

Love of Humanity in Shaftesbury's *Moralists* and Hume's *Treatise*

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High aspirations can lead to bitter disappointment. If you expect great things, you're more likely to be dismayed by the merely so-so.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, was an intensely aspirational thinker. He expected great things of his fellows, hoping to inspire them not only to do right by everyone but also to feel love for all. But Shaftesbury was also a keen observer of human folly. In the conduct of most people he saw much that fell far short of his ideal.

How did Shaftesbury's aspirational tendencies consort with his awareness of humans' shortcomings? Shaftesbury's meta-ethics — his view of the origins of morality's content and motivational force — brings that question into especially sharp focus. The answer to that question is less clear, and that might have been by design. The work in which Shaftesbury raises the question most conspicuously is his epistolary dialogue *The Moralists*, whose shifting scenes, multiple characters, and interrupted conversations provide plenty of places for a philosophical position to hide.¹

In section 1, I'll examine *The Moralists'* position on virtue and human nature. In section 2, I'll look briefly at several other approaches to the same issue. In section 3, I'll turn to a philosopher of very different character, David Hume. Hume didn't share Shaftesbury's great expectations. Hume was not an aspirational thinker. But although Hume did not seek to inspire, in the end he might have uncovered more useful truths about human morality as it actually exists.

¹ For discussion of the form of *The Moralists*, see Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), 47-73 and Shayda Hoover, "Voices and Accents?: Enthusiastic Characterization in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*," *Eighteenth Century Life* 37 (2013), 72-96.

1. Shaftesbury

One of the central questions in modern moral philosophy is whether morality originates in reason or sentiment.² Samuel Clarke and Immanuel Kant gave clearly rationalist answers to the question. Francis Hutcheson and David Hume gave clearly sentimentalist answers.

Shaftesbury has often been taken to be the forebear of Hutcheson and Hume. In fact Shaftesbury's view straddles the rationalist-sentimentalist divide. He believes that morality has an “*eternal*” and “*immutable*” content that is independent of human reactions; in this he agrees with the rationalists (C 2.36). But he also believes that human conduct is based in “*Affection*,” and that it is “*by Affection merely that a Creature is esteem'd good or ill*” (C 2.22; see also C 2.23 and 2.45); in this he agrees with the sentimentalists.³

So Shaftesbury is a rationalist about the content of morality and a sentimentalist about human motivation. It's a risky mix. For it opens up the possibility of humans' being sentimentally incapable of acting in the way that virtue requires — of morality's being a check that reason writes but affection is unable to cash. Unlike views on which moral content and motivation have a single origin, the Shaftesburean mix raises the specter of a mismatch between what virtue demands and what we're able to do.

Shaftesbury himself was keenly aware of this worry. His concern centered on the impartiality and affectivity of virtue.

To be virtuous, according to Shaftesbury, is to “*love the Publick, to study universal Good, and to promote the Interest of the whole World, as far as lies within our power*” (C 1.37). Shaftesburean virtue consists of an “*equal, just and universal Friendship*” with all

² I discuss the rationalist-sentimentalist debate in “*Moral Rationalism vs Moral Sentimentalism: Is Morality More like Math or Beauty?*,” *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2007), 16-30.

³ See Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics, volume 2* (Oxford, 2008), 354. Laurent Jaffro has suggested (in correspondence) that “*affection*” in this passage may not be synonymous with “*sentiment*” — that “*affection*” could signify merely a practical disposition or intention and may in fact be rational. I believe there is other evidence that Shaftesbury did have a sentimentalist view of moral motivation (see my *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* [Cambridge University Press, 2006], 118-134) and that *The Moralists'* discussion of “*love*” (discussed throughout the rest of this section) accords with this sentimentalist reading. But however that may be, the central question I will be focusing on here is whether humans can muster up the motivation to treat all humans impartially, and that question will still be pressing even if we can have rational practical dispositions. Another way to put the point I'll be trying to make: Shaftesbury believes that an understanding of virtue reveals that we ought to treat all humans impartially, but he doesn't take it for granted that ‘*ought*’ implies ‘*can*.’

humankind (C 2.137), the impartial care for the “publick Interest” (C 2.31). Given the affective origin of our motives, it follows then that morally righteous people are those who are sentimentally disposed to benefit humanity as a whole. As Shaftesbury puts it, “[I]o deserve the name of *good* or *virtuous* a Creature must have all his Inclinations and Affections, his Dispositions of Mind and Temper, sutable, and agreeing with the Good of his *Kind*... To stand thus well affected, and to have one’s Affections *right* and *intire*, not only in respect of one’s self, but of Society and the Publick: This is *Rectitude*, *Integrity*, or *Virtue*” (C 2.77).⁴ Some creatures can be good even if they have no awareness of the good of their kind. A spider or a tiger that is affectively constituted to behave in ways that best promote spiders or tigers in general will be good even though it lacks the reflective capacity for the idea of its species to figure in its motivational etiology. But the moral goal to which humans beings should aspire — “that which is call’d *Virtue* or *Merit*” (C 2.28) — does require an awareness of the good of the human species. “[I]n this Case alone it is we call any Creature *worthy* or *virtuous*,” Shaftesbury writes, “when it can have the Notion of a publick Interest” (C 2.31) For humans to be virtuous they must act from a “proportionable Affection of a rational Creature towards the moral Objects of Right and Wrong” (C 2.40). They must act from a conscious concern for humanity as a whole, from universal love.

Who, though, can bring themselves to feel universal love? How many of us are capable of acting out of affection for all of humanity? Philocles, narrator of *The Moralists*, initially maintains that he, for one, cannot. According to Philocles at the beginning of the narrative of the *The Moralists*, the goal of impartial virtue is for partially affected people such as himself “*a Chimera*” (C 2.239). Philocles’ first thought is that the Shaftesburean mix makes the accomplishment of virtue impossible. But then Philocles visits his friend Theocles. They walk the fields for two days, and they talk (and talk and talk). Eventually Philocles sees the light. Theocles convinces him that a mismatch between the content of morality and human motivation is not inevitable. Virtue is a realistic aspiration. Universal love can be achieved.⁵

⁴ See also C2.113, where Shaftesbury contrasts “*intire Affection*,” or concern for all of humanity,” with “*narrow* or *partial* Affection.”

⁵ In “The Cosmopolitanism of Lord Shaftesbury,” Angela Taraborelli provides a helpful account of Shaftesbury’s belief that virtue requires impartial love for all of humanity, or “*intire affection*” and shows that Shaftesbury developed his thoughts on being truly philanthropic in the section “Natural Affection” of *Askemata* (in *New Ages, New Opinions*:

How does Theocles make his case? That's what we'll look at now. We'll see that although Philocles is satisfied by what Theocles says, it's far from obvious that we should be.

The action of *The Moralists* commences in a “pompous *rural Scene*” by “*Morning-light*.” Philocles meets up with Theocles, who is “roving in the Fields” of his seaside estate, which is capacious enough to include a “Mountain,” an “antient Wood,” a “River,” and a “well-inhabited Plain” (C 2.222).⁶ Philocles and Theocles discuss poetry and pleasure and happiness, and eventually land on the topic of the highest good. Theocles contends that the highest good is a life consisting of “one continu'd Friendship” with all of humanity (C 2.239). Philocles doesn't deny that turning “all [one's] Life” in an “intire Act” of friendship is the essence of virtue. But he doubts such a thing is within his reach. He raises two obstacles to the development of universal love.⁷

The first obstacle is that many members of the human species are too corrupt and stupid for him to bring himself to love. “Wiser Heads” may think universal love is “heroick,” says Philocles. “But for my part, I see so very little Worth in *Mankind*, and have so indifferent an Opinion of *the Publick*, that I can propose little Satisfaction in loving *either*” (C 2.240). Philocles is not the only character to voice this view. Palemon, to whom Philocles is relating the story of *The Moralists*, has the same “*Man-hater*” (C 2.197) tendencies. The first words we out of Palemon's mouth are: “O wretched State of Mankind!—Hapless Nature, thus to have err'd in thy chief Workmanship!—Whence sprang this fatal Weakness? What Chance or Destiny shall we accuse [for creating] ... that wretched Mortal, *ill* to himself, and Cause of *Ill* to all?” (C 2.192-3). Palemon goes on to say that he wishes he

Shaftesbury in his World and Today, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 185-202 [p. 188]).

⁶ It seems likely that Shaftesbury's description of Philocles and Theocles' day in the hills was inspired at least in part by time he spent with Pierre Coste, who, as Fleming points out, reminisced in a letter to Shaftesbury of “having walked and talked with the Earl for many hours all along the canal and the terrace and beyond, and of completely losing track of time in the process” (Suzannah Fleming, “The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: Practical Gardener and Husbandman,” *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 97-98).

⁷ In the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury had addressed — and disposed of — the worry that self-interest poses an insurmountable obstacle to virtue. I discuss this aspect of the *Inquiry* in “Shaftesbury's Two Accounts of the Reason to be Virtuous,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000), 529-548.

could love humanity, but — “O what Treacherys! What Disorders! And how corrupt is all!” — their conduct repels him (C 2.198). People who in public appear as friends craftily plot each other’s ruin less than an hour later. Many would gladly sacrifice the “the State it-self” to satisfy their own ambitions (C 2.198). In company there is “much Folly and Perverseness ... and strange Appetites” (C 2.201). Everywhere is “Licentiousness,” “Villanys and Corruptions” (C 2.204).

Nor was *The Moralists* the first work in which Shaftesbury gave voice to such misanthropy. In his *Inquiry concerning Virtue*, Shaftesbury extolled the moral accomplishments humans and humans alone can achieve. “[T]he highest Improvements of Temper are made in Human Kind,” he wrote (C 2.96). But he also contended that humans are guilty of the “greatest Corruptions and Degeneracy” in all of creation (C 2.96). Only humans exhibit cruelty and “perverse Inclinations” (C 2.82). “All other Creatures in the world are for their orderliness ... a reproach to Man,” the *Inquiry* tells us, “since they... have regular and proportion’d Appetites ... whilst Man alone knows neither season, nor bound, nor fitness of Subject but breaks into all horridness of unnatural and monstrous Lusts, regarding neither Sex nor Species” (Virtue or Merit, 1st edition, 118). According to the *Inquiry*, no creatures other than humans have been designed to achieve virtue. We alone have the capacity to reach so high. But no creatures other than humans violate their nature so grievously. We alone sink so low.

Theocles does not dispute these judgments of pervasive “human Frailty” (C 2.136). What he does, rather, is seek to persuade Philocles that he can relish loving people even while recognizing their faults. Towards that end, Theocles has Philocles attend to his own friendships. If a friend does something for Philocles, Philocles will want to show gratitude. But suppose Philocles discovers in his friend “several Failings” (C 2.136). “Does this,” Theocles asks, “exclude *the Gratitude?*” “Not in the least,” Philocles replies. His gratitude toward a friend will not be at all undermined by his awareness of his friend’s faults. Theocles points out that the same is true of Philocles’ “*Bounty.*” Philocles delights in benefiting his friends not because they are “*deserving*” of it but just because they are his friends. Indeed, the delight he takes in showing bounty towards his friends is if anything enhanced by his awareness that he is not doing it because their moral characters compel it of him. But (Theocles continues) if Philocles is so pleased by showing gratitude and bounty toward his friends even while acknowledging their faults, why can’t he love humanity as a

whole while being fully aware of its flaws? From Theocles to Philocles: “[C]onsider then what it was you said, when you objected against the Love of *Mankind* because of human Frailty; and seem’d to scorn the *Publick*, because of its Misfortunes. See if this Sentiment be consistent with that Humanity [i.e., the kindness toward friends] which elsewhere you own and practice” (C 2.136-7). Philocles knows his friends are far from morally perfect, but he still delights in showing his gratitude toward them. So why shouldn’t he also delight in showing gratitude to society in general? As Theocles rhetorically asks, “What are the Faults or Blemishes which can excuse such an Omission, or in a grateful Mind can ever lessen the Satisfaction of making a grateful kind return?” (C 2.137). As well, Philocles takes pleasure in being able to “help, assist [and] relieve” not only friends but also “Strangers” in need even if he has no particular reason for thinking they are morally exemplary. But since Philocles relishes the “Compassion” and “Kindness” he shows to “Chance-Creatures,” he should also be able to enjoy showing compassion and kindness toward the public as a whole. The moral shortcomings of an individual recipient don’t subvert Philocles’ gratitude and bounty in particular cases. So the moral shortcomings of the species should be no bar to compassion toward human beings in general.

Philocles still has doubts. He doesn’t deny that the virtue consists of “universal friendship,” nor that he can love particular people. The worry he now raises is that he’s psychologically incapable of caring about something as large and abstract as humanity as a whole. “I told Theocles, going along,” he says, “that I fear’d I shou’d never make a good *Friend* or *Lover* after his way. As for a plain natural Love of *one single* Person in either Sex, I cou’d compass it, I thought, well enough; but this *complex universal* sort was beyond my reach. I cou’d love the Individual, but not the Species. This was too mysterious; too metaphysical an Object for me” (C 2.243).⁸ Loving a single person is one thing. Loving people in general is something else entirely.

⁸ Shaftesbury also discusses the difficulty of loving something as abstract as humanity as a whole in *Sensus Communis*, where he says that “Universal Good, or the Interest of *the World in general*, is a kind of remote philosophical Object. That *greater Community* falls not easily under the Eye” (C 1.111). Chavez takes that this passage from *Sensus Communis* to be evidence of an “unresolved conflict between two opposing ideals” in Shaftesbury, that of concern for the public good and that of love for contingent particulars (Chavez 61). This “unresolved conflict” in *Sensus Communis* is akin to the second obstacle to virtue that Philocles asks Theocles to overcome in *The Moralists*.

Expansive abstractness is Philocles' second obstacle to loving humanity as a whole. Philocles was not the only one impressed by it. So was David Hume.

According to Hume, we care about individuals because of certain qualities they possess, such as being beautiful, kind, amusing, or from our hometown. We can also be induced to take an interest in any particular person who is "brought near to us" or whose plight is "represented in lively colours." But the welfare of humanity as a whole does not engage our emotional machinery. The bare quality of being human does not engender our love. Hume writes, "There is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such ... no proof of such an universal affection to mankind" (T 3.2.1.12). Our sentiments are literally partial, ineluctably "confined to a few persons." While we can love almost any part of humanity, we cannot, Hume thinks, love humanity as a whole.

Theocles thinks we can. In response to Philocles' Hume-like worry, Theocles exclaims in characteristically high-blown fashion, "O Philocles! how little do you know the Extent and Power of *Good-nature*, and to what an heroick pitch a Soul may rise, which knows the thorow Force of it; and distributing it rightly, frames in it-self an equal, just, and universal Friendship!" (C 2.242). And just at this point, when Philocles is primed to hear Theocles' secret to virtue, Shaftesbury withholds. He does not allow Theocles to give his answer. He conjures an interruption. "Just as [Theocles] had ended these Words," Philocles explains, "a Servant came to us in the Field, to give notice of some Company, who were come to dine with us, and waited our coming in. So we walk'd home-wards" (C 2.243). Philocles and Theocles then trudge back to the house from the "Fields" in which they had been "roving."

But we are not left completely hanging. As they follow the servant home, Theocles gives a preview, a teaser, of his answer. Philocles thinks humanity as a whole is too abstract an object for him to love, that his affections can get a grip only on something more definite. Theocles points out, though, that Philocles has in the past loved some with whom he has had no physical interaction. The two examples he gives are "the people of old Rome" and Palemon, whom Philocles grew to love entirely through correspondence (C 2.244). In each case, Philocles formed an appropriate mental image of the object of his affection, a lovable picture that he called to mind when he thought of the Romans or Palemon. Philocles concedes these two examples. But what picture can function as a mental stand-in for humanity as a whole and elicit his love? How can he "raise any such [an] Image, or Specter,

as may represent this odd Being you wou'd have me love"? (C 2.243-44). What "Figure" could he "stamp upon [his] Mind" that would both represent humankind and be thoroughly lovable (C 2.244)? That's the challenge. And Theocles "accept[s] the Terms." He vows to reveal to Philocles the image that will turn him into "that *Lover* I cou'd wish" (C 2.245). But not just yet. The rest of the day they will spend with "Friends" at the "Table" and speak of matters more suitable to "Company" (139). The ultimate answer will be given — the image revealed, the challenge met — "To-morrow, when the eastern Sun (as the Poets describe) with his first Beams adorns the Front of yonder Hill" (C 2.245).

There the conversation breaks off — for ninety-four pages. In the interval, we follow Philocles and Theocles through an afternoon, evening, and night of conversation with company. They and their visitors discuss the benefits of temperance, the deficiencies of Deism, the inherent sociability of humans. They affirm the coincidence of virtue and happiness. They debate the relationship between religious belief and moral action.⁹

Eventually they all retire to their "repose." Getting into bed, Philocles is in a twitter. "For now (Palemon!)," he exclaims to his pen-pal, "that Morning was approaching, for which I so much long'd" (C 2.191). Despite his excitement, Philocles falls asleep easily enough.

He's woken the next morning by the sounds of guests' departing. He rises quickly and races up the hill to catch Theocles, who has begun his morning walk. After some jocular banter about the jealousy of "*Silvan* Nymphs," Theocles launches into his promised presentation.

Theocles begins with an examination of an oak tree. An oak tree, Theocles and Philocles unquestioningly assume, remains a single thing throughout its life. It has an identity. That identity cannot consist of the tree's outward form, for other things — such as "a Figure of Wax ... cast in the exact Shape and Colours of this Tree" — could have the same outward form and yet not be an oak tree (C 2.348). Nor can it consist of the physical stuff of which the oak tree is made, as the tree will remain "*One and the same*, even when by Vegetation and change of Substance, not one Particle in it remains *the same*" (C 2.349). What

⁹ Most important for what is to come the next morning is Theocles' evening speech on the existence of God (C 2.282-95). Theocles presents there an argument from design that anticipates his second-day presentation, maintaining that a proper understanding of the beautiful order of everything in the universe requires belief in a perfectly benevolent Creator-Mind.

the tree's identity must consist of, rather, is the "Concurrence" of all its individual pieces "*in one common End*," the enduring organizational principle of which its different elements partake, the "*Sympathizing of [its] Parts*" (C 2.348).

The same reasoning, Theocles argues, applies to the identity of a person. A person is a single thing, retaining an identity throughout the years. But that identity cannot consist of physical matter, as every particle of a person changes over time. The "*Stuff* ... of which we are compos'd," says Theocles, "wears out in seven, or, at the longest, in twice seven Years, [as] the meanest Anatomist can tell us. Now where, I beseech you, will that same *One* be found at last, supposing it to lie in the *Stuff* it-self, or any part of it? For when that is wholly spent, and not one Particle of it left, we are *Our-selves* still as much as before" (C 2.350). Nor can a person's identity be based on any idea or emotion, as all of a person's ideas and emotions change as well. There's no single mental item that has the constant existence that would be needed to fund a person's identity. So since a person remains "*one and the same*," when neither *one* Atom of Body, *one* Passion, nor *one* Thought remains the same," his identity must be based on "a Sympathy of Parts" (C 2.351). His identity must consist of an overall organization, of a "simple Principle" of which all the person's different aspects partake (C 2.352).

Theocles next sets out to show that the natural world as a whole is just as organized as a tree, and considerably more organized than most people. If Theocles can convince Philocles of that — if he can establish that there is "*a uniting Principle in Nature*" that brings all its aspects into "*Harmony and Order*" — then Philocles will have to embrace the idea that nature has an identity that is as robust as that of an oak tree, a "*Self*" that is no less real (even more real, actually!) than Philocles' own (C 2.357-8).¹⁰

¹⁰ Hume was dismissive of Shaftesbury's claims in *The Moralists* about the identity of trees, persons, and the natural world, writing "If the reader is desirous to see how a great genius may be influenc'd by these seemingly trivial principles of the imagination ... let him read my Lord *Shaftesbury's* reasonings concerning the uniting principle of the universe, and the identity of plants and animals [in] his *Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*" (T 1.4.6.6). It seems, however, that Hume did learn something about personal identity from Theocles' speech. For Hume's own view, like Theocles', relies on the idea that there is no single "constant and invariable" mental item that can fund personal identity: compare T 1.4.6.2 and C 2.350-51. Of course Hume and Theocles draw opposite conclusions, with Theocles moving from the premise that there is no constant and invariable mental item to the conclusion that personal identity must consist of something other than a mental item, and Hume moving to the conclusion that there is no personal identity.

The case Theocles makes for the identity of nature is observational.¹¹ When we examine carefully, he contends, we will see that “[a]ll things in this World are *united*” in “one common Stock” (C 2.287). Everything is “fitted and join’d” together, each contributing to the “Order, Union, and Coherence of *the Whole*” (C 2.287). Examples abound. Theocles points to the “mutual Dependency” found at both the micro and macro levels of plant and animal biology (C 2.287). He explains the coordinating purposes of light, wind, water, fire, the harmonious movement of planets, stars, sun, moon (C 2.287-88 and C 2.369-73). He takes us on a tour of the continents. At the Poles we learn the environmental benefits of extreme cold and snow (C 2.383-84). In India we witness the symbiosis between “land-creatures” and the Indus River (C 2.385). We come to understand the usefulness to myriad species of the “gums and balsams” in Australia, of the flooding of the Nile in Africa, of the topology of the Himalayas in Asia (C 2.386-89).

The word ‘ecosystem’ hadn’t been coined yet, but I think Shaftesbury would have pounced on it if he’d heard it. For what he wants Theocles to do is persuade Philocles that all of nature’s seemingly disparate parts form a tightly coherent, interdependent whole, that the entire natural world is one “System” (C 2.285-86).¹²

For recent discussion of Shaftesbury’s views of identity in general and personal identity in particular, see Kenneth P. Winkler, “‘All is Revolution in Us’: Personal Identity in Shaftesbury and Hume,” *Hume Studies* 26 (2000), 3-40 and Laurent Jaffro, “Shaftesbury on Human Frailty and the Will,” *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 153-166. Winkler raises the reasonable worry that Shaftesbury attributes identity in a much more profligate manner than would those who have been concerned with “the classical philosophical problem of personal identity, a problem about the conditions for a thing’s persistence over time” (Winkler 12). Jaffro attempts to assuage this worry by distinguishing “between a normative sense of ‘being oneself’ or ‘remaining the same person’, and the metaphysical sense, that is, personal identity” (Jaffro 158). I think Jaffro’s distinction is a promising way of viewing passages on identity from Shaftesbury’s *Soliloquy*. But given that Theocles’ argument is supposed to move seamlessly from the identity of an oak tree (which I would assume is non-normative) to the identity of a person to the identity of all of nature, I’m doubtful that Jaffro’s distinction will be as useful in *The Moralists*.

¹¹ See Patrick Müller, “‘Dwell with honesty & beauty & order’: The Paradox of Theodicy in Shaftesbury’s Thought,” *Aufklärung* 22 [2010], 207-8.

¹² Andrea Gatti explains well Shaftesbury’s notions of universal harmony and the system of nature, elucidating their origins in Stoic thought and Shaftesbury’s early formulations of the notions in the section “Deity” of *Askemata* (Andrea Gatti, “Stoic Influences on Shaftesbury’s Theory of Beauty,” *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 61-76 [pp. 68-69]).

Theocles has to do more, however, than persuade Philocles that there is a systematic unity to nature. He also has to produce a symbol of nature's unity, a mentally manageable object that represents the natural world and elicits Philocles's love. The object that fills that bill is the "natural Genius," or as Shaftesbury also calls it, the "*sovereign* Genius," the "Great Genius," the "*Universal Genius*," the "*Genius of the World*" (C 2.245, 343, 347, 352, 393, 400, 401, 410).

'Genius' meant a lot of things in Shaftesbury's day, some of them unfamiliar to twenty-first century ears. How are we to understand *The Moralists*' uses of the word?

One of the meanings of 'genius' current at the time was the "characteristic disposition" of an entity, its "distinctive character" or "inherent constitution" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).¹³ This meaning did not carry with it the twenty-first century notion of exalted intellect or creativity, nor was it applied primarily to human beings. A nation, a disease, a natural object: each could have its own genius, its own distinctive constitution. This is the meaning that explains Philocles discussion of "the Genius of our Age" at the beginning of *The Moralists*, as there he is describing the distinctive intellectual tendencies of his society, what we might call the period's zeitgeist (C 2.189; see also 2.183; compare 2.136). Similarly, when Philocles speaks of "your Genius" to Palemon and Theocles (C 2.194, 2.393; see also C 2.181), he is referring to his companions' characteristic dispositions, to their "natural aptitudes" and "inclinations" (*OED*). This use of the word does not have invariably positive connotations. Indeed, in the passages at the beginning of *The Moralists*, Philocles is expressing contempt for the "reigning Genius of Gallantry and Pleasure" (C 2.183). To say that something has a genius in this sense is simply to attribute to it a single unifying character, a defining, constitutive commonality, for good or ill.

I just said that when Philocles speaks of "your Genius" to his companions, he is referring to their distinctive characteristics. But Shaftesbury would also have had in mind an older, pagan sense of a person's genius, which is "the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character" (*OED*).¹⁴

¹³ See Darrin M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (Oxford, 2013), 20 and 22-3.

¹⁴ Shaftesbury uses this sense of genius in *Soliloquy* (C 1.168). For discussion of Shaftesbury's uses of genius in *Soliloquy*, see McMahon 19 and 22-3. Shaftesbury also uses this sense of 'genius' in a 1706 letter to Pierre Coste, where he writes of "the soul or genius itself (the true demon) committed to every man at his birth, [which] was by the ancients esteemed sacred of itself, as so committed and entrusted by nature, or the supreme universal divinity... [N]o

Another of Philocles' applications of 'genius' to a person is noteworthy because of how it points forward rather than back: when Philocles calls Theocles "that *Heroick* Genius, the Companion and Guide of my first Thoughts in these profounder Subjects" (C 2.223). Here Theocles doesn't *have* a genius; he *is* the genius. I.e., he is a person with extraordinary abilities, someone who possesses "intellectual power of an exalted type" (*OED*). This is the kind of usage twenty-first century readers are most familiar with.¹⁵ There are earlier examples of 'genius' being used in this way, but there aren't that many of them and they're not that much earlier. Shaftesbury probably had as much to do with the turning the word into what it means for us today as anyone writing in English.

'Genius' could also mean in Shaftesbury's time the "quasi-mythologic personification of something immaterial (e.g., of a virtue, a custom, and institution), especially as portrayed in painting or sculpture. Hence, a person or thing fit to be taken as an embodied type of some abstract idea" (*OED*). The examples of usage the *OED* gives for this definition are a person who is taken to be "the very genius of famine," and a "lizard" that is taken to be "the very genius of desolate stillness." This definition explains Theocles' use of the word when he speaks of Philocles' love for the ancient Romans "under the Representation of a beautiful Youth call'd *the Genius of the People*. For I remember, that viewing once some Pieces of Antiquity, where the People were thus represented, you allow'd 'em to be no disagreeable Object" (C 2.244).¹⁶ A 'genius' in this sense is a symbolic physical object, a material thing used to represent an abstract entity.

Theocles and Philocles also frequently speak of the "*the Genius of the Place*" (C 2.245, 2.343, 2.349, 2.351, 2.393). This is an English rendering of "genius loci," which is "the presiding deity or spirit" or "tutelary and controlling spirit ... connected with a place" (*OED*). At times Theocles uses the term in that ancient sense, referring to spiritual beings, or genii, who look after certain areas (C 2.343, 2.349). Theocles might really have believed that such genii — "*Nymphs*" and "*Hamadryads*" — exist. Perhaps, though, we should take

man can justly, honestly, or truly pretend to prefer anything else on earth to this genius of his" (Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, edited by Benjamin Rand [London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. and New York: the Macmillan Co., 1900], 357).

¹⁵ On the transition between "genius" as being something a person *has* to its being something a person *is*, see McMahon 70-72.

¹⁶ See McMahon 28 and 254.

Theocles and Philocles' uses of "genius loci" to be elaborate personifications, vivid metaphors for the "body of associations connected with or inspirations that may be derived from" a place (*OED*). If we take "genius loci" in this second way, then when Theocles and Philocles speak of the "genius of the place," their meaning will be similar to what you and I would mean if we spoke of the "spirit of a place," a phrase that refers to an area's atmosphere or vibe while still carrying with it the echo of a resident spiritual being.

These multiple implications — unifying character, extraordinary individual, personification of an abstract idea, animating spirit — all inhabit Shaftesbury's "natural Genius." By showing that all things cohere in a systematic whole, Theocles establishes that the world has one unifying character or organizing principle. By identifying that organizing principle with a personal spirit animating all of nature, Theocles provides an object onto which Philocles' affections can latch. "I cou'd love nothing of which I had not some sensible material Image," says Philocles the first day (C 2.243). Then Theocles shows him that the myriad of sensibles all around him bespeak a single individual. The more Philocles learns of nature's unity, the more beauty he sees in it. The more beauty he sees in nature, the greater grows his love for the mind of which all of nature is an expression. Theocles' "sovereign Genius" is both all of nature and a personal God — something that is as large as the world, as tangible as an oak, and as beautiful as a desert sunset.¹⁷

¹⁷ As Darwall astutely puts it, "The form and structure manifested by ... all natural beauty in the universe evidences the design of a unifying creative mind. This is not the God of orthodox Christianity Who transcends nature ... but an organizing presence immanent in nature. Shaftesbury's Deity is impersonal but is still a presence we can feel in the operation of nature through our imaginative grasp of harmonious order," (Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought* [Cambridge University Press, 1995], 188). Or as Axelsson writes, "Deity is, for Shaftesbury, immanent in nature, and the perfection of the emotions and dispositions is therefore determined by our participation in this divine nature" (Karl Axelsson, "Shaftesbury on the Natural Affections and Taste," *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 27-44 [p. 37]). Or as Müller explains, Shaftesbury's "ethics may appear at first sight to be a radically secular theory, but are in fact designed to guide the individual to knowledge of God. The almost Platonic, enthusiastic *furor poeticus* which leads to such knowledge through proper apprehension of the world as a divine artifact is sketched in *The Moralists*" (Patrick Müller, "Hobbes, Locke and the Consequences: Shaftesbury's Moral Sense and Political Agitation in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 [2014], 315-330 [p. 322].)

On the first day, Philocles had challenged Theocles to prove that what virtue requires him to love “is an object capable and worthy of real Enjoyment” (C 2.400). At the conclusion of his apotheosis of nature on the second day Theocles revisits the challenge. “And thus we are return’d again to the Subject of our Yesterday’s Morning-Conversation. Whether I have made good my Promise to you ... I know not. But so, doubtless, I shou’d have done with good success, had I been able in my poetick Extasys, or by any other Efforts, to have led you into some deep View of *Nature*, and the *Sovereign* Genius” (C 2.399-400). To which Philocles responds: “O Theocles! ... well do I remember now the Terms in which you engag’d me, that Morning ... You have indeed made good your part of the Condition, and may now claim me for a *Proselyte*” (C 2.400). Or as Philocles also puts it: “Tis true, said I, (Theocles!) I own it. Your *Genius*, the *Genius* of the Place, and the Great Genius have at last prevail’d. I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for things of a *natural* kind” (C 2.393).

So Theocles succeeds. With his sovereign Genius, he has produced an image that represents the entire natural world and onto which Philocles’ sentiments of love can latch. The second obstacle to virtue has been overcome.

Or has it? There seems to be a huge problem. Theocles has perpetrated a bait and switch.

Recall the set up. Philocles and Theocles agreed that to be virtuous is to love humanity as a whole. Philocles doubted he could love humanity as whole because [1] so many people are so stupid and corrupt, and [2] humanity as a whole is an object too large and abstract for him to love. The first day of their conversation, Theocles dispatched with [1]. Before he could get to [2], their conversation was interrupted. When they resumed the next morning, Theocles showed Philocles how he could love the natural world. But this looks to be a non-sequitur. Loving the natural world is not the same thing as loving humanity. If Shaftesbury hadn’t placed after the first-day discussion an eventful ninety-four page digression — if instead of spinning out an afternoon, evening, and night of colorful social interaction he’d moved directly from the question of how to love humanity to the answer of how to love nature — Theocles’ change of subject would have been obvious.

There is a moment at the end of the first day’s conversation that foreshadows the change of subject. In response to Philocles’ claim that he can love only a few individuals and not humanity as a whole, Theocles points out that Philocles has shown himself capable of

loving the entire civilization of ancient Roman. “Methinks,” Theocles then says, “you might have the same Indulgence for *Nature or Mankind*, as for the People of Old Rome” (C 2.244; emphasis added). “Indeed,” replies Philocles, “were it possible for me to stamp upon my Mind such a Figure as you speak of, whether it stood for *Mankind or Nature*, it might probably have its effect” (C 2.244; emphasis added). But the addition here of “*or Nature*” comes from out of the blue. What Theocles and Philocles had been talking about is how virtue requires the love of humanity. Why think that proving that one can love nature overcomes an obstacle to virtue so defined?¹⁸

Late on the second day Theocles does draw a connection between love for humans and love for the creator of the universe. When you find a work of art beautiful, he explains, your admiration attaches to the artist who created it. Similarly, therefore, when you experience love for the moral beauty of a human, your love should rise up to the creative Divine Mind to whom the human owes his existence.¹⁹ One might envision this line of thought leading to an exhortation to see in every person the image of God. But Theocles doesn’t guide us back down from love of the creator to love of every human. His speech is all about the ascent, about moving from a particularly beautiful human to admiration for the creator, not about the descent back down from creator to every human.

Another way one could try to bridge love of nature and love of humanity is to subsume the latter under the former. This approach would have us view our own species as part of the natural world. It would urge us to see in human phenomena the same beautiful unity that inspires our love of forest and desert, ocean, sky.

Such a bridging position cannot be attributed to *The Moralists*, however, for Theocles and Philocles explicitly and vociferously reject the assimilation of the human to the natural.

The Moralists is replete with statements contrasting the glorious perfection of nature with the despicable activity of humans. Shaftesbury’s encomia to nature are spiked with

¹⁸ Maurer and Jaffro point out that having “the public good” as the goal of one’s conduct may conflict with “stricter versions of Stoicism” that Shaftesbury otherwise endorsed (Christian Maurer and Laurent Jaffro, “Reading Shaftesbury’s *Pathologia*: An Illustration and Defence of the Stoic Account of the Emotions,” *History of European Ideas* 39 [2013], 207-220 [pp. 215-16]). Perhaps we should see Theocles’ shift from Day One of *The Moralists* to Day Two as reflecting the tension between Shaftesbury’s commitments to less strict and more strict versions of Stoicism.

¹⁹ I discuss this ascent in *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, 100-117.

misanthropy. During the evening discussion, Theocles says, “All we can see either of the Heavens or Earth, demonstrates Order and Perfection... All is delightful, amiable, rejoicing, except with relation to *Man* only, and his Circumstances, which seem unequal. Here the Calamity and Ill arises; and hence the Ruin of this goodly Frame. All perishes on this account; and the whole Order of the Universe, elsewhere so firm, intire, and immoveable, is here o’erthrown” (C 2.291). Philocles echoes the lamentable difference between nature and humanity. “I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me,” he says on the second day, “for Things of a *natural* kind; where neither *Art*, nor the *Conceit* or *Caprice* of Man has spoil’d their *genuine Order*, by breaking in upon that *primitive State*” (C 2.393). Or as Philocles puts it when comparing natural phenomena with human lives: “The *one* is regular, steddy, permanent; the *other* are irregular, variable, inconstant. In one there are the Marks of Wisdom and Determination; in the other, of Whimsy and Conceit: In one there appears Judgment; in the other, Fancy only: In one, Will; in the other, Caprice: In one, Truth, Certainty, Knowledg; in the other, Error, Folly, and Madness” (C 2.337). Palemon expresses the same, talking “with much Satisfaction of natural Things, and of all Orders of Beautys, Man only excepted” (C 2.112).

Even in the midst of his apotheosis of nature, Shaftesbury cannot resist criticisms of humanity. He thus has Theocles not only extol the wonders of the minerals underground but also excoriate humans for trying to extract them (C 2.376-77; 2.392).²⁰ He contemns human religion for breeding “mutual Hatred” and inevitably leading people to “profane one to another, war fiercer, and in Religion’s Cause forget Humanity; whilst savage *Zeal*, with meek and pious Semblance, works dreadful Massacre; and for Heaven’s sake (horrid Pretence!) makes desolate the Earth” (C 2.388). Politics is simply beneath contempt: on our tour of the continents’ natural beauty we skip Europe altogether because “it wou’d be hard

²⁰ Shaftesbury was not, however, critical of agriculture. He has Theocles contrast the wholesomeness of agriculture with the noxiousness of mining, writing “Not satisfy’d to turn and manure for their Use the wholesom and beneficial Mould of this their Earth, they dig yet deeper, and seeking out imaginary Wealth, they search its very entrails” (210-11). For an excellent discussion of Shaftesbury’s attitude toward agriculture, see Suzannah Fleming, “The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: Practical Gardener and Husbandman,” *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 93-114.

to see it in any view, without meeting still that *politick* Face of Affairs, which wou'd too much disturb us in our *philosophical* Flights" (C 2.393).²¹

Some contemporary environmental philosophers believe there is a special, inestimable value to "wildness" — to those parts of nature wholly untouched by human influence.²² Shaftesbury's *Moralists* should be counted an ancestor of such views.²³ While Theocles is a "bitter Enemy" of the human activities of politics, religion, and mining, he finds always that "Wildness pleases" (C 2.388).²⁴

Theocles' account of the natural genius may succeed in showing Philocles that it's possible for him to love an object as "mysterious" and "metaphysical" as nature as a whole. But inextricably linked to Theocles' glorification of nature is his damning of humanity. And

²¹ Shaftesbury's theodicy is relevant here. As Müller has convincingly argued, Shaftesbury aimed in *The Moralists* to show that natural evil does not actually exist, that all aspects of the natural world are in fact good (Patrick Müller, "Dwell with honesty & beauty & order': The Paradox of Theodicy in Shaftesbury's Thought," *Aufklärung* 22 [2010], 209-10 and 225). But what is so striking is that Theocles tries to convince Philocles of these things only as they concern the natural world, and not as they concern humankind. He tries to show that all natural things are perfect and harmonious, whatever their initial appearances. But he doesn't try to show that humanity partakes of that perfection and harmony. The point can be put in terms of aesthetic reactions. Müller maintains that the cornerstone of Shaftesbury's theodicy is the experience of the beauty of creation (Müller, 221-224 and 230). I completely agree. Theocles does his best to bring Philocles to an aesthetic appreciation of all natural objects (C2.388-89; 401). But Theocles never suggests that humanity is beautiful. Quite the contrary (see C 2.112, 2.291, 2.392-4). Theocles advances a cosmodycy, but he doesn't advance an anthropodycy.

²² See Hettinger, N and Throop, B, "Refocusing Ecocentricism," *Environment Ethics* 21 (1999), 3-21.

²³ Shaftesbury's humanism at times seems to anticipate that of Edward Abbey, who explained his reluctance to kill a rattlesnake that had taken up residence near his cabin in the Arches National Monument by saying: "Arches National Monument is meant to be among other things a sanctuary for wildlife — for all forms of wildlife... Even if this were not the case I have personal convictions to uphold. Ideals, you might say. I'm a humanist. I'd rather kill a person than a rattlesnake" (*Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* [Ballantine Books, 1968], 17).

²⁴ For elucidating discussion of Shaftesbury's love of non-human nature and its influences, see Andrea Gatti, "The Aesthetic Mind: Stoic Influences on Shaftesbury's Theory of Beauty"; Yu Liu, "The Surprising Passion for Wild Nature: the True Innovation of Shaftesbury's Aesthetics"; Suzannah Fleming, "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: Practical Gardener and Husbandman," all in *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 61-76, 77-92, and 93-114 respectively.

it was humanity that Theocles was supposed to show Philocles he could love.²⁵ The first obstacle to virtue — that too many humans are too stupid and corrupt for Philocles to bring himself to love — turns out to be the one Shaftesbury can't get Theocles to overcome.

Philocles has no complaints. He believes that Theocles has proved everything that needs proving. If he's the victim of a bait and switch — promised that he would be shown how to love humanity but in the end inspired to love non-human nature — he's blissfully unaware of it.

What about Shaftesbury himself? Was he aware of the incongruity between Theocles' first-day promise and second-day delivery? Did he deliberately shift from love “of the species” (which is what Theocles says he will establish at the beginning of the conversation), love of “mankind or nature” (which is what Theocles says he will establish in the middle of the conversation), to love of “wildness” (which is what Theocles establishes at the end of the conversation)? I honestly don't know. Perhaps Shaftesbury was as carried away by Theocles' apotheosis of nature as Philocles, and thus failed to notice that he had drifted from his original goal. Or perhaps Shaftesbury knew he was changing the subject, intentionally — if subtly, almost surreptitiously — contrasting the religious high of natural communion with the daily disappointment of dealings with men.²⁶

²⁵ There are numerous discussions in the secondary literature of Shaftesbury's belief that virtue consists of love for humanity. There are also numerous discussions of Shaftesbury's love of wild (non-human) nature and his attempt to show that all natural things constitute a divine unity. It seems to me, however, that the tension between these two conspicuous aspects of Shaftesbury's thought has not been well noticed.

²⁶ Michael Prince interprets *The Moralists* as purposely failing to reach “resolution through rational debate,” arguing that Shaftesbury uses the dialogue form in order to produce a work that does not “achieve a convincing sense of closure,” that “does not result in any binding conclusion,” that ends “not in a unity of viewpoints, but in a tragic impasse” (Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* [Cambridge, 1996], 47-54). I believe Prince misreads Philocles' reaction to Theocles' arguments for a unified sovereign genius of nature. It seems to me (*contra* Prince) that Philocles is convinced by Theocles, that Philocles thinks that Theocles has succeeded in achieving resolution or closure; see especially C 2.393 and 399-400, which Prince himself quotes at p. 67 but does not seem to me to reconcile with his overall reading. Prince takes the exchange between Theocles and Philocles at C 2.374-5 to be indicative of the “tragic impasse” between Theocles and Philocles. I have given a different interpretation of this passage in Gill 2006, 106-7. At the same time, I think Prince is correct in emphasizing how the dialogue form of *The Moralists*, as well as its epistolary framing, enables Shaftesbury to give voice to (his own) opposing ideas. I also agree with Prince that *The Moralists* fails to achieve a rational resolution of those opposing ideas. I just am not as confident as Prince

However that may be, *The Moralists'* ambivalent attitude toward love of humanity does seem to reflect a deep feature of Shaftesbury's own character. He was drawn in both philanthropic and misanthropic directions, alternating between periods of great public engagement and reclusive isolation. Some years, he would be as actively involved in human affairs as one can imagine, throwing himself into national politics and taking a hands-on approach to the running of his estate. Other years, he would retreat to a foreign country, shutting down his household, avoiding politics, refusing visitors. Perhaps we should not be surprised that Theocles affirms the moral requirement of loving humanity but is at his best when he has left company behind for the "*Solitude*" of the "open Scene of Nature" (C 2.343).

The Moralists ends abruptly. After achieving the enthusiastic heights while roving in the fields, Theocles and Philocles just stop. Says Philocles, "By this time we found ourselves insensibly got home. Our *Philosophy* ended, and we return'd to the common Affairs of Life" (C 2.443).²⁷ The conversation of the first day might have led us to believe that the inspiration achieved in nature would be transposed to society. But this ending, along with

that this unresolved result is what Shaftesbury intended. In "Voices and Accents': Enthusiastic Characterization in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*," Hoover develops a rich reading in which she too concludes that Prince misreads Philocles' reaction to Theocles — that Shaftesbury did not intend for the two of them to reach an impasse (Hoover, 88-90). Also helpful is the reading given by Den Uyl, who contends, "Shaftesbury cannot be simply equated with Theocles" ("Shaftesbury and the Modern Problem of Virtue," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 15 [1998: 275-316], 297)

²⁷ In "Shaftesbury's Philosophical Poetics," Patrick Müller notes the "sudden *exceunt* of the principal characters at the end of *The Moralists* 'to the common Affairs of Life' [which] reflects this seesawing between philosophical reflection and public calling" (in *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 239-260 [p. 256]). In "Reading Shaftesbury's Private Writings," Lori Branch discusses the tension between Shaftesbury's desire to be "a lover of men" while remaining "immune to the slings of commerce with them" (in *New Ages, New Opinions: Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Müller [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014], 261-276 [p. 265]). Similarly, Paddy Bullard describes Shaftesbury as "an anxious, private man searching for a way to take a virtuous public role in the commonwealth, and occasionally giving in to the impossibility of doing so" ("Review of *Askemata*," *Review of English Studies* 64 (2013), 532-34). In the same vein, Joseph Chavez excavates the tension between the solitary and sociable aspects of Shaftesbury's philosophy ("Philosophy and Politeness in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*," in *Theory and Practice in the Eighteenth Century: Writing Between Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Alexander John Dick and Christina Lupton [London and Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2008], 51-68).

The Moralists' entwining of natural glorification and human contempt, gives us reason to doubt.

2. Other attempts at impartiality

Have more wholehearted friends of humanity gone further than *The Moralists* at instilling impartial love?²⁸ Many have tried. Directly in Shaftesbury's wake, Francis Hutcheson instructed his readers to pursue a kind of cognitive behavioral therapy that would break the mental associations that cause us to favor a part of humanity at the expense of the species as a whole. Kierkegaard would exhort us to look deeply enough into every person to find the image of God therein. Mill would advocate for educational reform that would lead people, from youth onward, to identify their personal good with the happiness of all, imparting to the Utilitarian moral principle the status of religious truth. Buddhists recommend the Metta Bhavana meditation, a practice designed to inculcate loving kindness towards all beings.

Others have thought Theocles had the wrong goal altogether. Kant is a prime example. Kant agrees with Shaftesbury that morality is essentially impartial. But for just that reason Kant insists that morality must be based on reason and not on sentiment, as sentiment is ineluctably partial. As Kant explains when discussing our duty to benefit others, "Therefore, the law that we should further the happiness of others arises not from the presupposition that this law is an object of everyone's choice but from the fact that the form of universality, which reason requires as condition for giving the maxim of self-love the objective validity of law, is itself the determining ground of the will" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Lewis White Beck [Macmillan, 1993], 35 [95:34]). The morality of promoting the happiness of others is independent of sentimental desire and inclination (independent of "everyone's choice"). It is based solely on the impartiality (the "universality," "objectivity," or lawlikeness) of what "reason requires." Sentiment is essentially subjective while morality is essentially objective. Sentiment can thus never be the "determining ground" of impartial moral conduct. "Only rationalism of the faculty of judgment is suitable to the use of moral laws, for rationalism takes no more from sensible

²⁸ Of course, each of the following is working with a conception of love that differs in some ways from the conception the others are working with. "Love," as we all know, can mean many different things.

nature [i.e., from sentiment] than that which pure reason can also think for itself, i.e., lawfulness” (Kant, 74 [5:71]).

3. Hume

Hume too falls into the camp of those who think Theocles had the wrong goal, but for reasons different from Kant’s. Like Kant, Hume denies that human sentiment can on its own ground impartial moral principles. Hume believes, as we’ve seen, that our sentiments are literally partial: although we may be able to love any *part* of humanity (so long as it is “confin’d to a few persons”), we cannot love humanity as a whole.²⁹ He disagrees with Kant, however, about reason’s being able to provide impartial motivation, denying, famously, that reason alone can motivate at all (T 2.3.3. and 3.1.1).

But Hume does not lament the inevitable partiality of human sentiment. He is not driven to the conclusion that we must therefore be inevitable moral failures, that virtue is a mere “chimera.”³⁰ There are two Humean reasons not to be gloomy.

First, morality is not entirely impartial. Partial motivation is in many cases positively virtuous. Hume writes, “When experience has once given us a competent knowledge of human affairs, and has taught us the proportion they bear to human passion, we perceive, that the generosity of men is very limited, and that it seldom extends beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country. Being thus acquainted with the nature of man, we expect not any impossibilities from him; but confine our view to that narrow

²⁹ Shaftesbury was well-aware of humans’ tendency to form partial groups. He provides a penetrating description of our “*cantonizing*” tendencies at C1.112-14. The difference between Hume and Shaftesbury that I seek to highlight lies in their views of the extent to which our sentiments can overcome those *cantonizing* tendencies — or, perhaps more accurately put, the extent to which our natural concern for our fellows can be extended. For discussion of Shaftesbury’s view in Askemata of “partial affections” such as “love for a child, a friend, or a fellow citizen,” see Taraborelli, 187-89.

Hume’s affirms the partiality of human sentiment in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. In the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, he at times suggests that the feeling of “humanity” can come closer to being impartial in the sense Shaftesbury might have sought. See especially E 9.5-9. For insightful discussion of differences between Hume’s *Treatise* and *Enquiry* and the greater expansiveness of ‘humanity’ in the latter, see Jacqueline Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy, and Society in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford, 2015), 120-29 and 160-84.

³⁰ Shaftesbury and Kant both discuss the possibility of morality’s being a “chimera” — Shaftesbury at C2.239 and Kant at *Groundwork* 4:402.

circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character. When the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those, who have a more particular connexion with him” (T 3.3.3.2).³¹ Human generosity is conspicuously limited. Most people most of the time concern themselves chiefly with the welfare of those in their narrow circle: family, friends, co-workers. We all know that. We don’t expect any more. Indeed, no more is expected — where what’s “expected” is taken in not merely the predictive but the normative sense.³² In many aspects of our lives, partial affection is not ethically second-best, not a pale or shadow version of virtue, not morality lite. Partial affection is often fully, robustly virtuous, something higher than which there is no reason to aspire. This is why we “blame a person” who would “give the preference to a stranger or mere chance acquaintance” when that stranger or acquaintance’s interests came into “opposition” with the interests of a member of the person’s family (T 3.2.2.8). It is also why we strongly approve of “extraordinary delicacy in love or friendship, where a person is attentive to the smallest concerns of his friend... Such delicacies have little influence on society; because they make us regard the greatest trifles: But they are the more engaging, the more minute the concern is, and are a proof of the highest merit in any one, who is capable of them.” While Theocles says that morality requires that you show the same “Kindness” to “*your* Kind” as you do to your family, that all humans “deserve” from you the same consideration, that virtue consists of “an equal, just, and universal Friendship!” — while Theocles says all that, Hume quietly points out that many of our actual moral judgments are calibrated to the narrower virtues of intimate interactions. Helping a friend overcome a

³¹ Hume’s general point of view is impartial, but in a different way from Shaftesbury’s goal of impartial love for all of humanity (T 3.3.1.14-17). When we judge someone from Hume’s general point of view, we concern ourselves with the welfare of the subset of people with whom that person has direct interaction. “Impartial” here means: not selfish, concerned with a subset of people of which one might oneself not be a member. Shaftesbury’s impartiality is: concerned with all humans. For further discussion of this feature of the general point of view in the *Treatise*, see Taylor 111-16.

³² On the predictive and normative senses of “expect,” see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 85-87.

minor problem without a single thought to how it will affect humanity as a whole can be “proof of the highest merit.”³³

At the same time, Hume does hold that there are aspects of morality that are more impartial.³⁴ But he thinks we can achieve those other, more impartial virtues without love for the entire species. This is the second Humean reason not to be gloomy.

The most notable impartial aspect of morality is justice. Justice is impartial in two ways: it consists of rules that apply equally to everyone, and it benefits society as a whole. Hume is perfectly clear that our natural sentiments are too partial on their own to ground justice. Humans exhibit great generosity to people close to them, but their generosity is so limited that “instead of fitting men for large societies, [it] is almost as contrary to them, as the most narrow selfishness. For while each person loves himself better than any other single person, and in his love to others bears the greatest affection to his relations and acquaintance, this must necessarily produce an opposition of passions, and a consequent opposition of actions; which cannot but be dangerous to the new-establish’d union” (T 3.2.2.6). Hume goes on:

In vain shou’d we expect to find, in *uncultivated nature*, a remedy to this inconvenience; or hope for any inartificial principle of the human mind, which might control those partial affects, and make us overcome the temptations arising from our circumstances... [O]ur strongest attention is confin’d to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintance; and ‘tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons. This partiality, then, and unequal affection, must not only have an influence on our behaviour and conduct in society, but even on our ideas of vice and virtue... [O]ur natural uncultivated ideas of morality, instead of proving a remedy for the partiality of our affections, do rather conform themselves to that partiality, and give it an additional force and influence” (T 3.2.2.8; see also 3.2.7.1).

³³ The converse is also true: the failure to show small kindnesses to those in one’s immediate vicinity is proof of a vice, regardless of how much good one may do for humanity as a whole (see T 3.3.3.9 and E 7.3). Thus, someone like Martin Ellingham from the BBC TV series *Doc Martin* is judged to possess real vices of rudeness and ingratitude even though his skills as a physician enable him to save at least one innocent life every week.

³⁴ Hume is a pluralist about morality, holding that there are multiple independent ultimate moral ends, some more impartial, some less. Or so I argue in *Humean Moral Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

We care about the welfare of those in our narrow circle much more than those outside it, and our natural moral judgments hew to that partiality. Far from condemning confined generosity, we expect ourselves — in both the predictive and normative senses — to favor the familiar few over the unfamiliar many.

Given this natural partiality, how do we manage to establish impartial justice? Not by changing our sentimental structure so that we become extremely impartial. Not by engaging in a Shaftesburean project of affective enlargement. What we do, rather, is institute conventions that “restrain” our “partial and contradictory” sentimental tendencies.³⁵ We “remedy” partiality by “artifice” (3.2.2.9).

[J]ustice takes its rise from human conventions; and ... these are intended as a remedy to some inconveniences, which proceed from the concurrence of certain *qualities* of the human mind with the *situation* of external objects. The qualities of the mind are *selfishness* and *limited generosity*. And the situation of external objects is their *easy change*, join'd to their *scarcity* in comparison of the wants and desires of men. (3.2.216)

The conventions at the origin of justice do not make us care equally about all humans. They take our confined generosity and self-regard as givens, and then alter the circumstances in which they operate so that the same motives lead us to perform more widely beneficial and equitable actions.

As an analogy, consider a situation in which there is one pie and eight people who all want as much of it as they can get. Towards the goal of producing a satisfactory result, they could try to inculcate an impartial love for all. Alternatively, they could take their partiality as at least somewhat resistant to change and then implement a rule: that the person who is given the job of cutting the pie gets the last slice. The first approach is analogous to the

³⁵ In *The Enquiry concerning Morals*, Hume says that our notions of justice would not extend to creatures “of such inferior strength” that they could never “make us feel the effects of their resentment,” and that such powerless creatures will morally matter to us only to the extent that we have “compassion and kindness” towards them (E 3.1.18). There might be a sense, then, in which in the *Enquiry* Humean justice is more partial than Humean compassion: justice applies only to those who can make felt “the effects of their resentment,” while compassion can be extended to any creature whose pain we witness and sympathize with. But Humean compassion even in this case embraces only particular individuals and not all sentient beings at once. There is debate about how those passages about justice in the *Enquiry* should be interpreted. See Michael Ridge, “David Hume, Paternalist,” *Hume Studies* 36 (2010), 149-70 and Taylor, 175-79.

Shaftesburean attempt to achieve impartiality by instilling universal love. The second approach is analogous to the development of Humean conventions of justice that channel our partial affections into more impartial courses of action.

Or consider how symphony auditions are currently conducted. Unconscious biases — triggered by race, sex, appearance, etc. — can affect the judgments of even experts in a field. Symphony directors with the goal of hiring the best musicians could try to rid themselves of such biases. But it is now widely accepted that a more effective approach is to make auditions blind, with participants performing behind a screen that hides everything but the sound of their playing. This is a Humean approach to the problem: institute a convention that produces a more impartial outcome without relying on affective enlargement. Find a way to create behavioral impartiality that does not depend on psychological impartiality.³⁶

I will not enter here into the details of Hume's *Treatise* story of the development of justice and the other artificial virtues. I want to draw attention only to this fundamental point: that Hume explains how the more impartial aspects of morality arise from conventions that redirect, rather than reform, our sentimental partiality.³⁷ Our emotional hard-wiring might make it virtually impossible for most of us to love the entire species. But that hasn't prevented the manufacture of conventions that funnel us into conduct that's impartial enough. Like machines that move large objects we are physically too weak to lift, the conventions of justice are inventions that enable us to produce results beyond our natural psychological reach. Shaftesbury excoriates our movements from nature to artifice. In Hume's story, artifice furnishes the impartiality our natures cannot muster.

³⁶ See Buchanan and Powell, forthcoming.

³⁷ Hume does think that the development of justice eventually produces a sentimental change. Over time, that development causes us to experience the moral sentiment of disapproval when we witness violations of the rules of justice (T 3.2.2.24). This new sentiment of disapproval for justice-violations is impartial in the sense that it applies equally to every individual. But it is not impartial in the sense that Theocles seeks, for two reasons. First, it still only concerns particular individuals, not humanity as a whole. Second, its motivational force is too weak to overcome our typical, partial motives. Moreover, the moral sentiment of disapproval of injustice develops only *after* the artificial convention of justice has developed; the former's existence is parasitic on the latter's.

Philocles asks Theocles to inspire in him impartial love for all of humanity. Hume expects less of us: only that we show care and concern for those in our immediate sphere and affirm useful societal conventions. There is certainly something glorious about Shaftesbury's elevated aspirations. But *The Moralists* is a high-risk endeavor. Someone with Humeanism's more flat-footed goals of manageable kindnesses and workable laws is less likely to be disappointed. It's hard to imagine pervasive human folly ever tempting David Hume to head for the solitude of the hills.