

Luigi Turco

## Philosophy and religion. Some recent books on British moralists

My paper moves from a hypothesis, perhaps a wrong one. This hypothesis is not a speculative or theoretical one, but a hypothesis that deals with how we read and interpret eighteenth century British philosophy, and, more specifically, the British moral debate. According to Adam Smith's account of ethics in part VII of his *Theory of moral sentiments*, the foundation of morality is a modern problem, only slightly touched by the ancient moralists. Whether ethics is based on reason or sentiment, is natural or artificial, is eternal or historical, has its foundation in natural or revealed religion or has roots totally independent from religion are meaningless issues in the ancient world. In his *Enquiry on the origin of moral virtue* Mandeville, against the objection that the "Distinction between *Virtue* and *Vice*" was not "the Contrivance of Politicians, but the pure Effect of Religion", repeats that he speaks "neither of *Jews* or *Christians*, but Man in his State of Nature and Ignorance of the true Deity". "No States or Kingdoms under Heaven – he says – have yielded more or greater Patterns in all sort of Moral Virtues than the *Greek* and *Roman* Empires, more especially the latter; and yet how loose, absurd and ridiculous were their Sentiments as to Sacred Matters?"<sup>1</sup> But the young David Hume in his letter to the Scottish physician states that "the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> B. MANDEVILLE, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, in *The Fable of the Bees: or, Privates Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. by F.B. Kaye, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924, vol. 1, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> D. HUME, *Letter to [Dr George Cheyne]*, in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, vol. 1, p. 16.

Luigi Turco Philosophy and religion. Some recent books on British moralists

In Selby-Bigge's or Raphael's continuously reprinted anthologies of British Moralists it seems that religion had a minor or null role in their selection of the more relevant writers and excerpts. The secularisation of ethics is taken for granted.

Surprisingly in the last two decades, and especially in the last ten years, religion, Christian religion, is the background or the context that gives sense and meaning to the eighteenth century moral debate. A pioneer work exploring this perspective is Isabel Rivers' *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A study of the language of religion and ethics in England, 1660-1780*. The author has been working on this project for over twenty-five years, or rather thirty, as the first volume Whichcote to Wesley was published in 1991, and the second volume in 2000<sup>3</sup>. Rivers' competence in the field is beyond discussion, as well as the elegance, the accuracy and the subtlety of her discussion of published and unpublished primary sources. What is her project? "My Subject is the language of religious and moral prose, and my methods are those of the literary historian of ideas. I have concentrated on language because I am interested in the history of religious and moral thought for its own sake, not in relation to another subject, such as science or politics, and believe that it is only through the careful study of language that meaning can be ascertained"<sup>4</sup>. In her web site at Queen Mary college of London University she defines three fields of interest between 1660-1830: 1) Intellectual History, 2) Dissenting, Methodist and Evangelical Literary Culture, 3) History of the Book.

In her two volumes you can find brief magisterial descriptions of this or that writer, that testify her deep understanding and extensive reading of the author, although she usually defines her account as an oversimplification. The volumes present a huge selection of quotations together with her subtle comments. As an Italian scholar, accustomed to regard himself as an historian of philosophy, rather than a philosopher, – a term that has probably its roots in the permanent influence of the Kantian and Hegelian philosophy in our country – I admit that I am rather confused by both the terms 'history of ideas', 'literary' or not, and 'intellectual history'. I found, for example, that the scholars who define their field as 'intellectual history', are usually more interested in the biography, sources, of the authors and in their connections than in their philosophical, religious or scientific achievements.

However, while reading a given writer – explains Rivers in her introduction – she asks many questions to him. I have counted nineteen different

<sup>3</sup> I. RIVERS, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A study of the language of religion and ethics in England, 1660-1780*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, vol. I: *Whichcote to Wesley*, 1991, vol. II: *Shaftesbury to Hume*, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> RIVERS, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. I, pp. 2-3.

questions, often overlapping<sup>5</sup>. It would be tedious to report even a few of them; I only want to emphasise, for the purpose of my paper, that the authors' intended audience for their different works is the most prominent question. A curious characteristic of the five chapters in which each volume is divided is that every chapter (excluding the first one of the first volume and the last of the second) is divided itself into three parts. The first part is devoted to the "intellectual milieu of the movement or thinker under discussion", the second part to the circumstances of publication, whereas "the third (the most important) analyses ideas and their expressions"<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless this tripartition is a bit deceiving because it is often infringed.

It is worth quoting the clear initial statement of Rivers' introduction regarding the relationship between religion and ethics: "Broadly speaking, two crucial shifts in ideas took place in this period."

The first is an emphasis in Anglican thought on the capacity of human reason and free will to co-operate with divine grace in order to achieve the holy and happy life. This optimistic portrait of human nature represents a rejection of the orthodox Reformation tradition, which stresses the depravity of human nature and God's arbitrary exercise of his free grace in electing the few to salvation. The second is the attempt to divorce ethics from religion, and to find the springs of human action not in the co-operation of human nature and divine grace but in the constitution of human nature alone. The first shift comes to represent a new orthodoxy, and its effects in the period are very wide-reaching; the second shift, which in part arises on the first, remain heterodox in the period under consideration but its long-term influences are incalculable. [...] The first volume "essentially explores the tension between the languages of reason and grace"... The second volume "essentially explores the tension between the language of reason and sentiment".<sup>7</sup>

Therefore it seems that the general title is a bit misleading, as the triad has to be divided in two dyads, the first belonging to internal changes of Anglican thought and the second to the eighteenth century moral debate. But it is not so. After a long chapter devoted to the new orthodoxy proposed by the 'latitude-men' of Cambridge (Whichcote, Wilkins, Barrow, Tillotson, Fowler, Patrick, Glanvill with the exception of Wilkins who comes from Oxford), the first volume deals with: first, the resistance to the new orthodoxy by the non-conformist Baxter and Bunyan; second, the rhetoric of affections expressed by old dissenters like Watts and Doddridge, as well as the Evangelical Revival of John Wesley. However, the whole first volume presents itself as a text on the history of Anglican church between the Restoration and

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 1.

Luigi Turco Philosophy and religion. Some recent books on British moralists

the middle of the eighteenth century, – written by an impartial scholar – more interested in exploring the books and the conflicts internal to the established church, than to doctrinal differences.

The second volume – and this explains perhaps why it has been published after nine years – seems the work of a different author or, at least, on a different subject. The religion of reason is a minor subject, while the anti-Christian assault to revealed (and natural) religion is the main topic. This possibly explains why the books open with sixty-eight pages on the true religion of nature exposed by the freethinkers who, according to Rivers, had not much to say about ethics. “It is, however, a mistake to see the importance of the freethinking movement as resting on any positive contribution to ethical theory”<sup>8</sup>. Her chapter ends with Tindal: “The most unsatisfactory aspect of *Christianity as old as the creation* is the fact that Tindal does not really deal with ethics although his whole approach to religion is ethical”<sup>9</sup>; “He is principally concerned with showing on the latitudinarian’s own terms that revelation adds nothing to natural religion and that human reason is capable of defining morality”<sup>10</sup>. The true protagonists of the volume are Shaftesbury in the second chapter and David Hume in the fourth one. But, again, Rivers’ attention is focused on the complexity of the strategies adopted by Shaftesbury to revive the ethics of the ancients than on Shaftesbury’s ethics. Her exploration of the third book of the *Characteristicks* devoted to *Miscellaneous reflections* is probably a unique piece in understanding the aim of this book. But after following Rivers in these subtle pages the reader asks himself if her reading is too charitable towards her preferred author and whether the *Miscellaneous reflections* are a rationalisation of Shaftesbury’s consciousness of the many defects of his achievements. Rivers, at a certain point, wonders how a work of such complexity could have had such a durable influence on the posterior moral debate<sup>11</sup>. However once again the reader, following what Rivers has written in the third paragraph about Shaftesbury’s ethics, asks himself whether Shaftesbury had done more than contrast the ethics of the emperor and Epictetus to the Christian religion and to propose the same in a language palatable to his modern readers.

We find again the scholar of the Anglican church in the third chapter devoted to “the enormous influence of Shaftesburian moral thought”<sup>12</sup> (3) and entitled *Defining the moral faculty: Hutcheson, Butler and Price*. But I think that this is the most biased among the chapters of the two books by Isabel

<sup>8</sup> RIVERS, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. II, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p. 3.

Rivers. She unwittingly downplays the relevance of Shaftesbury's thought when she lingers on the large catalogues of books, modern and ancient, required to be read by the clerical students at Cambridge or published by Foulis in Glasgow. The hidden thesis of Rivers is that Shaftesbury introduces a subtle anti-Christian strategy, a sentimental ethics that is characterised by a consonance of the mind with the providential order of the world, based on the practice of a rational reflection. This perspective is totally Christianised, especially in Scotland, where 'moral sense' is the substitute of 'Grace' and has its foundation in the arbitrary will of God. Joseph Butler and above all Richard Price, in his acute and "invaluable" book<sup>13</sup>, destroys Hutcheson's theory of moral sense, as it does not explain what moral obligation is and undermines the eternity and immutability of morality. This explains the idiosyncratic selections of ethical writers by Rivers. Wishart (who never published a page of ethics), Turnbull, or Fordyce are better treated than Hutcheson, a "confused" author<sup>14</sup>. Shaftesbury's influence on Butler is overrated, Price's *Review of the principal questions and difficulties in Morals* (1758) is diffusedly presented in the final pages, whereas to the coeval Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* are given only a few pages in the chapter on Hume. By defining Smith's book as an eclectic book, Rivers shows she does not understand the aim of Smith's Theory. In this way, especially if we add to this the prosecution of this view in the final chapter of the book, the long influence of the 'Religion of reason', introduced at Cambridge in the age of Restoration, has its beneficial effects on the ethical debate.

However, the longest chapter devoted to Hume, presents us with almost a different scholar from the one approving the new orthodoxy of the Church of England.

English and Scottish moralists in the Shaftesburian tradition who founded morality in human nature were agreed that God has constituted nature and that the moral faculty, however identified, was a divine implantation. Ethics and religion were inseparable, because the moral human being reflecting on his own constitution could not but recognise that his benevolent affections and moral sense were the gift of his creator and confirmed that creator's existence. [...] But the case of David Hume (1711-1766) presented a real problem for his contemporaries. For Hume, the basis of morality in sentiment, in human passions, affections, and feelings, meant necessarily that it concerned only human life. Human experience provided no possibility of knowledge beyond the human, [...] Ethics and religion were separate subjects of enquiry. Hume was convinced that the effects of Christianity on ethics had been entirely damaging, and one of his aims was to restore the perspective of a particular group of classical moralists.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ivi, pp. 208, 215.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, pp. 238-239.

These beautiful sentences of the first page of the chapter anticipate the whole development of Rivers' account of Hume. I cannot linger on "the problem of the virtuous sceptic"<sup>16</sup>, or about Hume's swinging between prudence and raillery<sup>17</sup>. The doctrinal third paragraph is a long one<sup>18</sup>: from mitigated scepticism Rivers explores Hume's non religious morals in book ii and iii of the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* and his view of religion in every other work by Hume<sup>19</sup>, ending her chapter, as often, quoting his friendly and hostile critics. Surely Rivers is at her best when she deals with Hume as a critic of the natural and revealed religion and their pernicious influence on morality, or Hume's aggressive criticism of the clergy. Her account is a pleasant reading for every specialist. But her illustration of Hume's morality, mixing quotations from the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* could be fair as an introduction to Hume's morality but contains many flaws.

For example Hume's "assumption that the source of morals is feeling not reason, his use of taste, sense, instinct, affection, and benevolence, and his attempt to undo the damage caused by Locke's attack on innate ideas" is according to Rivers a clear example of his "debt to the Shaftesburian tradition"<sup>20</sup>. This and similar statements imply a loose understanding of Hume's achievement in the field of ethics. Happily in the same page she observes that "four key elements were unacceptable to contemporary readers: his distinction between the natural and the artificial virtues, his emphasis on the utility and tendency of actions, his insistence that natural abilities cannot be separated from moral virtues, and his refusal to search outside human nature for the origins of moral principles and the obligation to perform moral duties"<sup>21</sup>. However, only the last subject is explored in detail for its anti-Christian relevance.

How has Rivers' "more than twenty five years of experience of reading a very large quantity of controversial literature from the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries" helped to get a better understanding of the British moral debate? She answers in her introduction that this long experience "has convinced" her "that such debates, then or now, do not on the whole advance the pursuit of truth". This is a "third reason" – says in her introduction – "for not entering into debates with modern interpreters"<sup>22</sup>. At page 204-205 Rivers sums up the "several perspectives of accounts of the foundation of morals", associating terms and thinkers – ancient and modern – in six different groups

<sup>16</sup> It is the title of the first section of the Chapter, *ivi*, pp. 238-264.

<sup>17</sup> It is the title of the second section of the Chapter, *ivi*, pp. 264-282.

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, third section: *The science of human nature*, pp. 282-329.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ivi*, p. 283.

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 293.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ivi*, p. 5.

or views “that are not necessarily mutually exclusive”. Writers mentioned here are much more numerous than the authors that deserve a place in her two volumes. I believe that Rivers agrees with her favourite Richard Price that, regarding the foundation of morality, the eighteenth-century moral debate has only produced a great deal of confusion.

Let me add a few pages on Daniel Carey’s *Locke, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). If Rivers’ volumes celebrate the glory of the new orthodoxy established in Cambridge, and downplay the merits of Scottish and Irish writers, Carey deals with the Oxonian Locke and pays more attention to the Scottish writers, not only Hutcheson, but also Kames, Ferguson and Smith. If Rivers reads “seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates in their own terms”, the opposite Rortian approach of Carey is stimulated by the current debates on multiculturalism and tries to find its roots in Locke’s polemic against innate ideas, his large exploitation of travels and exotic literature, his denying our access to the real essences of substances. Locke’s account of diversity was a challenge for the Stoical approach to the subject of ethics and religion made by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Shaftesbury’s criticism of the legalistic ethics of Locke, and his scorn for Locke’s law of opinion, or of fashion, as well as for Locke’s credence on travel literature, have a place here as well as in Rivers’ volume; nevertheless Carey finds his way of giving a modern relevance to Locke’s critique of moral and religious innate ideas, showing that today “conflicting positions reflect long-standing differences that first emerged during the Enlightenment”<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore Carey dedicates three chapters and almost half of his volume to Locke and two chapters and the same number of pages to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and the different views of Hume, Smith, Kames and Ferguson. The most interesting part of his exploration of the theme of diversity – at least according to my knowledge of Locke – is the first chapter where Locke’s strategy against innateness and his interest for travel literature is connected with the Baconian methodology of natural history, the inductive method of accumulation of evidence, as well as the similar projects of Boyle and Oldenburg. Carey stresses that Locke in his *Journal* does not advance explicative hypotheses and refuses to regard the most striking differences in custom and manners (infanticide, parricide, cannibalism, incest) as degeneracy caused by education or the result of the original sin. It is for me a novelty to know that Locke’s library contains 195 volumes related to travel and exotic literature, or I find precious – in the third chapter – Carey’s discussion of how Locke uses and corrects his sources on the subject of atheist nations. Other themes supporting the

<sup>23</sup> D. CAREY, *Locke, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, cover page.

Luigi Turco Philosophy and religion. Some recent books on British moralists

open attitude of Locke towards diversity (the denial of our access to real essences, the conventionality of species, his connection with the French sceptical tradition, etc.) are surely well-known to the Lockean scholarship.

However if in Rivers' book there is an excess of quotations, in Carey's book I find a lack of quotations and a Rortian attitude to report historical issues in our terms and arguments. To take Locke's project of a natural history of man seriously, I would need more quotations from his *Journal*. The few I find in Carey's book testify special interests in Locke, for example in the phenomenon of religious enthusiasm, or in the existence of atheists in civilized nations. On the contrary these are subjects only slightly touched on by Carey. I would say that Locke's interest for diversity had its starting point in the issue of religious differences, both doctrinal and practical, among Christian churches and Sects that surely had a strong impact on the social and political peace in the every day life of the British nation. The discussion of Herbert of Cherbury's five propositions or "common notions writ on our Minds"<sup>24</sup> shows why Locke could not agree with any policy of tolerance based on a sum of consented tenets by different Christian confessions. Carey discards the theme because the existence of religious differences among Christians, "does not trace these disparities to an epistemic source" and because Shaftesbury and Hutcheson "agreed with Locke's views on tolerance and therefore accepted an area of intractable social difference"<sup>25</sup>. In my view it is not difficult to see why the book concentrates on the epistemic differences between Locke on one side and Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on the other, and, at the end, on the epistemic difference between the dogmatic theory of prolepsis in the Stoical thought and the ancient Sceptics. But, on Locke's side, the acceptance of incommensurable religious and moral differences among populations and nations does not result, as Carey acknowledges, in relativism<sup>26</sup>. Here Carey should have confronted himself with the projects of demonstrative ethics in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, as well as with Locke's final solution found in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*. On the other hand, while there is a lot that makes sense in Carey's understanding of Shaftesbury's thought, Shaftesbury had much more to say to justify moral preconceptions and universal values despite diversity of manners and costumes, through his deep criticism of revealed religions, of religious enthusiasm and superstitions, as well as through his recognition of unnatural affections.

<sup>24</sup> J. LOCKE, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1975, I.3. 15, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> CAREY, *Locke, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ivi*, p. 35.

I agree with Carey that Hutcheson presents a more complex question because he tries to present his view as an implementation of Locke's empiricism, without dismissing Locke's criticism of innate ideas. He correctly notes that Hutcheson admits "the vast diversity of moral principles in various nations, and ages" and takes it as "a good argument against innate ideas", a statement – says Carey – "prudently removed from the third edition"<sup>27</sup>; Carey should have also noted that according to Hutcheson kind affections and a moral sense are diffused among populations that scarcely have an idea of a deity. But Carey not only downplays Hutcheson's good arguments for justifying diversity without renouncing to a moral sense, but also fails to give just relevance to his criticism of Locke for not admitting different senses and kind affections in human nature. Locke's anthropology – as Carey interprets it – is not the sole anthropology known by seventeenth and eighteenth writers. There was another anthropological approach, just as controversial, based on passions and affections. In this case, Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* is particularly deficient. A Baconian natural history of man appears to Carey to be more relevant for its similarities to contemporary ethnological approaches. But, first, it is arguable that Locke makes more than a strategic use of the sceptical tradition and travel literature. Second, if we take seriously his recognition of diversity, diversity was no less of a problem to Locke than to Shaftesbury or Hutcheson.

Isabel Rivers' work is included in the secondary sources list of Carey's book. It does not appear among the secondary sources of Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*<sup>28</sup>. It is surprising because there are striking similarities between Rivers' and Gill's approach to the British moral debate. Both authors begin contrasting the total depravity of human nature after the fall (and the voluntarist conception of God) of the Calvinist orthodoxy with the capacity of Man for good and virtue of the Cambridge Platonists' new orthodoxy. Both authors believe that this beginning had a long-standing influence on the British moral debate. However there are striking differences between the two works. Gill's book is divided in four parts: one dedicated to Whichcote and Cudworth, one to Shaftesbury, one to Hutcheson, and one to Hume. There are many views in Gill's book that Rivers would not embrace: the inclination to understand the seventeenth-century British religious debate as a today question; the tendency to reduce historical questions and complicate doctrinal positions by formulating sweeping arguments; the liking to confront his interpretations with similar or different positions held by today scholarship.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> M.B. GILL, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

In Gill's brief introduction we read: "Are human beings naturally good or evil? Are we naturally drawn to virtue or to vice? [...] Call this the Human Nature Question." It is not just an issue debated for centuries by thousands Christian divines and turned into a dramatic cleavage with the Reformation. "Most of us have asked the Human Nature Question at one time or another". Gill is thinking about monstrous acts of torture, genocide, slaughter. I admit that in my experience I have asked the Human Nature Question only after leaving from an extenuating condominium meeting in a bad temper. However the question should have only two answers: the negative answer of the English Calvinist (human nature is basically evil) or the positive answer of the Cambridge Platonists (human nature is basically good)<sup>29</sup>.

I do not want to parody Gill's interesting book; I have not time to follow his fine comments on Whichcote's and Cudworth's sermons, and his good analysis of many rational themes discussed by them. What I find unbearable – for their lack of historical sense – is the sum of Gill's arguments and final sentences. For example, the following ones: "In the end, Whichcote simply cannot reconcile his rationalism with his Christianity, and frankly, it's painful to watch him try"<sup>30</sup>; or, as to Cudworth's *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, "There is no need, on this account, for Christ to mediate between humans and God, because the rational faculty inside each human turns it to be a means of direct access to the mind of God itself"<sup>31</sup>.

Likewise, there is much that can be appreciated in Gill's analysis of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* or *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody* and that we cannot find in Rivers' account of Shaftesbury's thought. But, according to Gill, "Shaftesbury's sentimentalist moral psychology" [developed by himself,] "conflicts with his rationalist moral ontology"<sup>32</sup>, ["inherited from Whichcote"<sup>33</sup>] in the *Inquiry*, while in *The Moralists* "Shaftesbury draws a very tight connection between morality and beauty, going so far as to make the former a subset of the latter"<sup>34</sup>. "Drawing this tight connection between morality and beauty was one of Shaftesbury's major contribution to the history of ideas"<sup>35</sup>. I would rather say that both that ontology and the connection between morality and beauty are as old as the Stoical and the Platonic approaches to ethics. What is new and that you cannot find in Locke's catalogue of simple ideas is the reflected sense on our affections.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, p. I.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless Gill comes back to the said conflict at the end of this part and discovers in some paragraphs added in the 1711 version of the *Inquiry* – that Shaftesbury presents as casual, whereas they are ‘terribly important’<sup>36</sup> – a sort of “Copernican revolution in moral philosophy”<sup>37</sup>. In fact “the study of morality becomes a subset of the study of human nature”<sup>38</sup>. Here the tension between an objective and a subjective theory of ethics is proposed, as Shaftesbury has “two different accounts of our reason to be virtuous”<sup>39</sup>, the “teleological account” and “the mental enjoyment account”. The first “claims that the creatures are happiest when they live in accord with their design and that humans were designed to be benevolent”. The second “reaches this conclusion through an examination of specific human affections”, and Shaftesbury understands the second account as “a further confirmation of the teleological principles”<sup>40</sup>.

In the paragraphs added to the *Inquiry* “The new idea is that is the mental enjoyment account will be equally compelling whether our perceptions of the external world are truthful or illusory”<sup>41</sup>. Even if the objects and the order of external world are imaginary, as well as the “real amiableness of deformity in moral acts”<sup>42</sup>, our obligation to virtue will be “in every respect the same”<sup>43</sup>. Therefore in answering to the most radical scepticism, Shaftesbury “made claims that implied that our obligation to virtue would remain just as compelling if we assumed that God does not exist”<sup>44</sup>. This new step toward a secular ethics is not clearly developed by Gill, whereas I would say that the Human Nature Question not only “begins to lose its footing”<sup>45</sup> – as Gill says – but becomes meaningless. However Shaftesbury ended up inspiring Hutcheson and Hume to develop their own sentimental accounts of morality, where their moral ontology “is clearly incompatible with a realm of human mind-independent value”<sup>46</sup>.

Gill does not share with Rivers the disparaging attitude towards Hutcheson. Whereas Shaftesbury is “a better writer”, Hutcheson is “a better philosopher” and “the form of Hutcheson’s philosophizing is much closer

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, p. 118.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> A. ASHLEY COOPER, Earl of SHAFTESBURY, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, in *Characteristiks of Men; Manners, Opinions, Times*, (1737 edition) ed. by D. den Uyl, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2000, vol. II, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Ivi, p. 173, quoted by GILL, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> GILL, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 132.

Luigi Turco Philosophy and religion. Some recent books on British moralists

than Shaftesbury's to that of contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy"<sup>47</sup>. The argumentative style of Hutcheson's *Enquiry on Virtue* excites a great deal of comments by Gill. Nevertheless, despite the sixty-three pages devoted to Hutcheson, and the nineteen pages of notes (against fifty-four and five dedicated to Shaftesbury), there is much that is not touched on by Gill's account. Take, for example Hutcheson's moral arithmetic, his introduction of public sense or the relationship between ethics and natural law. Why? I believe that Gill's favourite labels, Positive and Negative Answers to the Human Nature Question – and the new Copernican Revolution in ethics – have never proved in his book so useless as in the Hutcheson case.

I do not want to linger on the long part on Hume that concludes Gill's book and on his thirty pages of notes, where Gill discusses a large amount of Hume's literature. While I would agree with much that is said about the first part of Hume's book on Morality – especially where Gill states that part two and three “are incompatible with Hutcheson's moral sense theory”<sup>48</sup> – I find that the subsequent chapter on Hume's associative moral sentiments is much less clear than Hume himself and that much of the obscurity comes from the positive or negative answer to Human Nature Question. Again, in commenting on the artificial origin of justice Gill has good sense enough to compare Hume's view with the Mandeville, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury views. But I leave any comment on the last two chapters of his book to the patient scrutiny of the analytic philosopher.

There are other books published in the last decade that could support my hypothesis: Paul Russell's book is one of them and I do not want to repeat what I said last year<sup>49</sup>.

However, on the whole, what is my hypothesis? My hypothesis was that focusing on the relationship between religion and ethics, perhaps is a fashionable attitude, but has not produced a better understanding of the British moral debate.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 213.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Russell's *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Scepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*, Oxford University Press, 2008 was presented by the author and discussed in the *Humean Readings* 2009.