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HUTCHESON ON NATURAL RELIGION

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Recent scholars have examined the important role of English Deism in the formation of a modern naturalistic approach to the study of human religiosity. Despite the volume of important studies of various aspects of his thought, the role of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) in this development has been overlooked. The aim of this paper is to show how Hutcheson develops his own account of the origins of religion, consonant with his more well-known theories in aesthetics and moral philosophy, that diverges sharply from the then-prevailing Deist views. Hutcheson pioneers a psychological account of religion that anticipates the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars in important ways. At the same time, Hutcheson incorporates his account of the origins of religion into an overall vision of human flourishing.

KEYWORDS: Hutcheson; religion; Deism

Recent scholarship has revealed the importance of the concept of ‘natural religion’ in helping to shape modern attitudes about religion.¹ Particular emphasis has been laid on the role of English Deism in the formation of naturalistic approaches to religion.² This focus on Deism in discussions of natural religion, however, has come at the expense of other figures in the British tradition, notably Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746). This is not to say that Hutcheson’s significance for eighteenth-century philosophy, both in Great Britain and in Germany, has been passed over.³ Both Hutcheson’s

¹For example, two authoritative discussions of the history of religious studies both highlight the eighteenth-century roots of the discipline. See Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986) and Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³From his position in Glasgow, where Hutcheson occupied the chair of moral philosophy, he exerted a direct influence on the mainstream of the Scottish Enlightenment. In Germany, his ideas were appropriated enthusiastically by G. E. Lessing, for instance, in his early play *Miss Sara Sampson*. Lessing translated Hutcheson’s posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy* into German in 1756, only a year after its first publication in Britain. This connection is discussed,

seminal role in the development of aesthetics as an independent discipline and his place as the founder of the sentimentalist stream of British moral theory remain subjects of lively discussion among scholars.⁴ Hutcheson is often viewed as a pioneer of modern moral naturalism. Yet, despite this volume of excellent work, Hutcheson's views on natural religion have received much less attention. In studies of the history of modern theories of religion, Hutcheson's innovations in this domain are completely ignored. This general neglect leads to an unfortunate lacuna in the current understanding of eighteenth-century discussions of natural religion, and thus in our overall understanding of the development of modern approaches to religion.

This is particularly unfortunate in that Hutcheson offers a vigorous and viable alternative to the prevailing Deist accounts, one that anticipates many ideas more commonly associated with the Romantic turn at the end of the eighteenth century. Hutcheson is a pioneer of a broadly *psychological* account of religion that is, importantly, neither reductive nor sceptical. Hutcheson manages to transcend the intellectualism of the Deists and so opens the door to a renewed appreciation of the plurality of religious beliefs and behaviours. Hutcheson's account of religion is framed by his broader

among other places, in Arnold Heidsieck, 'Der Disput zwischen Lessing und Mendelssohn über das Trauerspiel', *Lessing-Jahrbuch*, 11 (1979): 7–34. The young Kant publicly expressed his admiration for Hutcheson's achievements in his 1764 Prize Essay. See Dieter Henrich, 'Hutcheson und Kant', *Kant-Studien*, 49 (1957): 49–69. Among the Wolffians, J. A. Eberhard, who held an influential position at Halle, discusses Hutcheson in many of his own works, most notably in his *Allgemeine Theorie des Denkens und Empfindens* (1776), a widely read account of rational psychology. Among Eberhard's more famous pupils was Friedrich Schleiermacher, who, by at least 1803, had become directly acquainted with Hutcheson's works. See the discussion of this connection in Julia A. Lamm, 'The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher's Notion of *Gefühl*', *Harvard Theological Review*, 87 (1994): 67–105.

⁴Regarding his aesthetics, the most widely discussed account is Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). Hutcheson's role in the development of the concept of disinterestedness is generally acknowledged and has received some careful consideration. See, for example, Dabney Townsend, 'From Shaftesbury to Kant: The Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987): 287–305; and Miles Rind, 'The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 40 (2002): 67–87. Hutcheson's sentimentalism in moral theory underwent a revival during the heyday of mid-century non-cognitivism. See, for example, William Frankena, 'Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16 (1955) No. 3: 356–75. More recently, there has been debate about whether or not Hutcheson holds some version of moral realism. This debate originates in the account in David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Norton's view is challenged by Kenneth Winkler in 'Hutcheson's Alleged Realism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985) No. 2: 179–94, to which Norton has replied. The most recent examinations of Hutcheson focus on his role in the development of modern secular moral theory. See Steven Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

philosophical ambitions, viz., to develop a theory of human nature aimed at promoting well-being through a programme of self-culture. He does not shy away from the moral implications of his views. On the contrary, these implications are explicitly meant to be the ultimate criteria of the success of his philosophical enterprise.

My aim in this paper is, first of all, simply to redress the neglect of this important element of Hutcheson's philosophy. Second, I highlight Hutcheson's innovations with respect to his contemporaries, showing him to be an important forerunner of later approaches to religion. Third, I locate Hutcheson's account of religion within his moral naturalism. This is an element of Hutcheson's view that may seem alien to many current concerns. However, as Hans Kippenberg has pointed out, the study of the nature of religion has never been entirely divorced from questions about then-current culture and moral life. My discussion begins by reviewing the recent work of two scholars who demonstrate both the significance and limitations of English Deism in the development of modern approaches to religion. I next briefly examine some of the ways in which Shaftesbury's general approach to philosophy played an important role in the development of Hutcheson's own project. I then turn to Hutcheson's own discussions of religion. I argue that he has a consistent and stable account of religion as *natural* in both the descriptive and normative senses of the word, i.e. as a spontaneous expression of our cognitive capacities *and* as a crucial element in human flourishing.⁵ As will become clear in what follows, it is at this point that my reading of Hutcheson departs from that recently offered by Michael B. Gill. More specifically, *pace* Gill, I argue that Hutcheson's moral theory is *religious*, in the sense that it does not merely imply the existence of God (as Gill argues), but rather carves out a central role for religion in the constitution of human perfection.

Two recent studies of the development of the concept of religion in the eighteenth century (coincidentally published almost simultaneously) place great emphasis on the role of Deism in giving rise to the modern study of religion. Just what 'Deism' amounts to is, however, notoriously difficult to spell out without controversy. Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1581–1648) is typically acknowledged as an important seventeenth-century forerunner. Other prominent thinkers labelled as Deists include Charles Blount (1654–93), John Toland (1670–1722), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), Matthew Tindal (1657–1733), and Thomas Chubb (1679–1746). In her magisterial study of the period, Isabel Rivers provides a helpful articulation of the

⁵Hutcheson's views would, in general, align well with some contemporary moral naturalists. See, for example, Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Importantly, however, Hutcheson places special emphasis on the role and function of *religion* in promoting a certain kind of human flourishing.

common agenda of the Deists (or ‘freethinkers’). These include, first of all, a ‘general anti-Christian stance’ expressed as ‘hostility’ to the Bible and to traditional doctrinal orthodoxy, as well as to ‘priestcraft’, or the corrupt rule of the clergy.⁶ Second, more positively, they engaged in analysis of religious discourse and belief in an effort to determine the cogency of the traditional distinction between matters ‘above’ and matters ‘contrary’ to reason.⁷ Finally, they all developed and promoted some conception of ‘natural religion’. Rivers points out that the precise content of this concept varied from Deist to Deist. John Toland, whose *Christianity not Mysterious* (1695) sparked heated debates about Deism, conceived of natural religion along pantheistic lines, while others conceived of it in a way more congruent with traditional theism.⁸ In fact, generalizations about the Deists’ conceptions of natural religion should be made cautiously. That being said, the careful scholarship of Byrne and Harrison warrant the following picture of the common current of Deism. Both highlight the Deists’ *naturalism* and their concomitant rejection of the pessimistic, ultra-Calvinist view of human nature that prevailed in the period. In locating the source of religion in human nature, the Deists clearly paved the way for modern disciplines like the psychology of religion and comparative religion.⁹ In addition to naturalism, many Deists also embraced what might be called *intellectualism* regarding natural religion. Thus, for example, in his *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), Matthew Tindal argues that religion just *is* the rational discernment of the divine will as expressed in the natures of things.¹⁰ This is the point at which Hutcheson and the Deists part company.

Byrne uses Lord Herbert of Cherbury to illustrate this aspect of the Deist position. Herbert famously reduces the essence of religion to a set of ‘common notions’ innate to the human mind and universally displayed in human history.¹¹ For his part, Byrne articulates some worries regarding what he sees as the abstractness of the Deist conception of religion, which was typically joined to a deep suspicion of all traditional forms of religious expression. As a result, Byrne argues, the range of phenomena deemed relevant to the study of religion is unduly restricted by the Deist paradigm.¹²

⁶Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780. Vol. 2: Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 8.

⁷Ibid., 8.

⁸Ibid., 59, 67.

⁹Peter Byrne is explicit on this point. See *Natural Religion*, 9–10, *et passim*. Harrison situates the Deists’ naturalism within a larger narrative of the history of ideas in which ‘the physical world ceased to be a theatre in which the drama of creation was constantly re-directed by divine interventions [...]’. See ‘*Religion and the Religions*’, 5.

¹⁰Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation, or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature*, edited by J. V. Price (London: Thoemmes Press, 1995) 56.

¹¹Byrne, *Natural Religion*, 37.

¹²Ibid., 142.

For Byrne, real progress in the study of religion only came about with the rise of Romanticism and historicism at the close of the eighteenth century.

Harrison is even more sharply critical of the Deists on this score. The Deists, on his reading, treat religion as ‘a natural object constituted primarily by propositional knowledge’.¹³ He views this as largely congruent with the spirit of the prevailing Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which ‘correct belief’ was the touchstone of genuine piety.¹⁴ Like Byrne, Harrison emphasizes the innovations of Lord Herbert in this respect.¹⁵ According to Harrison, Deist intellectualism transformed religion from a way of life and an overarching cultural norm into a set of beliefs. The Deists tended to assume that the original core of beliefs came to be overlaid and corrupted by the machinations of the clergy, with the result that religion, on the whole, became harmful to human well-being. ‘The cure’, writes Harrison, ‘was to be a return to the unsullied religion of the *illud tempus* which would result in a universal worship of the one God [...]’.¹⁶ This committed the Deists to drawing a sharp distinction between the true, hidden religion of reason and the popular superstitions that retarded human progress.

Hutcheson’s views on religion in general and on natural religion in particular departed from many of the characteristically Deist positions outlined above, and yet there are also some points of convergence. Hutcheson did not share the Deists’ general hostility to Christianity. According to his student, William Leechman (1706–85), who edited the posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy*, Hutcheson’s most well-attended lectures were informal weekly gatherings on Sundays, at which he held forth ‘on the truth and excellency of Christianity’.¹⁷ At the same time, however, Hutcheson did share the Deists’ misgivings about the pessimistic doctrine of human nature that was the hallmark of the orthodox Calvinism of the Church of Scotland.¹⁸ Hutcheson also seems to have been hesitant to endorse at least the utility of arguments for God’s existence on the basis of miracles.¹⁹ Moreover, almost immediately upon his appointment at Glasgow, Hutcheson came under the suspicion of his more staunchly Calvinist colleagues. His inaugural lecture directly challenges the Calvinist view of the corruption of human nature. Others soon objected

¹³Harrison, ‘*Religion and the Religions*’, 4.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 19–20.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy in Two Volumes* (London: Continuum, 2005) vol. 1, xxxvi.

¹⁸For a clear and informative account of Hutcheson’s divergence from Calvinism on this point, see Gill, *British Moralists*, 137–9. Gill attributes this aspect of Hutcheson’s religious outlook to the influence of John Simson (1667–1740), a broad-minded and humanistic Professor of Divinity at Glasgow.

¹⁹Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004) 60.

to the allegedly irreligious nature of Hutcheson's moral theory.²⁰ Still, in the *Inquiry* (the offending work in question), Hutcheson castigates the 'Prejudices' of the Deists against Christianity.

Gill places great emphasis on these elements of Hutcheson's thought in order to situate him within the epochal shift within 'English-speaking moral philosophy' between 1600 and 1750.²¹ Gill argues that Hutcheson 'did not think human beings needed Christ or the Bible to understand and realize virtue', since all can avail themselves of the uncorrupted deliverances of the moral sense.²² Still, it must be granted that Hutcheson's clear rejection of what Gill calls the Calvinists' 'Negative Answer' to questions about moral psychology and human nature does not sufficiently establish the further claim that Hutcheson is a forerunner of fully secular moral theories. Indeed, Hutcheson's view, while certainly incompatible with *one* religious outlook (i.e. seventeenth-century Calvinism), are quite congruent with the ancient tradition of Christian humanism revived in the century preceding his work by Protestants like Richard Hooker and Roman Catholics like Francis de Sales. Christian humanists, like Hutcheson, highlight the positive, though necessarily finite, potentialities of human nature. Moreover, as Gill carefully notes, Hutcheson maintained that his theory entails God's existence.²³ In other words, God occupies a key place in what we today would call Hutcheson's meta-ethics. That our nature has a *normative* status vis-à-vis how we should live is something that depends, for Hutcheson, on a theistic metaphysics. In this respect, Hutcheson comes closer to Thomism than to Hume, Kant, Mill, or their contemporary secular successors. There is still a considerable distance to travel to get from Hutcheson to the sorts of theories commonly discussed in moral philosophy today. In fact, central elements of Hutcheson's position would have to be completely given up to make it 'secular' in any plausible sense.

My primary concern, however, is with Hutcheson's divergence from the Deists regarding not Christianity as a 'revealed religion', but rather regarding *natural religion*. Hutcheson nowhere endorses the characteristically Deist notion of a pure religion of nature, founded solely on reason, suppressed by priests and preserved by freethinkers through the ages. More importantly, however, Hutcheson departs from the Deists' intellectualism. His account of natural religion is, in this respect, of a piece with his famously anti-rationalist moral philosophy. Again, Leechman is a helpful informant on this score. Hutcheson's discomfort with rationalist approaches to religion was already established while he was still a student. Leechman

²⁰See Gill, *British Moralists*, 172–3.

²¹*Ibid.*, 2.

²²*Ibid.*, 172.

²³*Ibid.*, 173, 185–6.

cites a now lost letter to Samuel Clarke from about 1717. According to Leechman, Hutcheson takes the opportunity to challenge Clarke's 'metaphysical arguments' for religion as well as his employment of a scholastic demonstrative method in theology.²⁴

Somewhat ironically, an important influence on the development of Hutcheson's position is a figure often labelled a Deist by both contemporaries and by posterity, Anthony Ashley Cooper, better known by his title, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713).²⁵ In the preface to the first edition of *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson appeals to Lord Shaftesbury as the source of his own conception of the moral sense. In the second edition (1726), he includes a more lengthy discussion of Shaftesbury, arguing in this case, despite the animadversions of various critics, Shaftesbury should not be seen as an ally of freethinkers and libertines.²⁶ By his own account, then, Hutcheson was profoundly influenced by Shaftesbury. Recent scholars have not, on the whole, differed from Hutcheson in this assessment of their relationship. Here, I draw attention to a few particular points relevant to Hutcheson's theory of religion in which Shaftesbury cleared a path for his successor.

First, and most importantly, Shaftesbury articulates and defends a revolutionary conception of philosophy that came to have a profound effect on the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment and on Continental thinkers who adopted many of these same ideals. Against what he saw as arid scholasticism, Shaftesbury argued passionately for a 'plain homespun philosophy of looking at ourselves', a philosophy that had more to do with self-examination than with *a priori* definitions and demonstrations.²⁷ He envisions a philosophy that tries to uncover the architecture of the human mind and that will replace what he calls the 'choking weed' of rationalistic system-building.²⁸ Crucially, the ultimate aim of this kind of philosophy is moral self-cultivation. In this regard, Shaftesbury (like his successors) drinks deeply from the well of late classical philosophy. In particular, Cicero's project of developing an eclectic, open-minded, and dialogic style of philosophy in an effort to shape a cultured public finds important echoes in Shaftesbury and in his successors.²⁹

²⁴Hutcheson, *System*, v–vi.

²⁵Recognizing Shaftesbury's influence on Hutcheson does not imply ignoring some of the important differences between their views on a variety of issues. For an account of their differences on moral philosophy, see Simon Grote, 'Hutcheson's Divergence from Shaftesbury', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 4 (2006) No. 2: 159–72.

²⁶Hutcheson was not alone in this approach to Shaftesbury's contentious legacy. See Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, 153–237.

²⁷This designation for Shaftesbury's preferred approach to philosophy comes from 'A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm'. See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, edited by Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 22.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 128.

²⁹For this aspect of Cicero's project, see the excellent discussion in P. G. Walsh's introduction to his translation of *De natura deorum: The Nature of the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

The goal of such moral self-cultivation on Shaftesbury's account is a kind of moral beauty.³⁰ Moral beauty in this case is a kind of harmony of our sentiments, affections, and powers in which our benevolent inclinations check our more self-interested drives. This leads to the second important element of Shaftesbury's position that becomes important for the development of Hutcheson's account of religion. In examining the architecture of the mind, Shaftesbury places great emphasis on what his German contemporaries called the 'lower faculties', i.e., affect, sensibility, and passion. Understanding this part of ourselves is, according to Shaftesbury, vital for the task of achieving moral beauty.

Taken together, then, part of what Shaftesbury bequeathed to his successors is a conception of philosophy as self-examination, in the specific sense of introspective analysis of our mental faculties as the roots of the arts, the sciences, morality, and religion. This conception of philosophy places great emphasis on the role played by non-rational faculties in the formation of individual personalities and social organizations. The ultimate aim of doing philosophy in this way is to provide a basis for forming selves (and societies) into coherent and valuable wholes. In all these respects, Hutcheson carried Shaftesbury's programme forward.

As noted in my introductory remarks, recent scholars have begun to appreciate Hutcheson's important contributions to aesthetics and moral philosophy. However, his philosophy of religion is rarely examined with any care or sympathy.³¹ Hutcheson is typically viewed as an important way-station on the progress toward the fully secularized moral theories of Hume, Smith, and Kant. While much has been gained by this approach to Hutcheson's work, it largely ignores his own insistence that religion is the cornerstone of moral self-cultivation, a topic that I will examine in more detail below. Moreover, Hutcheson's name is absent from recent accounts of eighteenth-century conceptions of 'natural religion', and so of the origins of the modern study of religion. The crucial point for correctly understanding

1998). Perhaps the most Ciceronian of Shaftesbury's successors is George Turnbull. Turnbull cites Cicero repeatedly at important junctures in his own most significant work, *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, vol. 1, edited by Alexander Broadie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005). The Ciceronian model was also picked up by the German *Populärphilosophen* after the middle of the eighteenth century. Importantly, many members of this rather diffuse, though highly influential, movement, such as Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Johann Nikolaus Tetens (1736–1807), Thomas Abbt (1739–66), and Christian Garve (1742–99), were also highly receptive to the ideas and ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment. For a general discussion of this movement, see Johan Van der Zande, 'In the Image of Cicero: German Philosophy between Wolff and Kant', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995) No. 3: 419–42.

³⁰Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 62. The most thorough account of this important aspect of Shaftesbury's thought is Robert E. Norton, *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) 26–38. Another discussion that focuses particularly on Shaftesbury's private notebooks and his published *Soliloquy* can be found in Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, 197–205.

³¹Typical in this regard is Kivy's dismissive discussion in *The Seventh Sense*, 111–23.

the character of Hutcheson's thought is to see that these two elements of his project are deeply and inseparably linked. Hutcheson took quite seriously Shaftesbury's critical reservations about abstract system-building. The ultimate import, for Hutcheson, of a theory of the human mind must always be human well-being. Any such theory must also take seriously the contribution of the senses to our overall mental economy. It is here that Hutcheson's divergence from the Deists becomes most pronounced. For thinkers like Tindal, 'natural religion' originates in the rational discernment of metaphysical features of the universe, and consists solely in adherence to propositions expressing these features. Emotions and desires, if discussed at all, are generally viewed as corrupting influences on the original purity of fully rational natural religion. This outlook receives its fullest articulation in Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, in which Hume dispenses with the Deist myth of primitive rationality altogether, and attributes the 'first obscure traces of divinity' to irrational passions like fear, anxiety, dread, and vengefulness.³² Hutcheson, on the other hand, defends a positive role for the senses and sentiments in the formation of religious conviction and the constitution of religious responses to the world. The ultimate import of Hutcheson's account is that religion is given a key role in the process of moral self-formation.

In what follows I will examine the connections between these ideas, first of all, in three of Hutcheson's most important and influential works, the *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (1728), and the posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755). I will also consult *A Synopsis of Metaphysics Comprehending Ontology and Pneumatology*, the text of lectures delivered most likely in Dublin in the 1720s, with the exception of the portion on natural theology, which Hutcheson presented after assuming the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow in 1729. Finally, I will discuss a few passages from the *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendaria* (first edn, 1742; second edn, 1745; English translation, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 1747), a pedagogical work closely connected with the posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy*.³³ Hutcheson's views on some issues do seem to have evolved over his career.³⁴ However, his account of the nature of religion and its link to moral self-culture remains remarkably stable. This account offers at least three things that mark it off from otherwise similar discussions in the period. First,

³²David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, edited by H. E. Root (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957) 26.

³³For a discussion of the relationship between this work and the *System of Moral Philosophy*, see James Moore, 'Hutcheson's Theodicy: The Argument and the Contexts of *A System of Moral Philosophy*', in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, edited by Paul Wood (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000) 239–67.

³⁴Darwall examines the issue of changes in Hutcheson's position in *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, 233–43.

Hutcheson's account is more nuanced than the heavily intellectualist discussions of some of the Deists. Hutcheson explains how affections towards God form the heart of religion, as well as how the sense of beauty plays a key role in the formation of religious convictions. Second, Hutcheson's account of religion is located firmly within a systematic theory of human psychology; yet, unlike other well-known psychological accounts of religion (e.g. Freud), Hutcheson's is not reductive. Hutcheson appreciates the complicated interaction of reason and sentiment in forming our religious attitudes and in accounting for the role of religion in moral life. Moreover, in allowing the senses to play a central role in religion, Hutcheson is in no way committed to the claim that either religious belief or the worship of God are somehow irrational. Finally, both the theory of religion and the larger psychological view in which it is embedded are all meant to serve a humanistic ethics that still manages to provide a crucial place for religion, something that is overlooked in Gill's account.

Hutcheson's latter-day fame largely rests upon the *Inquiry*, the foundational document of the 'moral sense' tradition in modern philosophy. Hutcheson's own estimate of the importance of the work is clear in his preface:

There is no part of Philosophy of more importance, than a just Knowledge of Human Nature, and its various Powers and Dispositions. Our late Inquiries have been very much employ'd about our Understanding, and the several Methods of obtaining Truth. We generally acknowledge, that the Importance of any Truth is nothing else than its Moment, or Efficacy to make Men happy [...]. It must surely then be of the greatest importance, to have distinct Conceptions of this End it self, as well as of the Means necessary to obtain it [...]. It is to be fear'd indeed, that most of our Studys, without this Inquiry, will be of very little use to us; for they seem to have scarce any other tendency than to lead us into speculative Knowledge it self.³⁵

Here, Hutcheson pledges his allegiance to Shaftesbury's 'plain homespun philosophy' and its motivating goal, i.e. moral self-culture. Without denying the significance of recent developments in the theory of knowledge (the wording here suggests that Hutcheson has Locke in mind), he stresses that the import of any philosophical theory of the human mind must ultimately lie in its serviceability in advancing humanity. One implication of this is that Lockean innovations, such as empiricism, are to be seen as bearing fruit in Hutcheson's own inquiries. More directly, however, Hutcheson makes clear his commitment to moral naturalism, i.e., to the claim that a theory of human nature is the only basis for a valid conception of the good life. Hutcheson goes on to maintain that insufficient attention has been given precisely to those 'Powers and Dispositions' that enable this good. One of the most important of these, which plays a crucial role in the account of

³⁵Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004) 7.

religion he provides in the *Inquiry*, is what he calls the ‘internal sense’. This is the source of pleasures ‘in those complex Ideas of Objects, which obtain the Names of Beautiful, Regular, Harmonious’.³⁶ Hutcheson insists that the internal sense cannot be reduced to reason. He writes:

This superior Power of Perception is justly called a sense, because of its Affinity to the other senses in this, that the Pleasure does not arise from any knowledge of Principles, Proportions, Causes, or of the Usefulness of the object; but strikes us at first with the Idea of Beauty: nor does the most accurate Knowledge increase this Pleasure from prospects of Advantage, or from the Increase of Knowledge.³⁷

Hutcheson here argues that the pleasure we take in perceiving a beautiful whole does not rest upon any of our discursive faculties. Indeed, a ‘sense’ or determination of our nature to take pleasure in certain ideas, is explicitly contrasted with ‘reason’, which Hutcheson describes at one point in this text as our capacity for constructing ‘long Deductions’.³⁸ Instead, like our other sensory faculties, the deliverances of the ‘internal sense’ are quite immediate. Put another way, the ‘internal sense’ is not a discursive faculty that strings together ideas to form propositions. At the same time, the internal sense does make it possible for us to take pleasure in contemplating propositions, or, more properly, in systematic concatenations of propositions. In this respect, our interest in theoretical activity is shaped by the internal sense, such that this interest is not explicable *solely* on the basis of reason.³⁹ Hutcheson’s terminology, in this instance anyway, is largely derived from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He follows Locke in using the term ‘idea’ to refer to the immediate object of a mental act. During his discussion of the formation of complex or ‘Compound’ ideas, Hutcheson refers directly to Book II of Locke’s *Essay*.⁴⁰ ‘Proposition’, on the other hand, is for Hutcheson a class to which ‘Theorems’, ‘Axioms’ and ‘Truths’ belong.⁴¹

A bit further on in this discussion of the internal sense, Hutcheson considers the role that it plays in the formation of religious conviction. For Hutcheson, an important part of religion is the *pleasure* we take in contemplating the providential order of the universe. Indeed, this pleasure accounts in large part for our *interest* in exploring nature.⁴² This is a point at

³⁶Ibid., 22.

³⁷Ibid., 25.

³⁸Ibid., 9.

³⁹See Hutcheson’s discussion of ‘the Beauty of Theorems’, and our attraction to it, in Section III. Hutcheson points out that, so great is our inclination to seek simplicity and elegance that we are often led to embrace implausibly reductive positions; *ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰See *ibid.*, 8, 19.

⁴¹Ibid., 36–8.

⁴²Towards the end of Section V, Hutcheson remarks: ‘This is certain, That we have some of the most delightful Instances of Universal Causes in the Works of Nature, and that the most

which Hutcheson diverges from some of his Deist contemporaries. Recall how, in his *Christianity as Old as Creation*, Tindal maintains that God's will, or the law of nature, by which he means universal, immutable moral principles, is inscribed in nature and can be discovered by reason. In Section IV, entitled 'Of Relative or Comparative Beauty', Hutcheson also attributes religious ideas to the perception of 'Nature', but with an important difference:

This beauty arising from Correspondence to Intention, would open to curious observers a new Scene of Beauty in the Works of Nature, by considering how the Mechanism of the various Parts known to us, seems adapted to the Perfection of that Part, and yet in Subordination to the Good of some System or Whole. We generally suppose the Good of the greatest Whole, or of all Beings, to have been the Intention of the Author of Nature; and cannot avoid being pleas'd when we see any part of this Design executed in the Systems we are acquainted with. The observations already made on this Subject are in every one's hand in the Treatises of our late Improvers of mechanical Philosophy.⁴³

Earlier on, in Section II, Hutcheson had defined beauty *simpliciter* as 'Uniformity amidst Variety'.⁴⁴ One way in which this 'Uniformity' is achieved is through *intention*, as in most products of human artifice. Hutcheson's point in the lengthy passage quoted immediately above is that human beings perceive a broadly teleological ordering of the parts of natural objects and of those same objects with respect to the universe as a whole. This gives rise to a kind of pleasure, and to the idea of a certain kind of beauty. Accounts such as Tindal's narrowly focus on the role of reason in this process, without offering the more nuanced account of the *interest* we take in contemplating nature. As will become clearer below, Hutcheson's views on the place of religion within the moral economy depend upon this important role for sentiment in the formation of religious convictions. Here, however, the thought is that the inquiries that deepen religious convictions through insight into nature are largely motivated by and sustained by a decidedly non-theoretical interest in the pleasure produced by the internal sense.

As Section V makes quite clear, Hutcheson is in no doubt that the occurrence of various sorts of regularity in nature make it highly probable that nature as a whole is a product of design. Indeed, the probability of this is so high that it approaches as near to demonstration as an inductive

studious men in these Subjects are so delighted with the Observation of them, that they always look upon them as Evidences of Wisdom in the Administration of Nature, from a Sense of Beauty' (*ibid.*, 58–9).

⁴³Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 45.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

argument can. This probability can be established, according to Hutcheson, even on the supposition that our sense of beauty had been constituted differently. In other words, even if irregularities pleased us, or we were indifferent to regularities, the likelihood that, out of infinite possibilities, any particular regularity would emerge without design is extremely small.⁴⁵

More is required, however, to establish further qualities or attributes of the divine designer. The occurrence of regularity by itself only shows us that there must be some design, and falls short of giving us reason to ascribe 'Wisdom and Prudence' to the cause.⁴⁶ Hutcheson presents three possible ways to establish these qualities in the cause. First, given the antecedent assumption that God is benevolent, we can assert that 'indeed the Happiness of Mankind is desirable or Good to the Supreme Cause'. Next, given the actual constitution of our sense of beauty, i.e., the fact that we take pleasure in regularities of various kinds, we can conclude that 'that Form which pleases us, is an Argument of his Wisdom'.⁴⁷ In other words, the structure of the world, as a matter of fact, operates upon our sense of beauty to produce pleasure, and so contributes quite directly to our happiness. A second consideration that allows us to ascribe wisdom to the designing cause of the universe is the observation of something achieving its designated end. That is, the *success* of a design evidences a 'comprehensive large Understanding in the Cause'.⁴⁸

Finally, Hutcheson adduces another type of beauty or regularity, viz., the sort of simplicity or parsimony at work 'when we see many useful or beautiful Effects flowing from one general Cause'.⁴⁹ In other words, the sense of beauty plays a key role in at least one of the paths along which human beings can arrive at conviction regarding the existence of a wise designing cause of the universe. He writes:

Interest must lead Beings of limited Powers, who are incapable of a great diversity of Operations, and distracted by them, to chuse this frugal Oeconomy of their Forces, and to look upon such Management as an Evidence of Wisdom in other Beings like themselves. Nor is this speculative Reason all which influences them, for even beside this Consideration of Interest, *they are determin'd by a Sense of Beauty where that Reason does not hold*; as when we are judging of the Productions of other Agents about whose Oeconomy we are not solicitous. Thus, who does not approve of it as a Perfection in Clock-work, that three or four Motions of the Hour, Minute, and second Hands, and monthly Plate, should arise from one Spring or Weight, rather than from three, or four Springs, or Weights, in a very Compound Machine, which

⁴⁵Ibid., 46–9.

⁴⁶Ibid., 57.

⁴⁷Ibid., 57.

⁴⁸Ibid., 58.

⁴⁹Ibid., 58.

should perform the same Effects, and answer all the same Purposes with equal exactness?⁵⁰

Hutcheson begins this passage by observing how we form the idea of other rational agents at work in the natural world by taking notice of the way in which some creatures' behaviour is goal-directed or purposive. Moreover, we also become aware of the ways in which some creatures employ elegantly parsimonious methods in achieving their ends. Presumably with human beings in mind, Hutcheson ascribes these sorts of behaviours to 'speculative Reason'. Reason in this case means a faculty for coordinating interests and means for realizing them.⁵¹ However, Hutcheson quickly points out that this fit between means and interests is not the only source of the notion of rationality in nature. Instead, he calls attention to the ways in which people are immediately struck by economy of means even where there is no question (at least *prima facie*) of any interest being served. Here, Hutcheson is clearly expressing his commitment to the common eighteenth-century idea that aesthetic pleasure is fundamentally disinterested. For present purposes, the most important aspect of this passage is Hutcheson's claim that our non-discursive sense of beauty is assigned a key role in establishing religious convictions. Hutcheson does not say that this is the *best* or even *most important* way in which such convictions can be formed and established. However, a comment made shortly after the long passage quoted immediately above does suggest that, at the very least, something more than pure reason is in play in the move from natural philosophy (i.e. physical science) to natural theology:

This is certain, That we have some of the most delightful Instances of Universal Causes in the Works of Nature, and that the most studious men in those Subjects are so delighted with the Observation of them, that they always look upon them as Evidences of Wisdom in the Administration of Nature, from a sense of Beauty.⁵²

The delight occasioned by the operation of the sense of Beauty is given a prominent role here in accounting for the force of scientific observations in generating religious convictions. Clearly, reason plays a part as well. But the thrust of these comments is that reason relies upon the deliverances of the sense of Beauty in inferring the presence of certain qualities in the designing cause of the universe. Without the affectively charged perception of a certain

⁵⁰Ibid., 58. Emphasis added.

⁵¹That Hutcheson uses the term 'Reason' to designate our faculty for 'instrumental Reasonings' is quite clear from the *Essay*. See Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, edited by Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002) 143–45, 148.

⁵²Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 59.

kind of beauty in nature, it would seem that some people anyway would be at a loss for ‘Evidences’ of divine design.

In Section VIII, Hutcheson steps back from the close analysis of beauty and of the workings of the ‘internal sense’ to consider the general way in which the fact that beauty pleases us should be understood within the overall providential order of the universe. The question of the ‘final Cause’ of the sense of Beauty amounts to the question of why God would create a world ‘every where full of Regularity and Uniformity’.⁵³ Hutcheson’s first response is that such a world has significant cognitive advantages for ‘Beings of limited Understanding’ like us, for such a world is most amenable to the ‘manner of Knowledge by Universal Theorems, and of Operation by Universal Causes’.⁵⁴ Second, abstracting away from this consideration, Hutcheson argues that the particularities of our sense of beauty rest ‘upon a voluntary Constitution, adapted to preserve the Regularity of the Universe’.⁵⁵ That is, not only does the regularity observable in the world facilitate our understanding of its workings, but the fact that we are pleased by such regularity is itself an important constitutive element of the overall providential design of things. More specifically, our sense of beauty (which takes pleasure in regularity) allows us to achieve psychological unity. Reason requires regularity in order to function properly. A sense of beauty constituted differently from our actual sense of beauty would therefore be at odds with reason. As it is, however, our higher pleasures and our cognitive advantage dovetail.⁵⁶

The deepest reason, however, for the fact that our sense of beauty fits the world is that the pleasures it engenders play a central role in coming to know God. Hutcheson writes:

[S]ince the divine Goodness, for the Reasons above mention’d, has constituted our Sense of Beauty as it is at present, the same Goodness might determine the Great Architect to adorn this vast Theatre in a manner agreeable to the Spectators, and that part which is expos’d to the Observation of men, so as to be pleasant to them; especially if we suppose that he design’d to discover himself to them as Wise and Good, as well as Powerful: for this he has given them greater Evidences, thro the whole Earth of his Art, Wisdom, Design, and Bounty, than they can possibly have for the Reason, Counsel, and Good-will of their fellow-creatures, with whom they converse, with full Persuasion of these qualities in them, about their common Affairs.⁵⁷

⁵³Ibid., 78.

⁵⁴Ibid., 79.

⁵⁵Ibid., 80.

⁵⁶Ibid., 80–1.

⁵⁷Ibid., 81.

The sense of Beauty therefore plays an important role in the formation of rational religious convictions. But, unlike the Deists, Hutcheson also seems quite aware that religion is more than just a set of rational convictions. Religion is something that a person *feels* and *engages in*, as well as *thinks about*; it is the active exercise of certain virtues. In his discussion of the sorts of actions approved by the ‘moral sense’, Hutcheson maintains that the common feature in all of them is benevolence. Turning to religion, he writes:

Hence those Affections which would lead us to do good to our Benefactor, shall appear amiable, and the contrary Affections odious, even when our Actions cannot possibly be of any advantage or hurt to him. Thus a sincere Love and Gratitude toward our Benefactor, a cheerful Readiness to do whatever he shall require, how burdensome soever, a hearty Inclination to comply with his Intentions, and Contentment with the State he has plac’d us in, are the strongest Evidences of Benevolence we can shew to such a Person; and therefore they must appear exceedingly amiable. *And under these is included all the rational Devotion, or Religion toward a Deity apprehended as Good, which we can possibly perform.*⁵⁸

‘Rational Devotion’ just *is* a matter of having the appropriate affections towards God. There is no suggestion that religion is *merely* some set of beliefs. Of course, Hutcheson’s comments clearly imply some apprehension that God is good, and, in particular, *good to us*. But the tendency of this account is clearly towards affections or sentiments and away from the sort of ‘common notions’ typically identified by Deists as constituting the essence of religion. Hutcheson does, however, share the Deists’ reservations about over-emphasizing rituals as the mark of genuine piety:

As to external Performances of Religion, they are no doubt very various in different Nations, and Ages; and Education may give Men opinions, that certain Actions are pleasing, and others displeasing to the Deity: but then wherever any external Rite of Worship is approv’d, there also it is look’d upon to proceed from Love toward the Deity, or some other Affection necessarily join’d with Love, as Reverence, Repentance, or Sorrow to have offended. So that the general Principle of Love, is the Foundation of all the apparent moral Excellence, even in the most fantastick Rites of Worship which were ever approv’d. For as to Rites design’d only to appease a furious Being, no Mortal, I fancy, apprehends there is any Virtue, or Excellence in them; but that they are chosen only as the dishonourable Means of avoiding a greater Evil. Now as there are various speculative Opinions about what is acceptable to the Deity, it necessarily follows, ‘That, accordingly, Practices, and Approbation, must be various; tho all the moral Goodness of Actions is still presum’d to flow from Love’.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid., 117. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹Ibid., 117–18.

Hutcheson, like many Deist critics of institutional religion, is willing to allow that some rituals are based upon unworthy attitudes towards the divine. However, unlike the Deists, Hutcheson clearly does not regard the plurality of existing religious customs as the regrettable offspring of priestly machinations and human frailty. Instead, all rites (even the less worthy ones) are regarded as expressions of religious affections and sentiments. Pluralism in these matters is simply a historical fact in Hutcheson's view, one that can be explained by appealing to more or less universal features of human psychology. There is no trace of the Deist suspicion of these psychological roots. Importantly, by Hutcheson's account the criterion for judging the value of what many at the time called 'external forms' of religion is not the dictate of reason, nor the 'speculative Opinions' of theologians, but rather the natural, and hence proper, affections towards God. The religion of a rational person is not just a matter of correct belief so much as of correct *sentiment*.

A few final observations about the account given in the *Inquiry* are in order. At several points, Hutcheson comments that the overall theory he provides here is meant to deepen our appreciation of God's benevolence. Given what was discussed above, it follows that his account of human nature is meant to deepen *religion*, conceived of as a set of affections towards God. These affections are rooted in the perception of the benevolent, wise order of nature, which itself relies mainly on the 'internal sense'. Of his famous account of the 'moral sense', Hutcheson asserts that 'would surely recommend human Nature, and its Author, more to the Love of a good Man'.⁶⁰ At the conclusion of the work, Hutcheson maintains that the knowledge we have gained about the structure of our moral psychology is all the evidence we might ever need for God's benevolence.⁶¹ In so far as the account of religion provided here in the *Inquiry* is an important part of the general picture of our psychology that Hutcheson is attempting to convey, it seems quite plausible to suppose that it too is meant to foster religion as a virtue.

Following various criticisms of the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson was induced to publish the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* in 1728. In his Preface, Hutcheson defends the subtleties of his account of the passions by arguing that they are necessitated by the received opinions derived from the unnecessary hair-splitting of the traditional bugbears of the Enlightenment, i.e. the 'Schoolmen', as well as by their 'Adversaries', i.e. the egoists of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries such as Hobbes.⁶² Thus, far from being 'not necessary for the Instruction of Men in *Morals*', Hutcheson suggests that his investigations may go a considerable way towards promoting human

⁶⁰Ibid., 133.

⁶¹Ibid., 196–7.

⁶²Hutcheson, *Essay ... with Illustrations*, 3–4.

happiness. Hutcheson makes it clear that the happiness he aims to promote is the happiness of a virtuous life, one of ‘universal calm Benevolence’. He writes:

Our *moral Sense* shews this to be the highest Perfection of our Nature; what we may see to be the *End* or *Design* of such a Structure, and consequently what is requir’d of us by the Author of our Nature: and therefore if any one like these Descriptions better, he may call Virtue, with many of the Antients, ‘*Vita secundum naturam*’; or ‘acting according to what we may see from the Constitution of our Nature, we were intended for by our Creator’.⁶³

Hutcheson’s moral naturalism comes through quite clearly in this passage. A good life is a ‘natural’ one, in the sense that it conforms to the ends of our various natural faculties. Since these faculties, as well as their characteristic ends, are the products of a benevolent God, a life lived ‘in accord with Nature’ is also a life pleasing to God. As is already familiar from the account he gives in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson regards affection for God, rooted in the inner sense, as a valuable expression of our basic mental architecture. A life in accord with nature is therefore not only objectively or externally one in conformity with the divine will, but is one that is *internally guided by religious affections*. Thus, Hutcheson is not simply concerned with the theoretical implications of his moral psychology for theistic metaphysics, as on Gill’s reading. Instead, he wants to build religion, as a set of sentiments and concomitant virtues, into the very heart of his account of the good life.

The basic shape of a good life is an ordering of ‘particular Affections or Passions’ whereby we can be assured of ‘constant *Self-Approbation*’.⁶⁴ This can be achieved, according to Hutcheson, through a neo-Stoic programme of self-examination and rigorous self-regulation. This move is based on the consideration that our affections are shaped in large measure by our opinions of the value of various objects.⁶⁵ Hutcheson outlines the basic structure of this programme in a later section of the work entitled ‘Some general Conclusions concerning the best Management of our Desires. With some Principles necessary to Happiness’. He writes:

[W]e should, as much as possible, in all Affairs of Importance to our selves or others, prevent the *Violence* of their *confused Sensation*, and stop their *Propensities* from breaking out into Action, till we have fully examined the real *Moment* of the Object, either of our Desires or Aversions. The only way to affect this is, ‘a constant *Attention* of Mind, an habitual *Discipline* over our selves, and a fixed *Resolution* to stop all Action, before a calm *Examination* of every Circumstance attending it [..]’.⁶⁶

⁶³Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴Ibid., 33.

⁶⁵Ibid., 67–8.

⁶⁶Ibid., 110.

In the remainder of the section, he offers a series of ‘Considerations’ meant to assist in this project of self-regulation. This kind of regimen is very close to that recommended by Shaftesbury in his ‘Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author’, and has its roots in the Stoic tradition of antiquity. Hutcheson, it must be recalled, produced an edition of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, which is precisely a collection of such ‘Considerations’.⁶⁷

Unlike in the earlier *Inquiry*, Hutcheson is much more explicit here about the role of religion in this project of self-cultivation. Hutcheson maintains that the belief in Providence, or the idea that the universe is an ordered whole governed by a benevolent God, plays a significant role in the regulation of the passions.⁶⁸ As in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson holds that the operation of our ‘internal sense’ plays a key role in the formation of these convictions. He writes:

Under this Head of our Internal Sense, we must observe one natural Effect of it, that it leads us into *Apprehensions of a DEITY*. Grandeur, Beauty, Order, Harmony, wherever they occur, raise an Opinion of a MIND, of *Design*, and *Wisdom*. Every thing great, regular, or proportioned, excites *Veneration*, either toward itself, if we imagine it animated, if not animated, toward some apprehended Cause. No Determination of our Mind is more *natural* than this, no Effect more *universal*. One has better Reason to deny the Inclination between the *Sexes* to be natural, than a Disposition in Mankind to *Religion*.⁶⁹

Religious conviction is a ‘natural Effect’ of the ‘Internal Sense’. The ‘internal sense’, it will be recalled, produces ideas of the sorts listed here, viz., ‘Grandeur, Beauty, Order, Harmony’. For Hutcheson, beings devoid of a sense of beauty simply would not have these ideas. This position flows out of Hutcheson’s appropriation of Locke’s empiricism, according to which the ultimate source of *all* our ideas must be some sense or combination of senses. By an unspecified process, these ideas ‘raise an Opinion of a MIND’. This point recalls Section V of the *Inquiry* (discussed at length above) in which Hutcheson argues that, while the probability of design in nature can be inferred independently of considerations of beauty or harmony, such considerations typically play a central role in the formation of religious

⁶⁷See *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, translated by Francis Hutcheson and James Moor (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008).

⁶⁸A representative passage is the following: ‘This Belief of a DEITY, a PROVIDENCE, and a *future State*, are the only sure Supports to a good Mind. Let us then acquire and strengthen our Love and Concern for this *Whole*, and acquiesce in what the governing MIND, who presides in it, is ordering in the wisest Manner, tho not yet fully known to us, for its most universal Good.’ Hutcheson, *Essay . . . with Illustrations*, 123. For an excellent recent discussion of this largely overlooked element of Hutcheson’s moral theory, see James A. Harris, ‘Religion in Hutcheson’s Moral Philosophy’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46 (2008) No. 2: 205–22. Harris argues that religion plays a crucial role for Hutcheson in maintaining the ‘stability’ of virtue. I find Harris’ account wholly convincing, as my comments here make clear.

⁶⁹Hutcheson, *Essay . . . with Illustrations*, 116.

convictions and allow us to move beyond mere design to ascribe other attributes to the designing cause. Here, in the *Essay . . . with Illustrations*, Hutcheson adds an important further point, namely, that such ideas arouse 'Veneration'. That is, the perception of beauty in nature is not *purely* cognitive, but, in an important sense, arouses our affections. This entire complex of cognition and affect is here described as a 'Disposition . . . to Religion'. Notably, there is no trace here of innate propositional knowledge of God's nature; instead, Hutcheson is describing a propensity that, when it takes its natural course, generates religious beliefs and sentiments.

Thus, three-quarters of a century before Schleiermacher's famous *On Religion* (1799), Francis Hutcheson ascribes the roots of religion to a 'sense and taste' for regularity in nature. Two other things are particularly striking here in this passage. The first is Hutcheson's insistence on the universality of the disposition to form religious ideas as a *natural* propensity of the human mind. As Byrne and Harrison rightly insist, the attempt to locate the sources of religion in human nature, though not entirely new to the eighteenth century (Cicero and some of his Christian admirers, such as Tertullian, take much the same line), represents a crucial step on the way to the modern study of religion in disciplines like anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Moreover, as already observed above, if religious beliefs and sentiments are a 'natural Effect[s]' of our inner sense, it would seem that a life lived in accord with nature is a *religious* life.

As already discussed, Hutcheson also diverges from Deists like Tindal in making sensibility and sentiment fundamental to the formation of religion. For Hutcheson, 'Reason' in the broadest sense is just 'our *Power of finding out true Propositions*'.⁷⁰ In the *Essay . . . with Illustrations*, he is at pains to respond to rationalist critics of his moral sense theory, most of whom derived their own rival accounts from Samuel Clarke. In the course of his defence, Hutcheson repeatedly draws a sharp contrast between 'Reason' and the 'moral Sense'.⁷¹ Just as so-called '*sensible Ideas*' like '*Extension, Figure, Colour, Taste*' are not 'perceivable antecedently to any *Sense*, by our *Power of finding Truth*', so too ideas of beauty, and moral goodness are not discovered by reason.⁷² But these ideas occupy a central place in Hutcheson's account of our propensity or disposition to religion. Finally, Hutcheson departs from the Deists' emphasis on *propositional knowledge* to highlight the way in which religious ideas or intuitions are inseparable from certain 'affections'. Human religiosity cannot be adequately understood unless allowance is made for the importance of affections and sentiments, as Hutcheson is quick to point out:

⁷⁰Ibid., 137.

⁷¹See, for example, *ibid.*, 144.

⁷²Ibid., 150.

We cannot open our Eyes, without discerning *Grandeur and Beauty* every where. Whoever receives these Ideas, feels an inward *Veneration* arise. We may fall into a Thousand vain Reasonings: foolish limited Notions of DIVINITY may be formed, as attached to the particular *Places* or *Objects*, which strike us in the most lively manner. Custom, Prejudice of Sense or Education, may confirm some foolish Opinion about the *Nature* or *Cause* of these Appearances: But wherever a superior MIND, a governing INTENTION or DESIGN is imagined, there *Religion* begins in its most simple form, and an inward *Devotion* arises. Our Nature is as much determined to this, as to any other Perception or Affection. How we manage these Ideas and Affections, is indeed of the greatest Importance to our Happiness or Misery.⁷³

In contrast, for example, with Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Hutcheson here does not claim that human beings have a natural innate propositional knowledge of the divine. Instead, we have a natural propensity to apprehend and to venerate order and regularity in nature. This tendency does not operate in a vacuum. Instead, it is shaped by psychological, social, and historical factors. Hutcheson lists a few of these, focusing primarily on their role in the formation of confused or false religious ideas and what he took to be improper religious practices. The point, however, holds more generally. What is primary is an affectively charged intuition of order and regularity in nature. ‘Inward Devotion’, rather than the belief in certain propositions, is the ‘most simple form’ of religion. This ‘simple form’ is elaborated in many ways through interaction with other conditions and propensities, but Hutcheson insists that the core of religion is always the idea of design at work in nature, and that this idea depends upon the operation of our internal sense of beauty.

A bit further on, in investigating the question of whether or not virtue is possible without affection for God (Hutcheson answers with a qualified yes), he considers briefly the hypothesis of a person with absolutely no ideas of God.

The Supposition indeed . . . is perhaps wholly *imaginary*; at least as to Persons above childhood. One can scarce imagine that ever any Person was wholly unapprised of a *governing Mind*, and of a *Right* and *Wrong* in Morals. Whether this is to be ascribed to *innate Ideas*, to *universal Tradition*, or to some *necessary Determination* in our Nature, to imagine a designing *Cause* of the beautiful Objects which occur to us, with a *Moral Sense*, let the curious inquire.⁷⁴

Of the three possible explanations suggested here for the near-universality of ideas of God, the first seems to come quite close to Lord Herbert’s theory of ‘common notions’, discussed above. Hutcheson largely shares Locke’s

⁷³Ibid., 116–17.

⁷⁴Ibid., 196.

repudiation of the theory of innate propositional knowledge. The second explanation, which appeals to a ‘*universal Tradition*’, was popular among Renaissance Platonists, and can be found as far back the Patristic notion of the *preparatio evangelicum*. The tradition in question is typically described as a sort of Platonized monotheism. The core of this theory is that peoples who did not receive revelation were still ‘apprised’ (to adapt Hutcheson’s phrasing) of the core truths of natural religion, such as the existence of one God and the immortality of the soul. There is, however, no evidence that Hutcheson endorsed this view. Given what he says elsewhere, in remarks amply documented and commented upon here, Hutcheson’s preferred explanation of human religiosity must be the third. Importantly, the Deist account, which relies on the ability of reason to discern the natural law, is not even offered as a candidate for a plausible explanation of religion.

Hutcheson goes on to examine a hypothetical process whereby a person might arrive at rational religious conviction. Importantly, Hutcheson does not exclude reason from this process. But, the picture he paints shows reason as necessarily dependent on other elements of our mental economy. He begins his account with the supposition of ‘an Idea formed in a *benevolent Mind*, of other *sensitive Natures*, *Desire* of their Existence and Happiness would arise’.⁷⁵ Next, ‘A good *Temper* would incline any one to wish, that other Natures were *benevolent*, or morally Good, since this is the chief *Happiness*’.⁷⁶ The crucial step comes next, when Hutcheson maintains that ‘A good *Temper* would desire that the Administration of Nature were by a *benevolent* or *good Mind*’.⁷⁷ Presumably, this is the case because the benevolent administration of nature would be an important condition of the happiness of one’s fellow sentient creatures. Hutcheson goes on to assert that ‘All *Desire* of any Event or Circumstance inclines any Mind to search into the *Truth* of that Event or Circumstance, by all the *Evidence* within its power to obtain’, and that ‘Where there is such *Desire*, and sufficiently obvious *Evidence* given in proportion to the *Sagacity* of the desiring Mind, it will come to the Knowledge of the Truth, if its *Desire* be strong’.⁷⁸ The formation of rational conviction in the existence of God and of the providential governance of the universe, at least in the hypothetical scenario described by Hutcheson, crucially depends upon the presence of sentiments, attitudes, and desires that, for Hutcheson anyway, are not reducible to any rational cognition on its own. That is, at least here, Hutcheson maintains that rationality is importantly conditioned by extra-rational factors, and that, only when these factors are operative would a person have any motive for inquiring into God’s existence.

⁷⁵Ibid., 196.

⁷⁶Ibid., 196.

⁷⁷Ibid., 196.

⁷⁸Ibid., 197.

Hutcheson's final word on the matter in this text makes his own view unequivocal:

Beings of such Degrees of *Knowledge*, and such *Extent* of Thought, as Mankind are not only capable of, but generally obtain, when nothing interrupts their Inquiries, must naturally arise to the Knowledge of the DEITY, if their Temper be good. They must form *general Conceptions* of the Whole, and see the *Order*, *Wisdom* and *Goodness* in the *Administration of Nature* in some Degree. The Knowledge and Love of the DEITY, the *universal MIND*, is as *natural* a Perfection to such a Being as Man, as any Accomplishment to which we arrive by cultivating our natural Dispositions; nor is that Mind come to the *proper State* and *Vigor* of its kind, when *Religion* is not the main *Exercise* and *Delight*.⁷⁹

The concluding comments of this passage show that, for Hutcheson, religion is not merely an essential component of human perfection, but its crowning bloom. The role of religion within our mental economy is, on Hutcheson's account, the development of various sorts of affections that 'tend to *reform* or *improve* our Temper'.⁸⁰ The love of God ought to be the foundation of our desire to act in a way that pleases him. Moreover, God's benevolence and affection towards his creatures should be both imitated and promoted on the basis of our affection for him. More generally, the 'Perfection' of our nature, in the sense of that 'to which our *natural Dispositions* tend, when we improve them to the utmost', includes the acknowledgement of and love of God and a calm trust in Providence.⁸¹ As in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson maintains that religion in this sense is supported and strengthened by the results of his philosophical inquiries into our mental economy.⁸² Hutcheson's theory of the good life thus entails not merely the truth of theistic meta-ethics, but also a robust commitment to the claim that the best life is a *religious* one, i.e. one in which proper affections for God are basic to a person's motivational structure.

Mention must be made at this point of Hutcheson's *Synopsis of Metaphysics*, a text of his lectures in Dublin and Glasgow that was much in demand by students throughout the eighteenth century. The sections dealing with pneumatology, dating most likely from Hutcheson's time in Dublin in the 1720s, and thus closely coinciding with the appearance of both *Inquiries*, the *Essay*, and the *Illustrations*, is a valuable source of his views on the structure of the human mind. Of more immediate importance here, however, is the final section of the text on natural theology, dating from shortly after Hutcheson's arrival in Glasgow in 1729. Hutcheson begins his discussion in this section by observing that natural theology is the most

⁷⁹Ibid., 202.

⁸⁰Ibid., 190.

⁸¹Ibid., 130–1.

⁸²Ibid., 65, 117–20.

‘pleasant and profitable’ part of philosophy.⁸³ He elaborates this claim in a way entirely congruent with the general importance he attaches elsewhere to religion within moral life:

... this knowledge of the highest matters is not only delightful and worthy of a man in itself, but also offers supreme inducements to every virtue and to all honest modes of life, while at the same time laying firm foundations of true magnanimity, constancy, and peace.⁸⁴

Hutcheson goes on to consider the traditional catalogue of topics in natural theology, i.e. the existence and attributes of God. As in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson places great emphasis on the so-called ‘design argument’ as providing the surest grounds for rational conviction of God’s existence. However, unlike in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson does not resort to the consideration of the probability of design in abstraction from a sense of beauty. Instead, the idea of beauty in nature plays a central role in his argument. That nature is ‘beautiful’ and ‘regular’ is the crucial premise in the argument, for Hutcheson contends that such qualities can *only* arise through purposive action or ‘design’.⁸⁵ As in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson draws attention to the discoveries of ‘natural philosophy’ as providing key evidence of design in nature. His emphasis, however, is on the ‘grandeur and beauty’ that we see as a result of these discoveries.⁸⁶ He later draws a conclusion from this which is strikingly at odds with later accounts of the origin of religion, such as that found in Hume’s *Natural History*. Hutcheson asserts that ‘It is not unfamiliarity with nature and ignorance of causes which have compelled men to have recourse to God as the architect of the universe.’⁸⁷ When he turns to the divine attributes, Hutcheson ascribes a central role to the ‘internal sense’ in forming the relevant ideas.⁸⁸

Another notable passage brings home the significant distance between Hutcheson’s views and those of the Deists. He writes:

Not all piety, however, or religion would be abolished, nor would all the foundations of virtue be subverted by the belief that there are several gods, provided we retain a belief in the government of the whole universe by the harmonious counsel of benevolent and provident gods.⁸⁹

⁸³Francis Hutcheson, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, edited by James Moore and Michael Silverthorne (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006) 151.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 151.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 153–4.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 160.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 164.

Both Byrne and Harrison observe how, for most Deists, polytheism is a sort of perversion or miscarriage of the primitive, pure, monotheistic religion of reason. As a result, the religious beliefs and practices of the majority of the human race throughout most of its history are dismissed as the results of irrational emotion or priestly machinations. For Hutcheson, on the other hand, the essence of religion consists in the belief in providential governance and (as the previous discussion has shown) the corresponding affections and sentiments. This capacious notion allows him to adopt a considerably more tolerant attitude to polytheism than the typical Deist line. Moreover, Hutcheson's views do not commit him to the historically implausible notion of primitive monotheism, which Hume was later to attack with devastating effect in his *Natural History*.

A stable view is thus clearly discernible in two of Hutcheson's most famous and influential works from the 1720s, as well as in lectures dating from the same period. He integrates a novel understanding of the origins and nature of religion into an overall account of human psychology, all in the interests of promoting and articulating an ideal of human perfection. In order to understand Hutcheson's position, each of these elements must be seen in its relation to the whole project. Following Shaftesbury, Hutcheson's concern is with a 'plain homespun philosophy' of introspection and psychological analysis in which the affective and emotional aspects of our minds are given pride of place. Hutcheson, of course, goes much further than Shaftesbury in developing what has been called a 'sentimentalist' moral psychology. His criticisms of rationalism, particularly in moral theory, are well known and do not need to be re-examined here. What has not been clearly seen is that his account of the origins and nature of religion follows this more general trend in his thought quite closely.

The Deists can be seen as counterparts of the moral rationalists against whom Hutcheson so carefully argued. Like the rationalists, the Deists held that religion is primarily the creation of human reason. This position had a profound influence on eighteenth-century religious thought. To cite just one example, the so-called 'Neologians' in Germany combined the Deists' suspicions of institutional religion with Wolffian rational psychology to produce a picture of religion as a more or less kind of nascent metaphysical theory. Kant (and Kantians like K. L. Reinhold and K. H. Heydenreich, among others) also viewed religion as a product of reason, albeit of *practical* rather than *theoretical* reason. Both interpretations came in for scathing criticisms from J. G. Herder and the young Schleiermacher. Hutcheson, however, largely avoids this over-intellectualizing trend in eighteenth-century theories of religion.

Turning now to the later years of Hutcheson's career, it is evident that his views on religion remain largely (if not entirely) unaltered. A good place to begin with Hutcheson's later thought is the *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*, also known by the title of the English translation of the work, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*. This is clearly a pedagogical

work, designed for the use of students in Hutcheson's courses and growing out of his teaching activities in the 1730s. It also bears a fairly close structural and argumentative relationship to the posthumous *System of Moral Philosophy*, discussed below. In the *Short Introduction*, the link between theism and a life lived 'secundam naturam' is quite explicit.⁹⁰ As in earlier works, he still maintains that the basic truths of natural religion (i.e. God's existence) are established by an *a posteriori* argument from design.⁹¹ Like some of his rationalist contemporaries, Hutcheson also maintains that it is due to God that various parts of the constitution of our nature 'clearly intimate to us the will of our munificent Creator and Preserver; and shew us what sort of offices, what course of life he requires of us as acceptable in his sight'.⁹² Crucially, however, it is not by *reason* that we discern these intimations, but rather by means of 'several sublimer perceptive powers or senses', including the moral faculty 'implanted by nature'.⁹³ Piety is a response to God's excellence that rests entirely on the deliverances of the moral faculty.⁹⁴

Hutcheson fills in this last point further on in the text. The proper response to God's excellence on the part of the moral faculty consists of 'the most grateful affections', 'generous love', and 'the highest praises and thanksgiving'.⁹⁵ Moreover, the moral faculty motivates us to pursue 'a constant endeavour to imitate the Deity and cultivate in ourselves all such affections as make us resemble him'.⁹⁶ Revisiting a claim made about beauty in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson argues that religion is not, in fact, rooted in the rational calculation of self-interest. Rather, 'from our natural sense and approbation of moral excellence, wheresoever it is discovered', there 'must arise a disinterested love and veneration'.⁹⁷ Private, or interior, 'acts of devotion' both express and foster these 'lively affections of the soul'.⁹⁸ In the 1745 edition, Hutcheson goes on to note that this account of religion, if taken to heart, makes it possible for one to avoid the negative extremes of impiety ('a neglect and contempt of all religious worship') and superstition ('an abject dread of a cruel or capricious Daemon men form to themselves').⁹⁹ Public worship is simply the natural result of this private devotion in interaction with our natural sociability. Far from being merely the execrable 'priestcraft' so mercilessly ridiculed by the Deists, such public

⁹⁰Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria, with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, edited by Luigi Turco (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007) 23–4.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 27.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 27–8.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 28, 36.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 79.

worship 'also tends to increase our own devotion, and to raise like sentiments in others'.¹⁰⁰

This text is important to my account here because it helps, once more, to highlight some of the distinctive features of Hutcheson's position on natural religion vis-à-vis the Deists. For many Deists, the concept of a 'religion of nature' serves as a critical weapon aimed at institutional religion. For Hutcheson, on the other hand, his own conception of natural religion as a proper affection for God, rooted in our natural sensibilities, is precisely what allows him to see the value in what the Deists denounced as hollow 'priestcraft'. At the same time, Hutcheson retains the ability to wield a concept of natural religion as a normative criterion with which to judge aberrant religious attitudes and practices.

Purely in terms of its scope, Hutcheson's last work, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, published in 1755 (almost a decade after his death), goes well beyond his earlier works such as the *Inquiry* and *Essay*. Besides revisiting the psychological foundations of morality and aesthetics, Hutcheson examines the bases and nature of rights, political order, family relations, and the morality of war. Throughout the work, Hutcheson returns again and again to the topic of religion. He elaborates and reiterates many of the ideas found in his earlier works. He also expands upon his earlier account, which almost exclusively cited the role of the 'internal Sense' in the formation of religion, to include the 'moral Sense' as well.

As in his works from the 1720s, Hutcheson views the primary task of moral philosophy as the promotion of human flourishing. The 'knowledge of the constitution of this species, and of all its perceptive and active powers' is necessary to carrying out this task.¹⁰¹ The 'senses of beauty and harmony' and the 'moral sense' are crucial elements of our 'constitution'.¹⁰² In a short section of Book I, marked in the margin with the title 'Religion natural', Hutcheson introduces the process by which our various 'perceptive powers' or 'senses' are crucial elements in the formation of religious convictions and sentiments. Hutcheson writes:

As the order, grandeur, regular dispositions and motions, of the visible world, must soon affect the mind with admiration; as the several classes of animals and vegetables display in their whole frame exquisite mechanism, and regular structure, evidencing counsel, art, and contrivance for certain ends; men of genius and attention must soon discover some intelligent beings, one or more, presiding in all this comely order and magnificence. The great and the beautiful strikes the mind with veneration, and leads us to infer intelligence as residing in it, or directing it [...]. Thus some devotion and piety would

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 80.

¹⁰¹Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy in Two Volumes* (London: Continuum, 2005) vol. 1, 2. This edition is a facsimile reprint of the original edition of 1755. A modern critical edition is forthcoming from Liberty Fund.

¹⁰²Ibid., 15, 24.

generally obtain, and therefore may justly be called natural to a rational system.¹⁰³

Several things stand out in this passage. First, note Hutcheson's allowance for different sorts of religious intuitions, both polytheistic and monotheistic, as being equally 'natural'. As discussed above, the Deists typically regarded monotheism as 'natural', while polytheism was seen as a kind of perversion or aberration. This view played easily into Hume's hands in his *Natural History of Religion*, which, as Harrison rightly argues, played an important role in burying Deism as a viable intellectual project. Hutcheson, however, does not place the same sorts of *a priori* limits on religious intuitions as did the Deists. Coming to see the genuine variety of human religiosity as *natural* represents significant progress on the way to modern disciplines such as comparative religion. Recall also that Hutcheson makes similar allowances for a plurality of valid or 'natural' religious practices.

The other notable feature of this passage is its congruence with Hutcheson's earlier accounts of the human disposition to religion. The centrepiece of this disposition is the operation of the internal sense or sense of beauty. Only after the idea of beauty is formed does reason go to work. Hutcheson thus continues his earlier account of religion, which is considerably more balanced than the intellectualist views of the Deists. Hutcheson portrays religion as the result of a cooperative venture between different faculties, i.e. between the internal sense, the affections, and reason. None of these can be reduced to the other. Perhaps most importantly, the internal sense cannot be reduced to reason. Daniel Carey captures the essence of Hutcheson's early view quite well, and the same point applies here in the *System*. He notes that, for the early Hutcheson, the deliverances of the moral sense occur 'prior to any social input, contribution from the will, rational reflection, or intervention of self-interested impulses'.¹⁰⁴ Or again, Carey paraphrases Hutcheson's view thus: '... moral and aesthetic responses ... occur immediately, prior to reason or reckoning of self-interest, though considerations of this kind may subsequently affect them'.¹⁰⁵

Hutcheson does, however, expand his account of the formation of religion, though in a way that strikes one as entirely consistent with his earlier position. More specifically, he includes the moral sense among the faculties that cooperate to produce characteristic religious responses. He writes:

¹⁰³Ibid., 35–6.

¹⁰⁴See Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 151.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 158.

Our feeling moral sentiments, our sense of goodness and virtue, as well as of art and design; our experience of some moral distribution within, by immediate happiness or misery constantly attending virtue and vice, and of a like distribution generally obtaining even in external things by a natural tendency, must *suggest* that there is a moral government in the world [. . .].¹⁰⁶

Hutcheson continues to insist on the importance of sentiments and affections in the constitution of religion. Religion is not *merely* a matter of rational assent to general propositions about the ordering of the universe. He places great emphasis on the attractiveness of God's supreme moral excellence and on the desire to obtain or imitate this quality that arises upon our apprehension of it.¹⁰⁷ He states his position quite unequivocally, in terms that echo many of his earlier discussions: 'This desire of moral excellence, and love to the mind where it resides, with the consequent acts of esteem, veneration, trust, and resignation, are the *essence* of true piety towards God.'¹⁰⁸ Impiety, for Hutcheson, is thus less a matter of incorrect doctrine than of a lack of 'due affections to the Deity'.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, worship primarily consists either in 'the sentiments and affections of the soul' alone or also in the external actions that are 'the natural expressions of them'.¹¹⁰

While in his writings from the 1720s, Hutcheson bases his account of the origins and nature of religion almost entirely on the 'internal Sense' or 'sense of beauty', here in the posthumous *System* he also allows an important role for the moral sense. The moral sense comes to be seen by Hutcheson as a capacity to take delight in God's excellence and to come to resemble Him in this respect.¹¹¹ Still, Hutcheson reiterates a by now familiar claim from his earlier writings, viz., that his own account of the 'constitution' of the human mind supports and confirms our intuitive perception of God's beauty and excellence.¹¹² Among other things, this account also explains how the moral sense is what allows us to achieve harmony and order among our affections and passions, and so to attain moral beauty.¹¹³ Given the role that the moral sense plays in generating religion, it comes as no surprise that Hutcheson accords religion a crucial role in the process of attaining this kind of virtuous mental equilibrium. 'This trust and resignation, with hope, upon a firm persuasion of the divine goodness', he writes, 'should be maintained by frequent meditation in such strength and vigour as to controll all narrower

¹⁰⁶Hutcheson, *System*, 367.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹¹See especially Hutcheson's paean to God's excellence as shown in the moral dignity of our nature. *Ibid.*, 212–13.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 114–15.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 74.

affections, and support the soul under the social distresses occasioned by them.’¹¹⁴

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the preceding discussion. First, Hutcheson’s account of the formation and nature of religion is much closer to what one finds in later (Romantic and post-Romantic) accounts in that he (1) makes a central, positive place for sensibility in the formation and operation of religion and (2) regards religious pluralism as natural. In both respects, he diverges significantly from his Deist contemporaries, who typically stressed the formative role of the intellect and the primacy of belief, and who typically located the origins of religious pluralism in unnatural corruptions of reason. Second, Hutcheson must be justly regarded as a pioneer of a psychological approach to religion. Throughout his career, he consistently locates the origins of human religiosity within an overall theory of mind that is meant to account for religion alongside other cultural and social phenomena. Finally, Hutcheson’s account diverges from contemporary naturalistic accounts of religion as a result of his commitment to moral naturalism. ‘Nature’ is not merely a moniker for the way things (in this case, human beings) happen to be. Instead, ‘nature’ (and ‘natural’) has a normative valence that would have been apparent to Hutcheson’s contemporaries, but which many (though certainly not all) current philosophers and other students of religion typically avoid. Yet, it would be a distortion of Hutcheson’s position to disregard this moral naturalism. For Hutcheson, inquiry into human nature is primarily motivated by a desire to determine what the characteristic ends of human existence are, and to discern whether or not our psycho-physical architecture is fit for the rational pursuit and ultimate realization of these ends. To call religion ‘natural’ is, then, not merely to note its presence in most human societies. Instead, religion is natural in that it is an expression of fundamental features of our mental economy. Alongside other such expressions, such as morality, the arts, and the sciences, religion is therefore a key ingredient in the fulfilment of human nature. The best life for a human being is one in which these natural endowments are cultivated fully and harmonized with one another. The ultimate lesson of Hutcheson’s theory of religion is that religion is the centrepiece of such a life.¹¹⁵

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¹¹⁴Ibid., 154.

¹¹⁵I would like to acknowledge my colleagues Lex Newman and Eric Hutton, as well as anonymous reviewers for this journal, for their many helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

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