AN ESSAY ON THE NATURE AND CONDUCT OF THE PASSIONS AND AFFECTIONS, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE MORAL SENSE
NATURAL LAW AND ENLIGHTENMENT CLASSICS

An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense

Francis Hutcheson

Edited and with an Introduction by Aaron Garrett

The Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xxv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual Notes</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense (1728), jointly with Francis Hutcheson’s earlier work Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (1725), presents one of the most original and wide-ranging moral philosophies of the eighteenth century. These two works, each comprising two semiautonomous treatises, were widely translated and vastly influential throughout the eighteenth century in England, continental Europe, and America.

The two works had their greatest impact in Scotland and influenced many well-known Scottish philosophers, particularly those writing after the last Jacobite upheaval, in 1745. This can be seen in the concern of the post-1745 generation with analyzing human nature as the foundation of moral theory, with the “moral sense” and moral epistemology more generally, with the impartial spectator and the calm passions, and with the independence of benevolence from self-interest. In addition to the influence of his writings, Hutcheson was also a famed teacher whose Glasgow students, notably Adam Smith, held sway over generations of Scottish moral philosophers.

Despite their impact on Scottish letters, the four treatises were in fact written in Dublin, and the philosophers to whom Hutcheson re-

1. I refer to these as, respectively, Essay with Illustrations and the Inquiry.
2. Hutcheson seems to have thought of the works as four independent but interconnected treatises, and he generally cites by treatise and section number (i.e., Inquiry on Beauty as Treatise 1, Inquiry on Virtue as Treatise 2, Essay on the Passions as Treatise 3, and the Illustrations as Treatise 4) as opposed to by book and page number. This is further reflected in the titles of the two works.
sponded and with whom he debated were in the main not Scottish but English, Irish, French, Roman, and Greek. Consequently, part of Hutcheson’s legacy was a cosmopolitan outlook among enlightened Scots, who learned to turn their eyes far from home.

Early Life

Hutcheson was born in 1694 in County Down, near Saintfield. His father and grandfather were respected Presbyterian ministers in the Scots emigrant community of Ulster. Unlike their brethren in Scotland, where the Presbyterian Kirk was the established church, the Irish Presbyterians were Dissenters. Like the English Dissenters, they were discriminated against by the Anglican state church, which considered them marginally less unsavory than Catholics. They were excluded from Trinity College, Dublin, as well as from Oxford and Cambridge, and, after 1704, they could not take public office. The major difference between Irish Presbyterians and English Dissenters was that the former had strong ties to Scotland, including the Scottish universities, especially Glasgow.

Irish Presbyterians were divided between traditionalists and more rationally inclined “New Light” ministers. John Hutcheson, Francis’s father, was a traditionalist who wrote the church’s response to the claims of “liberal” nonsubscribers. Francis associated with the nonsub-


scribing clergymen in Belfast and leaned toward the tolerationist the­
ology of love that was associated with the New Light.6

Hutcheson was schooled in classics in Ireland and moved to Glas­
gow in 1711 when the university was just recovering from a period of
decline, thanks to the influence of some charismatic and theologically
moderate teachers and of politically active Irish students who chal­
lenged the arbitrariness of university authority.7 Upon graduating,
Hutcheson returned to Ireland to head a Dissenting Academy in Dub­
lin, a major undertaking of the Ulster Kirk in which he appears to have
prospered. Hutcheson associated with Robert Molesworth, a close
friend of Shaftesbury and of radical intellectuals such as John Toland
and Anthony Collins. In Ireland, Molesworth cultivated a circle of tal­
tented intellectuals who wrote in the Dublin Journal, notably Hutche­
son’s friend James Arbuckle. Hutcheson was also in contact with open­
minded Anglican intellectuals such as William King, the archbishop of
Dublin. At the same time, Hutcheson no doubt felt the impact of the
more bigoted world about him.

In intellectual circles, clubs, and, particularly, publications such as
the Dublin Journal and the London Journal, provincial intellectuals
flourished, fought, and exchanged ideas. Like Bayle’s Rotterdam, with
its Huguenot diaspora, Hutcheson’s Dublin felt the weight of sectarian
controversy and the tug of another country. In this context Hutcheson
wrote his early masterpieces.

The Inquiry

Treatise 1, the Inquiry on Beauty, is relatively independent of the Essay
with Illustrations except that it presents the sense of the “beautiful” as a
model for Hutcheson’s subsequent considerations of the “internal”
senses. Treatise 2, however, is presupposed in the Essay with Illustrations
(see the Preface). The first section of Treatise 2 considers the moral

6. See Wolfgang Leidhold, Ethik und Politik bei Francis Hutcheson (Freiburg:
Alber, 1983), chaps. III and IV.
7. See M. A. Stewart, “John Smith and the Molesworth Circle,” Eighteenth­
INTRODUCTION

sense, and the validity and the importance of the arguments for it in Treatise 2 are assumed in Treatises 3 and 4.

Hutcheson’s basic premise—in both the Inquiry and the Essay—is that our immediate perceptions of the moral qualities of an action or a character are derived from a “sense,” like the external senses, that perceives external, adventitious qualities. To this end, Hutcheson argued that the content of a moral perception, the quality perceived, cannot be forced upon us. Moral perceptions are, like the perceptions of other senses, independent of the will.

As we cannot will the perception of something, for example, stimulated by a reward or punishment, our volitions either result from or are independent of our experience of moral qualities; they do not prompt them. This is the basis for Hutcheson’s argument against the view that morality arises from sanctions associated with Locke’s Essay and Pufendorf’s Law of Nature and Nations (although Hutcheson is at pains not to deny all influence of sanctions). On the same basis, Hutcheson argued that benevolence toward mankind is “disinterested”; we are capable of having benevolent sentiments toward those in whom we have no interest and whose “lovely disposition” our moral sense tells us to approve (T2 148).

Hutcheson’s best explanation of this moral sense was that nature determines us to apprehend moral qualities and that our apprehension is issued with a moral sense that approves of good moral qualities (T2 180). Our judgments are sometimes incorrect, but there is nevertheless a perceived quality of which we judge. When we perceive as benevolent someone who is in fact malicious, what we approve of is still the perceived benevolence. Thus, Hutcheson attempted to rest the approval of benevolence on our perceptions and, ultimately, on our natures.

Gilbert Burnet and John Clarke of Hull

The Essay with Illustrations followed the Inquiry by almost three years, during which time a number of acute thinkers criticized the Inquiry, and Hutcheson became widely known. The Essay with Illustrations is distinctive, therefore, both for its content and for the altered intellectual context. In 1725, Hutcheson entered into a debate in the London Jour-
nal with Gilbert Burnet concerning the newly published *Inquiry*—and this bore fruit in Treatise 4, the *Illustrations*. In the same year, John Clarke published an attack on the then-anonymous author of the *Inquiry* (along with criticisms of Samuel Clarke) and then communicated further comments to Hutcheson directly. The first section of Treatise 3, the *Essay*, is a response to John Clarke that sets the agenda for much that follows.

Gilbert Burnet (1690–1726) was the son of Bishop Gilbert Burnet of Salisbury (1643–1715), one of the best-known latitudinarian divines of the era, admired by Shaftesbury and many others. His son, Hutcheson’s correspondent, was chaplain to George I and a promising young churchman. John Clarke was master of the Hull grammar school when he entered into argument with Hutcheson. He was referred to as John Clarke of Hull to distinguish him from Samuel Clarke’s better-known nephew. Clarke of Hull was known in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries primarily for his popular Latin manuals, but he was also an able philosopher who produced two undervalued but significant works: *An Examination of the Notion of Moral Good and Evil* (1725) and *The Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice Considered* (1726).

In an enterprising piece of self-advertisement, Hutcheson published an anonymous letter, “To Britannicus,” in the *London Journal*, praising the *Inquiry*. Shortly afterward, Burnet responded skeptically: How do we know the moral sense is not erroneous or deceitful? Pleasure does not make it true; rather, reason does, and that is the proper internal or moral sense by which we judge. Once we know that a given act or quality is really good, then we take pleasure in its intrinsic moral qualities.

Hutcheson thus confronted moral rationalism of the sort presented by Samuel Clarke, who had argued that morality was found in the “fit­nesses” of things. Obligations and duties flowed from eternal relations, ends, and offices forming a system as certain as mathematics and, like mathematics, discerned through reason.9

9. See particularly *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Nat-
Hutcheson provided a bevy of arguments against Burnet and criticized the clarity and coherence of his terminology. One argument is particularly notable. Hutcheson took over Grotius’s distinction between exciting and justifying reasons, arguing that “Desires, Affections, Instincts, must be previous to all Exciting Reasons; and a Moral Sense antecedent to all Justifying Reasons.” Neither justifying reason nor exciting reason is adequate to the purpose to which Samuel Clarke and Burnet would put reason. For moral reasoning, “reasonableness,” is practical and has numerous ends. Some ends may be more “fit” and “rational” than others, but we recognize ends through our practical interests, and we distinguish among competing ends.

John Clarke’s *The Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice* was a criticism of Samuel Clarke and Hutcheson. Clarke of Hull was a hedonistic theist in the mold of the elder Locke and Pierre Bayle, who viewed sanction as the basic support of morality, in contrast with both Hutcheson and the moral rationalists. His central challenge to Hutcheson concerned self-love. Clarke claimed that Hutcheson’s arguments for the independence of benevolence from self-love were inadequate because they failed to recognize that “the Love of Benevolence is . . . a Desire or Inclination to do Good to others,” and “the Object and Cause of Desire is Pleasure alone, or the supposed Means of procuring it.” Although there is a profound natural connection between the happiness of a parent and the happiness of a child, and this connection is as “disinterested” as smelling a rose or tasting a peach, it is still pleasure that reinforces and spurs action in both cases. We may have different sorts of pleasures, some brutish and bad, such as the desire for esteem, and

10. Gilbert Burnet (ed.), *Letters Between the Late Mr. Gilbert Burnet, and Mr. Hutcheson, Concerning the True Foundation of Virtue or Moral Goodness. Formerly Published in the London Journal* (London: W. Wilkins, 1735), 49.
some delightful, such as eating a peach or seeking the good of a child, but this does not make them less pleasing. Their virtue must instead be related to the pain and pleasure of divine sanction.

The Essay

In the Essay, Hutcheson attempted to untangle these difficulties while furnishing a consistent and convincing theory of the passions. The latter was formulated with reference to two of his predecessors, Bernard Mandeville and Shaftesbury. Mandeville had been publishing for twenty years, but only with the publication in 1723 of a much expanded edition of the Fable of the Bees did he become famous and controversial. It was on Hutcheson’s generation, therefore, that he had his greatest impact. Mandeville presented an infamous Epicurean theory of the passions based on a skeptical analysis of human nature: “I believe Man (besides Skin, Flesh, Bones, &c. that are obvious to the Eye) to be a compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked, and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no.”

The theory was directed against Shaftesbury, as a naïvely optimistic aristocrat with little understanding of the realities of human nature.

Shaftesbury also championed the diversity of human nature but diminished the importance of self-interest by promoting the social affections “and a thousand other springs, which are counter to self-interest, [and] have as considerable a part.” Following Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, Shaftesbury saw virtue, not as a Mandevillian artifice, but as a stoic harmony with man’s intrinsically passionate nature.

Mandeville emphasized the complexity of self-interest, the interconnectedness of vice and virtue, and the diversity and ubiquity of plea-

12. The subtitle of the first edition of Inquiry reads “IN WHICH The Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain’d and Defended, against the Author of the Fable of the Bees.” Hutcheson also wrote three letters to the Dublin Weekly Journal in 1726, in which he criticized Mandeville.


sure. Hutcheson’s reply to this, as to John Clarke’s hedonism, was a reprise of the argument that we cannot force a sentiment, even if the result is pleasing. If feeling a certain passion makes us happy, we might wish to feel it in order to be happy, but we cannot force ourselves to feel something in order to get a reward. Instead, we sense and desire, and then we may feel pleasure as a consequence of the desire. The idea that action implies pleasure is false moral psychology.

For Hutcheson, as for many early modern philosophers, the passions were central to ethics. The most unsavory passions and sentiments—bigotry, anger, and the desire to harm—are consequences of limited and “partial Views,” and they arise from emphasis on selfish interest and mistaken understandings of the public good (pp. 72, 75). Consequently, they are less present in the broader view and disappear in the universal view of the moral system. Limited views of human interest derive such validity as they have from their approximation to the most general view, the providential design of creation, and the prospect of the future state (p. 123). The general view reinforces the calm passions.

The progress of the sentiments accordingly leads us to reflection not only on the human system but also on its place in the universal system. Such reflection shows how many apparently negative features of human nature have their place—in moderation. By reflection on the universal “oeconomy,” we learn to regulate passions so as to be happy and to make others happy.

Illustrations

Hutcheson’s theory of the passions responded to John Clarke’s claim that his moral philosophy was based on poor psychology. Clarke forced Hutcheson to draw his account of desire and sentiment more precisely than he had in the Inquiry, and to show how it was linked with the moral sense. But, as noted previously, other issues were afoot. Burnet’s criticisms of Treatise 2 had brought out Hutcheson’s conflict with moral realism and the view that moral judgments are like other judgments insofar as they are only valid if true.
As noted, Hutcheson emphasized in Treatise 4.1 that this was a skirmish among those who accepted the moral sense, even if some parties were not aware of it! But Burnet was not the only writer of that stripe. In the opening chapters of the Illustrations, Hutcheson successively criticized Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston (1659–1724), employing two related strategies. First, he used Grotius’s distinction between exciting and justifying reasons to show the confusion in many rationalists’ invocation of reason. Hutcheson argued that there is “no exciting Reason previous to Affection” (pp. 139–40); what we take as exciting reasons to action and to active attitudes, such as desire and affection, either presupposes affections and desires or serves as mere justifying reasons.

Furthermore, moral reasoning is practical and particular and varies from agent to agent. Consequently, supposedly fixed and eternal reasons differ drastically according to how they are viewed by individuals, and judging what is reasonable in a given situation is difficult. Rather, moral ends and actions are fixed through a moral sense; they may be justified by reason but cannot be called forth by it.

Similar arguments were deployed against Samuel Clarke’s eternal moral relations and Wollaston’s “significancy of truth in actions.” Hutcheson attacked Samuel Clarke’s “fitnesses”—real, normative predispositions among beings—and argued that the theory was incoherent and failed to support the eternal moral relations that Clarke required. Clarke’s heart was in the right place, but that was because the “eternal relations” were perceived by his own moral sense.

William Wollaston argued in the Religion of Nature Delineated (1724; first printed privately in 1722) that actions have “significancy”; that is, they could be true or false. Any act that interferes with truth is morally wrong, and, conversely, any act in accordance with the truth is morally right. Therefore, there is a correspondence of the truth signified by actions and the morally right, and conversely the denial of truth and the morally wrong.

Hutcheson distinguished between logical and moral truths. Many logical truths and falsehoods are not moral truths and falsehoods. Notably, actions that unintentionally hinder truth are rarely considered
evil; they may be logically but not morally false.\textsuperscript{15} False ideas often may result in moral evil, but they are evil not because of falsity but because we recognize them as evil through our moral sense.

The moral sense in parallel with the senses of beauty, honor, and imagination does not mean that Hutcheson saw morals as nothing but spontaneous reactions. Although we do not divine eternal moral relations in the fitnesses of things, we are capable of exact knowledge of natural law and civil laws, which constitute “the most useful Subject of Reasoning . . . as certain, invariable, or eternal Truths, as in any Geometry” (pp. 174/10, 216). But these “relations” arise from the nature of people in social interaction, not from eternal logical relations in abstraction from human nature. The absolute principles of the universal moral system are inaccessible to humanity, but we can gain more extensive views by exploring our nature and its place in a wider world.

In the final chapter of Illustrations, Hutcheson is concerned with balancing the importance of toleration with the need for belief in and love of God. Our love of God amplifies the social affections and reinforces benevolence. Consequently, the best signs of piety are social affections and public virtue, and we should not attempt further divination of the beliefs of others. Instead, we should broaden our views through reflection on the general moral system and thereby cultivate the calm passions. The Illustrations thus concludes with a “moderate” vision of humanity that connects the theory of the passions with Hutcheson’s later discussions in the System.\textsuperscript{16}

Remarks Concerning the Editions

Three editions of the Essay with Illustrations were printed during Hutcheson’s lifetime, with two variants of the first edition:

\textsuperscript{15} This argument is perhaps derived from John Clarke, An Examination of the Notion of Moral Good and Evil, 12.

\textsuperscript{16} On Hutcheson as model for Moderatism, see Richard Sher, Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 69.

IB An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations On the Moral Sense. London: Printed and Dublin re-printed by S. Powell for P. Crampton, at Addison’s Head, Opposite the Horse Guard in Dame’s-Street, and T. Benson, at Shakespear’s Head in Castle-Street, MDCCXXV.


There is some question about the order of appearance of IA and IB. Scott notes that IB was advertised as having “the errors of the London Edition emended.” But IA has fewer errors than IB, which might seem according to Scott’s comment to make it the “emended” edition. Fur-

thermore, IA and not IB was repackaged as the “second edition.” But IB clearly reads, “London: printed and Dublin re-printed,” and according to Mautner, IA is advertised in the London Journal as having been printed on January 13, 1728. Thus, unless IB was printed in the first two weeks of January, which seems unlikely, IB was an inferior edition that appeared after IA.

IA and IB appeared anonymously as penned by “the Author of the Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue” (which did carry Hutcheson’s name). The second edition of 1730, which introduced Hutcheson’s name on the title page, is not an independent edition but rather IA reprinted with Francis Hutcheson’s name on the title page. This was, it seems, the only revision. The authorship read in full, “Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow; and Author of the Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue.” The point of this reissue was probably to boost sales of both of Hutcheson’s works by means of his newly acquired academic distinction. He became a professor in Glasgow in 1730, and the third edition of the Inquiry (1729) had been published too early to make note of Hutcheson’s new standing.

The third edition of 1742 is a distinct and revised edition with many additions and emendations, mainly to the Illustrations. There were a number of posthumous editions of Essay with Illustrations. Jessop mentions a 1751 Dublin edition, a 1756 London fourth edition, and a 1772 Glasgow “3rd edition.”

Editorial Principles

Of the two extant variorum editions, Peach used a posthumous 1769 reprint of 3 as the copy text for his edition of the Illustrations. This is the best approach to the Illustrations when presented independently of the Essays. I have adopted 1A as the copy text for this edition of the entire Essay with Illustrations for a simple reason. It allows the reader to view the actual chronological alteration of the text: that is, how Hutcheson himself initially presented it and then altered it fourteen years later.

Turco’s excellent Italian edition uses internal citation to make the body of the text neutral to the specific edition. Unfortunately, that approach becomes far too unwieldy when noting punctuation changes. As Turco’s edition is a translation into Italian with textual apparatus, minute changes of punctuation go for the most part unremarked.

Why 1A and not 1B? Because 1A has fewer mistakes than 1B, is more common, and is the basis for 2 (more accurately, it is identical to 2, aside from a new title page). I have not noted any variations among 1A, 1B, and the “second edition,” as they have only bibliographic interest (and limited bibliographic interest at that), since Hutcheson appears to have had little or no hand in them. For the same reason, I have not noted variations found in posthumous editions.

Hutcheson made numerous alterations in the third edition, although the differences between the two editions are not as dramatic.

19. There are a number of reprints without variorum. Volume II of Fabian (op. cit.) reprints 1A, as does the Gafland (New York: 1971). Andrew Ward (ed.), Essay with Illustrations (Manchester: Clinamen, 1999) is a modernized version of 1A; and 3 has been reprinted in Paul McReynolds (ed.), Four Early Works on Motivation (Gainesville, Fla: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1969).
as one might expect, given the fourteen years between them. The significant varia are at the end of this text and are indicated by page and line number of the present volume. Hutcheson’s notes and my editorial notes are attached to the main body of the text, as is the pagination for 1A and 3 (1A appears in italic typeface; 3 appears in regular typeface).

The lengthiest emendations are found in the preface to the work and in the Illustrations; generally, these are subtractions from the preface and additions to the Illustrations. Many of the specific references to his contemporaries Joseph Butler, Jean Le Clerc, and John Clarke are trimmed from the preface in 3.

There are numerous other changes to the text, additions and subtractions of words, lines, and paragraphs, as well as countless modifications and alterations to punctuation, capitalization procedures, italics, and typeface. A number of footnotes were added to the later edition as well, including a diatribe against Hutcheson’s critic John Balguy. A sole reference to the New Testament is also added. There are even alterations in the marginal titles.

I have restricted my variorum to changes that could alter the sense of the text, although what could affect sense is a point of debate. I have noted all changes of wording and all changes of relevant punctuation. These are clearly the two most important types of textual varia. There are many varia, though, that have not been noted.

I have not noted most changes in capitalization, as there is little or no rhyme or reason to Hutcheson’s use of them. Although capitals are often used for emphasis in twentieth-century prose, they are not used with great consistency in earlier eighteenth-century English-language philosophical texts. Furthermore, capitalization was often a printer’s decision. The same holds for italics. I have noted very few changes in capitals and italics—only those that could possibly be construed as providing a change in emphasis. Readers are strongly cautioned, however, against reading too much into even those changes.

Among other variorum that have not been noted are the following:

1. Differences in spelling, broadly conceived, among the editions.