distinguishes between original (or absolute) beauty and comparative (or relative) beauty. Absolute beauty takes in objects which are beautiful in themselves and not copies or imitations of anything else. Objects that are imitative are beautiful insofar as their original is beautiful and they represent the original faithfully.[22] Absolute beauty concerns him to a greater degree. Examples of objects which have it include natural forms, geometrical forms, harmonious chords of music, and mathematical theorems. Uniformity seems to be the main exciting cause of pleasure in beauty. Variety lends interest by complicating the apprehension of the form of the object; it seems likely that the reduction of a complex object to some unity is more unexpected and delightful, other things being equal, than the reduction of just a few aspects to a common principle or pattern. That the unity of an object can be sustained despite complexity may amaze, and may generate a pleasant kind of interest and appreciation. Complexity draws out the process of apprehending the object as a whole (a unity), which postpones the gratifying pleasure which we expect to have in its form. This postponement is a frequent cause of more intense pleasure.[23] Even in organic forms, a kind of geometrical regularity is asserted to underlie the perception of beauty, and repetition of structure in a multiplicity of settings delights the observer.

> And this uniformity is not only observable in the form in gross . . . but in the structure of their minutest parts, which no eye unassisted by glasses can discern. In the almost infinite multitudes of leaves, fruit, seed, flowers of any one species, we often see a very great uniformity in the structure and situation of the smallest fibres. This is the beauty

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[20] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty,* I.XII-XIII.

[21] See Kail, "Function and Normativity in Hutcheson's Aesthetic Epistemology." Kail finds "a nicely integrated structure" of sentimentalism in Hutcheson's account of the internal senses, but enough sensitive objectivity in the notion of a sense to sustain the claim that there is such a thing as correct, and incorrect, taste on the basis of it (442). I will argue is that, additionally, there is adequate, very good, and superb taste in the beauty of motives and characters.

[22] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty,* I.IV.I.

[23] Perhaps the unity which is grasped by means of the uniformity has a cognitive limit: the excess variety or excessive repetition of sides in the figure interferes with the ability to grasp the object as a unity and hence as beautiful.

> which charms an ingenious botanist.

Hutcheson continues,

> Again, as to the beauty of animals . . . And how amazing is the unity of mechanism, when we shall find an almost infinite diversity of motions, all their actions in walking, running, flying, swimming; all their serious efforts for self-preservation, all their freakish contortions when they are gay and sportful, in all their various limbs, performed by one simple contrivance of a contracting muscle, applied with inconceivable diversities to answer all these ends![24]

In each instance of original or absolute beauty, the uniformity is brought about by some repetition of form or pattern, or a unifying formula, principle, or mechanism. The viewer might not fully understand the formula or mechanism, but must perceive or suspect its presence.

A closer examination of Hutcheson's account clarifies the relation between aesthetic perception and aesthetic feeling. Commentators such as Peter Kivy and Emily Michael agree that the feeling of beauty is what it is to perceive the beauty in an object. In fact, the idea of beauty is the idea of an internal sense because aesthetic pleasure is associated with a proper sensible that is received by internal sensation. Hutchesonian beauty is a pleasant sensible idea of a relation, viz., uniformity amidst a variety of qualities. The idea of beauty thus involves both a proper sensible and a pleasure.[25] This is not meant to imply that beauty is nothing over and above the feeling of pleasure. Michael says that it is a pleasant sensible idea of a relation. Kivy considers various interpretations of the relation between the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and the aesthetic perception of beauty. Perhaps pleasure *is* the idea of beauty. He views passages like the one just quoted from *Inquiry Into Beauty* as possible support for that interpretation:

> We can all perceive the same primary and secondary qualities of X, says Hutcheson, and yet not all perceive the beauty of X, because we can all perceive the primary and secondary qualities of X and yet not all experience pleasure (of a certain kind) in perceiving X. Thus, perceiving pleasure (of some special kind) is identical with perceiving beauty; and the idea of beauty, then, must be identical with pleasure since the perception of beauty is the having of the idea of beauty.[26]

However, since this interpretation has the consequence that aesthetic qualities are entirely subjective, and since it could not tie the experience of pleasure to any constitution of the object, Kivy rejects it. After all, we are not deluded when we attribute beauty to an object: we are using what Hutcheson calls internal sense to perceive beauty.

Kivy resolves the tension between the perceiver's response to the object and the beauty imputed

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[24] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty*, II.VII, 22; and II.VIII, 23-24. For another view on instrumentality and aesthetic value, see also P.J.E. Kail, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense: Skepticism, Realism, and Secondary Qualities," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 18, 1 (2001): 64-65.

[25] Emily Michael, "Francis Hutcheson on Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Pleasure," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 24, 3 (1984): 248. See also Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal "Ought,"* 214-215.

[26] Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense: A Study of Francis Hutcheson's Aesthetics and Its Influence in Eighteenth-century Britain* (New York: Burt Franklin and Company, 1976), 52.

to the object by allowing different descriptions. Beauty may be described as the quality of the object which causes us to be pleased: uniformity amidst variety, or alternatively, as the idea which arises from the effect of the relational quality of uniformity amidst variety on aesthetic sensibility — aesthetic pleasure.[27] Kivy believes that Hutcheson was influenced by George Berkeley, who recognized that a pleasurable sensation on a hand near a fire at a certain distance would turn to pain if the hand moves too close to the flame. Berkeley says that throughout it is the fire that is felt, but at one time as pleasure, another time as pain. Similarly, beauty is caused by a structural internal relation holding between the sensible qualities of the object. If the form is uniform with a degree of variety, it is felt as pleasant, but if form has too much variety, it begins to pain the perceiver and is no longer felt to be beautiful. The two ways of representing the content of the aesthetic experience afforded by internal sense is a double aspect view.

If this double aspect view is correct, then the theory that beauty is a structurally relational *quality* of uniformity amidst variety is wrong. However, I think that the distinction may be drawn differently: the aesthetic *judgment* is bivalent, but the aesthetic quality is not. At this point more clarification of aesthetic realism is in order. Frank Sibley's paper "Aesthetic Concepts" in the *Philosophical Review* (1965)[28] argued from analogy to establish the reality of aesthetic properties, and hence the determinate reference of aesthetic concepts. Taking the reality of colors as secondary properties of objects, Sibley argued for enough features common to both the use of sensory quality concepts and aesthetic quality concepts to support a realist account of markers of aesthetic excellence. It is noteworthy that those chosen by Sibley are the very concepts Hutcheson cites as aesthetic: "grace" and "elegance." Their common structure is that both sorts of qualities are in the public domain, both are perceivable, and disputes surrounding both are resolved (or not) by attending more closely to the object under dispute.

David Fenner applies just these criteria of aesthetic realism to Hutcheson's theory and finds him offering a relational realism: "While he [Hutcheson] thought there was a real property of beauty, and that one could be right or wrong in the ascription of beauty to any given object, he thought that the seat of that real property was in the relationship between the object and the subject."[29] For a realist, to say that there is a real property of beauty is to say that aesthetic assertions are just that: claims, not mere expressions of feeling. As the current aesthetic realist, Philip Pettit writes:

> An aesthetic description of a picture may well fail to capture all that is there to be seen by the informed eye, but what it captures when it is a faithful record is something which properly belongs to the painting and something which is in principle accessible to all. Aesthetic characterizations, or at least those to which no special disqualification attaches, are both standardly and properly taken to be assertoric, and as assertoric in the strictest and most genuine sense of that term.[30]

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[27] "The reason, then, why Hutcheson sometimes describes beauty as the idea of something like a secondary quality and sometimes as a pleasure is that he thinks of them as two descriptions of the *same* simple idea" (Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, 54).

[28] Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 421-450.

[29] Fenner, *The Aesthetic Attitude*, 31. Others, such as Iuliana Corina Vaida, have found dissimilarities between sense qualities and aesthetic qualities. In the case of aesthetic qualities only, there is a need for cultural or paradigmatic example re-framing of the object in order to see its beauty. This fact is sufficient to support some form of aesthetic relativism (Vaida, "The Quest for Objectivity: Secondary Qualities and Aesthetic Qualities," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 3 [1998]: 283-297).

[30] Philip Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism," in Eva Schaper, ed., *Pleasure, Preference, and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): "An aesthetic description of a picture may well fail to capture all that is there to be seen by the informed eye, but what it captures when it is a faithful record is something which properly belongs to

For an aesthetic realist, the judgment of beauty is about the world but felt in us.[31] Furthermore, Hutcheson rejects the dichotomy between the subjective and objective nature of beauty or virtue; both have this dual nature, "and yet were there no mind with a sense of beauty to contemplate objects, I see not how they could be called beautiful."[32] The sensible qualities cannot simply be heaped up to make aesthetic form, for the taking together of these qualities as a gestalt experience is the perception of some new object of evaluation.

This relational quality of uniformity amidst variety, which itself has disparate forms in various types of objects, is the objective quality in virtue of which it is termed beautiful. Thus, in addition to endorsing Winkler's weakened aesthetic realism, the interpretation of Hutcheson's account of the idea of beauty that I am offering concurs with Michael's. Whereas Michael distinguishes aesthetic qualities from the primary and secondary qualities of objects given in external sense perception in virtue of its presentation via pleasure, one might recall that pleasure itself need not be thought of as anything other than a secondary quality. Though Michael prefers to characterize uniformity amidst variety as a tertiary quality of objects, for purposes of comparing the theory with other theories of beauty, we need only identify beauty as a relational quality. Since this sort of relational quality is clearly objective, the result is aesthetic realism. It is true that the idea of beauty is more than the pleasure, and thus not reducible to its qualitative presentation via pleasure. But if we only wish to situate his view in relation to other views in aesthetics, then the fact that beauty is a relational property is all that need be emphasized.

From Aesthetic Realism To Moral Virtue

The idea of beauty involves the perception of a relation holding between sensible qualities in the object of assessment and a response to those qualities but its object is the beautiful thing as so arranged in a particular balance of uniformity amidst variety. The delight taken in the beautiful object is, for Norton, a delight taken in the object as the embodiment/incarnation of beauty. What he calls the sense of beauty is, he says, appropriately termed a sense because "of the close affinity which it bears to the external senses, including not only the power to perceive beauty, a disposition to know or appreciate beauty which is exactly like the disposition to know or appreciate color that is provided by the sense of sight. The gratification of the sense of beauty is as natural, as real, and as satisfying as that of any external sense."[33] This in turn establishes the relational realist theory of moral beauty in characters. Structurally, benevolence is picked out by the moral sense and transformed into a spectator's experience of it as virtuous motivation; this is the *objective* or *intentional* aspect of the moral

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the painting and something which is in principle accessible to all. Aesthetic characterizations, or at least those to which no special disqualification attaches, are both standardly and properly taken to be assertoric, and as assertortic in the strictest and most genuine sense of that term" (38).

[31] For a sustained discussion of aesthetic qualities, see Alicja Kuczynska, "Qualities of Things as Aesthetic Qualities," in Michael H. Mitias, ed., *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), Chapter Nine. Of works of art, she writes: "Aesthetic qualities are, as it were, suspended *between* two existences which exist independently of each other, and are supported by the existences which they link together. It was this non-autonomous existence that Aristotle described as 'to pros ti.' One might say that the foundation of the work is the basis of quality, which the perceiving subject, the audience, is the goal, the end . . . And so quality indicates the foundation which is conferred on it by the goal which 'receives' it" (159). Thus, Kuczynska ascribes relational function to the aesthetic viewer. What is related is two existences, one sense perceptual and scientifically, and one aesthetic-perceptual and beyond the descriptive terms of science.

[32] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty*, II.III, 17.

[33] Norton, *David Hume*, 63.

sense judgment. Phenomenally, as a "feel" or sentiment, our perception of virtue in some character is agreeable; this is the *subjective* or *internalizing* aspect of a moral response. In each case, aesthetic and ethical, the sense of pleasure leads us to praise and admire the object.

In fact, this interpretation is well supported. To rethink this aesthetic quality is to see the possibility for a fully-developed theory of taste — not just in objects, but in motives and characters — to apprehend not just the morally pretty in virtuous actions, but the morally splendid as well. Uniformity amidst variety and benevolence are natural qualities, yet beauty and virtue are non-natural attributes of objects and characters. However, combining this claim with a realist claim about the objects of assessment shows that non-natural objects and characters are real existents, a necessary part of ontology. Recall how Hutcheson's ingenious botanist is first drawn to the contemplation of plants by their beauty and later sustained in her interest by the discovery of more beautiful patterns in need of explanation. Consider how the youthful zoologist's fascination with animal movement may lead to a scientist's investigation of the structure and functioning of muscle as the mechanism of movement. Hutcheson's "science of beauty," if it may be so termed, leads nicely into his aesthetic epistemology. As Kail has shown, the discovery of utility and function is a consequence of an object's attractiveness. The aesthetic pleasure focuses and intensifies our intellectual efforts with respect to beautiful objects even after we are first drawn to them. Where the cognitive goal is to discover the unifying principles which govern the structure and function of these objects, progress in achieving that goal is likely to be made.

Such is the case for beauty, but what of moral beauty? What is the moral attention-enhancing value of the moral sense? As with absolute beauty, disagreements between observers arise when observers fail to establish the proper attitude toward the object. Hutcheson notes how partialities and aversions preclude a proper disinterested assessment of the form: "The association of ideas above hinted at, is one great cause of the apparent diversity of fancies in the sense of beauty, as well as in the external senses; and often makes men have an aversion to objects of beauty, and a liking of others void of it, but under different conceptions than those of beauty or deformity."[34] The presentation of more exquisite instances of uniformity amidst variety improves the sense of beauty, so not surprisingly, the presentation of greater, more extensive acts of benevolence improves the moral sense's discernment of higher levels of virtue. Ultimately, in either case, the response of pleasure is the confirmation in perception of the beauty to be experienced.

One might test responses against those of others, yet the final judgment of beauty is grounded in one's own responses which will naturally and often unconsciously follow a rule of taste. Since it stems from private feeling, moreover, on a feeling so highly dependent on the gathering of a complex set of impressions and on being properly receptive to the qualities of the object, it might seem too evanescent to allow for ostensive definition. Yet, if an object can please by its arrangement of sensible qualities alone, then an affection and the acts that the affection disposes us to (benevolence and beneficence) may also please by their arrangement alone. To detect the presence of the form of virtue is to be pleased by it, not as a causal consequence of such apprehension, but as an ontological grasping of what is present.

Notice that the observer perspective, disinterestedness, and a determination to be pleased by the object are common to Hutcheson's aesthetic and moral theories. He can best be understood as engaged in a project of mapping out overlapping rather than totally distinct finer sensibilities of the human

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[34] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Beauty*, VIII.II, 98-99.

being. The reason why the form of the motive of benevolence is lovely and why other motives fail to please, why beauty can be correctly located in the motive of the agent and not in the consequences of the act, is revealed. If the aesthetic parallel is to have any philosophical significance, there must be some sense in which there is something beautiful in the way that motive reveals a relational and structural feature of the character of the person who has it. One can assume that beauty of virtue can be seen primarily in the motive of benevolence, but as with aesthetic quality, generally one must consider *scales of moral beauty*. To see this scale, one must expand the perspective of virtue as moral beauty to encompass the beautiful scene of beneficent action.[35]

Judgments of moral sense are judgments of the inferred motive of the agent:

> The object of this sense is not any external motion or action, but the inward affections and dispositions, which by reasoning we infer from the actions observed.[36]
>
> The forms which move our approbation are, all kind affections and purposes of action; or such propensions, abilities, or habits of mind as naturally flow from a kind temper, or are connected with it.[37]
>
> And here 'tis plain that the primary objects of this faculty are the affections of the will, and that the several affections which are approved, tho' in very different degrees, yet all agree in one general character, of tendency to the happiness of others, and to the moral perfection of the mind possessing them.[38]

If benevolence is the uniquely beautiful moral motive, what aspect or form of this motive as compared to others makes it comely? Recall that in this style of theory, the distinction between form and content in aesthetic objects consists in the distinction between the arrangement and relation of parts in the whole, and the matter or material so related. The distinction between form and content in moral object would have to include the act of an agent, with his or her character as the motivational matrix containing various affections as possible sources of motives as well as the concrete choice of intention (to further that other person's interests, for example) and of means to realizing his or her intention in that instance. And it is all of this as apprehended by our observer, subject to his or her degree of confidence in being sure about the motives of others and ability to discern the broader context of the situation. In other words, surgery is not cruelty or torture, just as walking someone by the arm may be assistance or arrest, as examples.

The motive which pleases immediately through its form is the motive of benevolence which consists in desiring the good of another for the other's own sake. Intentions are virtuous or vicious

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[35] This approach accords with Radcliffe's notion of the plasticity of moral qualities due to their dependence on observation conditions: "The moral sense subjectivist is distinguished by his insistence that moral distinctions depend on the mental states of (actual) observers—persons who need not be directly involved in the situation under consideration. And since the perceiving constitution of a real perceiver, in contrast to that of a hypothetical or real type, is susceptible to change, moral qualities are open to variation as well" ("Hutcheson's Perceptual and Moral Subjectivism," 412).

[36] Bernard Fabian and George Olms, eds., *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson.* Volume I*: A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), Book I (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969), Chapter 5, 97.

[37] Fabian and Olms, Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson. Volume IV: A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy (1747), Chapter 1, 17.

[38] Fabian and Olms, *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson.* Volume I, Book I. Chapter 4, 62.

only insofar as they point to motivation. The affection causing the agent to adopt the ends of another as his or her ends is determined to be virtuous or vicious by the response of the moral sense. The intention to help another may be formed by a person motivated by self-interest who is not moved by benevolence at all. The agent's knowing of what benevolence consists in this instance, as opposed to which act would be elected in other instances, is a matter of good moral upbringing. Acts may be appropriate or inappropriate to the situation, well or poorly suited to promoting another's good; this is irrelevant to the question of the basic moral worth of the act, but it is relevant to its assessment as to the scale of moral beauty.

The observer takes all this in and experiences pleasure upon discerning the form of the action. The disposition to so act is in itself lovely, whether or not the agent succeeds in her intention, and whether or not the means chosen is the most appropriate for realizing the end which is adopted out of benevolent affection. Just as what the beautiful form of geometrical figures, landscapes, animals and plants, and artifacts may differ from each other, so too what the beautiful actions and characters consists in may differ from each other. Yet, the beauty of virtue is a beauty of a relational property of the object of moral assessment.

> We are not to imagine, that this moral sense, more than the other senses, supposes any innate ideas, knowledge, or practical proposition: We mean by it only a determination of our minds to receive the simple ideas of approbation or condemnation, from actions observed, antecedent to any opinions of advantage or loss to redound to our selves from them; even as we are pleased with a regular form, or an harmonious composition, without having any knowledge of mathematics, or seeing any advantage in that form, or composition, different from immediate pleasure.[39]

Scaling Virtue And Disputing Taste

For there to be a scale of moral beauty against which approvals of virtuous characters would be assessed, there would need to be real differences in the moral value of actions. In *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Hutcheson says: "There is a plain gradation in the objects of our approbation and condemnation, from the indifferent set of actions ascending to the highest virtue, or descending to the lowest vice. It is not easy to settle exactly the several intermediate steps in due order, but the highest and lowest are manifest."[40] But what could the discernment of finer forms of virtue consist in? People do not Platonically recollect the form of moral beauty by withdrawing from bodily sensations; they learn it from experience. All virtuous acts must have as their motive the desire for another's good for the other's own sake. But they display these features in different contexts, in complex entities of varying components and materials. So if moral beauty is present in all of these objects equally, on what grounds can we say that one person's character is superior to another? Is there some common account that we can give of how even the scale of moral excellence reflects, to some extent, the scalar features of aesthetic delight in uniformity amidst variety?

Beautiful objects displaying uniformity amidst variety and virtuous acts motivated by the desire for another's good for the other's own sake might have a common quality that is differently described in each case but marked as cognate by the disinterested approval responses. But beautiful objects

[39] Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into Virtue*, I.VIII, 128.
[40] Fabian and Olms, *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson*. Volume I, Book I. Chapter 4, 64.

display their features in different contexts, in some cases giving to them different degrees of excellence. Unity amidst variety is, if not more beautiful, at least more impressive where variety is magnified, yet unity remains. A complex work which can be reduced somewhat unexpectedly to a unity pleases immensely; a work or object of lesser intricacy less so. Although this point could be challenged, human responses seem to confirm it. So the general point we might take away from this is that if the structure of uniformity amidst variety can be maintained on a greater scale, then, other things being equal, the object of greater scale will please more.

What, then, would be comparable to the challenge of maintaining unity amidst multiplicity on a greater scale? In virtue, the motive of benevolence is pleasing and approved. But what is the scale of excellence, and what trajectory does it follow? Magnitude and effortlessness play a role: an act on a greater scale motivated by benevolence would be more pleasing to the moral sense than acts on a lesser scale. But what would magnitude consist in?[41] Either the motive of the act is somehow more disinterested, or the intention to benefit others is more extensive — in other words, one chooses an act that benefits a larger class of persons. In fact, Hutcheson favors universal calm benevolence prompting to acts considerate of all mankind, perhaps even of all sentient beings. He explicitly identifies the highest moral excellence and holds that it is what the moral sense approves to the highest degree:

> [W]e more approve the calm stable resolute purposes of heart, than the turbulent and passionate. And that, of affections in this respect alike, we more approve those which are more extensive, and less approve those which are more confined . . . And the love of a society, a country, is more excellent than domestic affections.
>
> That disposition therefore which is most excellent, and naturally gains the highest moral approbation, is the calm, stable, universal good will to all, or the most extensive benevolence. And this seems the most distinct notion we can form of the moral excellency of the Deity.[42]

When someone intends benefit to a larger class of persons, he or she may well need more disinterested affection in order to be motivated to choose their good over the good of some smaller yet nearer group. Such greater affection is not to be equated with a stronger act of will — it may simply come naturally, all the better if it does. The most excellent (most morally beautiful) acts surpass their root and common forms; simply helping someone who is not you because you disinterestedly aim for their good is laudable but ordinary. A range proceeds from the "morally nice" or "morally pretty" levels, ordinary niceness and good temper, through to the morally awe-inspiring level of shining examples of moral excellence. To maintain constancy of will and moral focus in the face of changing circumstances, to find the opportunity for acts of universal calm benevolence in the various situations one faces, is a good characterization of moral excellence.

Hutcheson also notes that, given that our moral sense approbations apply to ourselves, directing our conduct with reference to universal calm benevolence is also the surest way to avoid moral regret and maintain personal happiness.

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[41] One may idealize and prefer something grander and more expansive, and this would seem to hold for the character with moral beauty as well. This principle goes back at least as far as Aristotle: "[F]or pride implies greatness, as beauty implies a good-sized body, and little people may be neat and well-proportioned but cannot be beautiful" (*EN* IV: 3/1123b). David Ross translation, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[42] Fabian and Olms, *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson.* Volume I, Book I. Chapter 4, 68-69.

> Our moral sense, though it approves all particular kind affection or passion, as well as calm particular benevolence abstractly considered; yet it also approves the restraint or limitation of all particular affections or passions, by the calm universal benevolence. To make this desire prevalent above all particular affections, is the only sure way to obtain constant self-approbation.[43]

A contemporary Hutchesonian might take issue with this claim. The regulative ideal of universal calm benevolence might better be seen as an ideal which agents might strive for than as a regulative rule for avoiding moral self-reproach. Agents who act morally rightly need not reproach themselves. To fail to regulate one's conduct by this striving might not be equal to failing to maintain constant self-approbation.

A theorist of moral beauty should strive to articulate a meaningful account of moral excellence that is broad but not vacuous, broad enough to admit different contexts of moral virtue and different cultural possibilities. Yet throughout, moral beauty is concerned with unity amidst multiplicity, constancy amidst change. One might wonder whether taking every opportunity to concretely enact benevolent intent on a world scale be the highest virtue. Such an ideal of action is possible, but would its intention be the most morally desirable, the most widely approved to the highest degree? Here, moral taste can be disputed, since is possible to endorse the perfect friendship of Homeric warriors (or something else) as a standard of excellence instead of universal calm benevolence. Yet to dispute this in terms of taste is at least quintessentially aesthetic. Aristotelian ethics requires that the person of practical wisdom act so as to achieve the mean that is relative to us. But in so doing, it asserts a constancy of purpose and moral vision that enacts virtues as a matter of living with difference and with change, which again implicates unity over multiplicity. Such an interpretation of unity and difference is broad, but pregnant with meaning for many traditions in ethics.

Here is the beginning of an account of moral taste which provides for the cultivation of taste in virtue along a definite trajectory of moral perfection. Hutcheson's aesthetic realism shaped not only his notion of the task of moral philosophy, but also the very specific structural elements of his moral sense theory. When agents are assessed aesthetically, the moral worth of the motive is integrated into the aesthetic quality of an ideal or principle of emulation. When we consider the moral sense in this way, aesthetic concerns do seem relevant to moral theory. Letting ethics be guided by aesthetic realism does not subordinate ethics to aesthetics. Rather, it illuminates two crucial domains of human experience, excellence, and appreciation.

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[43] Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections,* Section II, 32.