

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE STOIC TRADITION in 2016,

available online: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-the-Stoic-Tradition/Sellers/p/book/9780415660754>.

Stoicism and the Scottish Enlightenment

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Much of intellectual life in eighteenth-century Scotland is marked by the phenomenon nowadays called the “Scottish Enlightenment” – a flourishing exchange of ideas in a quite remarkably tolerant public space, involving thinkers interested in topics like philosophy, ethics, religion, psychology, history, law, politics, the natural sciences and the arts. Many shared a belief in the possibility of improving the world in both natural and moral matters. Some famous authors associated with the Scottish Enlightenment are Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith, to whom this chapter is going to devote much attention, Hugh Blair, George Campbell, Adam Ferguson, Henry Home Lord Kames, Thomas Reid, William Robertson and Dugald Stewart.

Scotland before the Enlightenment was not devoid of interest in classical antiquity, yet during the eighteenth century one can identify an increased interest in Greek and Latin authors – in particular in the Stoics and Cicero, and slightly less so in the Epicureans and the Sceptics (Harris 2009: 161). When analyzing the implicit influence of Stoic ideas upon thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment and their explicit treatment of the Stoics, one should bear in mind two risks. One is to see “Stoics” or “Neostoics” too readily, for example by stretching nomenclature and calling someone a Stoic just in virtue of ambiguous commonplace statements in favor of controlling the passions or against the pursuit of riches, for a view of human nature as sociable, or for considering virtue as something not unpleasant. One should be similarly careful with the loose use of concepts in eighteenth-century polemics. The

second, opposite danger is to rely on far too rigid classifications, which would render invisible interesting influences, proximities and overlaps between early modern and ancient thinkers, keeping us from understanding how ideas were used in new contexts for new purposes.

Given the absence of systematic attempts to re-build a Stoic philosophy, it may not be apposite to speak of the presence of genuine Stoicism in the Scottish Enlightenment. With the famous exception of Hume, however, many Scottish thinkers undeniably expressed positive views of some (but not all) Stoic philosophers, and of some (but not all) of the central Stoic tenets. Some of these they appear to have integrated into their new philosophies in more or less eclectic ways, often motivated by the Enlightenment's interest in a Science of Man. The favorite sources seem to have been Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus and Cicero rather than Seneca, Zeno and Diogenes Lærtius, and inspiration was found in Stoic moral philosophy rather than cosmology, theology or logic.

It is equally often noted that the Scottish Enlightenment was quite open to Christianity – again with the well-known exception of Hume, and in contrast to the French Enlightenment. Many thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment spent some considerable effort on showing the compatibility of certain Stoic principles with certain Christian ones. Commentators thus frequently characterize the Scottish Enlightenment as marked by “Christian Stoicism”.ⁱ This seems not inappropriate, yet the notion of Stoicism is notoriously vague, and Christianity underwent fiery debates on orthodoxy – questions about providence, predestination, mankind's moral status, the nature of God and Christ, the interpretation of the scriptures and the sacraments, the status of revelation, and many others frequently provoked more than just polite debates amongst theologians only. It is therefore crucial to ask *which* variety or principles of Christianity were conjoined with *which* variety or principles of Stoicism. Answering such questions becomes even more pressing if one takes into account that during the seventeenth century, a common view was that Christianity and Stoicism were strictly

incompatible: Scottish Calvinists, and Augustinians elsewhere in Europe, suspected Stoicism of being a heresy that contradicted fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, or even of being a type of atheism.ⁱⁱ This contrast suggests that a significant shift must have taken place so that a “Christian Stoicism” could become the acceptable background it was for many during the Scottish Enlightenment.

Christianity and Stoicism in Scotland before the Enlightenment

Seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy bears many marks of Calvinism’s struggle over orthodoxy. One landmark of seventeenth-century Scottish Reformed efforts towards doctrinal unity is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, adopted by the Kirk in 1647. This document held an important place in Scotland far beyond the Enlightenment – in spite of various political developments and disputes regarding church government in the seventeenth century, and in spite of a remarkable shift in the eighteenth century towards emphasizing the importance of moral practice over doctrinal orthodoxy. The *Confession* is structured around the Calvinist doctrines of predestination, original sin, postlapsarian corruption and dependence on divine grace for faith, good works and salvation. In the present state we are declared to be “dead in Sin, and wholly defiled in all the Faculties and Parts of Soul and Body”, and “utterly undisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all Good, and wholly inclined to all Evil” (*Confession* VI.ii.; iv.). It is not in our power to will the good, to perform truly good works, or to cultivate virtue – moral regeneration and salvation is achieved through saving faith only, which cannot be merited or achieved through our own efforts (*Confession* XI.iii.; XVI.vii.). It is the work of divine grace, freely bestowed by God on the few predestined elect. To think that human efforts towards moral self-improvement would make

one truly better is to fall prey to Pelagian or Arminian heresy, and to insist on the power of human reason as a help for salvation is Socinianism. Our nature, our faculties, and in particular the passions are corrupt and must be denied.

In seventeenth-century Scotland, academic and non-academic philosophers were surrounded by Calvinist doctrines, and if they did not endorse them, they had to confront them in ways that avoided more serious problems. In numerous Latin *Theses philosophicæ* written by university regents, the sections on moral philosophy contain references to the above-mentioned Calvinist doctrines. Discussions of Aristotle's and Descartes' ethics, for example, are often followed by critical reactions to these philosophers' ignorance or undue neglect of the Fall.ⁱⁱⁱ Outside the academic context, the non-renouncing Covenanter and first Lord Arniston James Dundas (1620–1679) penned a manuscript entitled *Idea philosophiæ moralis*, developing a profoundly Calvinist moral philosophy. Dundas jointly criticizes Seneca and Descartes for contradicting the doctrine of the Fall and proclaiming that it is in our power to be virtuous and happy (Broadie, *forthcoming*).

The relation between Stoicism and Christianity (in the understanding of orthodox Calvinism) is knotty. On the one hand, one might find quite significant thematic overlaps: most importantly, both strongly insist on the rejection of, say, things commonly thought valuable – such as riches, honor, and life (the Stoic “externals”). Both highlight the importance of other, truly valuable goods, combined with a practical emphasis on self-command and self-denial, and with a negative view of the passions. One might furthermore want to detect overlaps in their views regarding determinism, fate, predestination and providence – an uncomfortable point that Calvinists undertake substantial intellectual efforts to reject, however. Also, one might wish to relate the Stoic *hêgemonikon* to a Christian conception of natural conscience, explaining how the Gentiles could be “a law unto themselves” (*Rom.* 2, 14). If orthodox Calvinists allow for this move, they also insist that not

being acquainted with the Bible provides no excuse for sinning against the divine law.^{iv} One of the most important contrasts with Stoicism signaled by orthodox Calvinists and Augustinians in general concerns the Stoic claim that virtue is in some sense in harmony with our nature. This gives reason too much power and leaves it in the hands of corrupt postlapsarian humans to cultivate virtue, reach genuine happiness and work towards salvation. On such grounds, the Stoics are often reproached with pride and vanity. In the Scottish Enlightenment, however, the Stoic approach to self-cultivation becomes a very attractive point. Is this a mere shift in emphasis from doctrine towards moral practice, or a genuine rejection of fundamental Calvinist principles?

The academic *Theses philosophicae* rarely contain explicit discussions of Stoicism, but where they do, they demonstrate a generally critical attitude. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Stoics are commonly aligned with Hobbes because of their theory of the *fatum* (e.g. Middleton 1675: 21; Boyd 1693: 7), and they get criticized alongside Descartes for their claim that postlapsarian human beings could acquire control over the passions (Forbes 1680: §IX). With the reception in Scotland of the ethics of Descartes and of Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More, another type of criticism appears more frequently, namely the rejection of the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*. Explicitly against the Stoics, and implicitly against Calvinist orthodoxy, the passions are presented as a useful part of human nature which ethics shall teach us how to govern duly (e.g. Middleton 1675: 22; Boyd 1693: 6-7). More's *Enchiridion Ethicum* was present in several Scottish university curricula until the visitation by Presbyterian committees in the 1690s, and it is marked by Stoic ideas, albeit rejecting *apatheia*. The Cambridge Platonists' treatment of notions like conscience, the *hêgemonikon* and the moral sense, their emphasis on natural sociability and the naturalness of virtue are absorbed by several Scottish academic philosophers, and strongly reemerge in Hutcheson.

Stoicism may have been viewed rather critically in seventeenth-century Calvinist Scotland, but there are most interesting exceptions, notably Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh (1636/38–1691). In the 1660s, Mackenzie published several collections of non-academic essays that explicitly embrace Stoicism, including *Religio Stoici* (1663), *Solitude preferr'd to Publick Employment* (1665) and *The Moral History of Frugality: With its Opposite Vices* (1691). Besides writing on traditional Stoic themes, arguing that virtue is its own reward, and that it is easier to be virtuous than vicious, Mackenzie's engagement with Stoicism in *Religio Stoici* is heavily concerned with the tensions between Scottish Presbyterians and Episcopalians. Mackenzie criticizes "the Doctrine of Predestination, as some teach it; wherein they well have Man to play the mere Spectator in his own Salvation" (Mackenzie 1713: 19). Mackenzie instead wants to preserve our power and responsibility, and claims that each creature has "innate Qualities, sufficient to act every thing requisite for its Subsistence" (*ibid.*), with God keeping a "Prerogative Royal, a Power to bend and bow these Inclinations upon extraordinary Occasions, for the Good of the Universe" (Mackenzie 1713: 20). Such a position "seems to suit best with the Principles, both of Christianity and Stoicism. With Christianity, because it gives a Check to Presumption, and suffers not Man to think of himself the sole Arbiter of his own Condition", and "with Stoicism, because it pulls the Hands of a Sluggard from his Bosom, and sets them at Work to prepare for himself, and not to repose his unreasonable Hopes upon Divine Providence; which only keeps those from sinking, who endeavour to swim." (*ibid.*)

At the dawn of the Enlightenment: Stoicism and Christianity in Hutcheson's ethics of benevolence

The Scottish eighteenth century appears to be much more favorable to Stoic ideas than the seventeenth century, albeit not univocally so. The philosophy of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), who is sometimes controversially called the “father” of the Scottish Enlightenment, makes manifest some important developments in the early eighteenth century. Hutcheson’s interest in Stoic ideas is most prominent in his treatment of the passions, their cultivation and their relation to virtue, in the question of the moral faculty, and the question of providence. Originally from Ireland, Hutcheson studied in Glasgow under the moral philosopher Gershom Carmichael and the controversial unorthodox theologian John Simson, succeeding Carmichael in the Glasgow chair of moral philosophy in 1729. It seems that Hutcheson was the first academic moral philosopher in Scotland to adopt a relatively important body of Stoic ideas, together with Carmichael and the Aberdonian George Turnbull.

Like many subsequent proponents of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hutcheson had a lively interest in Shaftesbury’s writings, with which he became acquainted in the Molesworth circle in Dublin. In often strongly Stoic terms, Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) suggest against Hobbes, the Epicureans and others that both selfish and social (or natural) affections – in particular the *storgê* or familial affections – are a natural ingredient of human psychology (Shaftesbury 2001: Vol. 1, 73ff.). Virtue, or moral goodness, requires having these affections in their natural degree, and furthermore a capacity “of forming general Notions of Things”, or a moral sense, which makes the affections the object of reflection (Shaftesbury 2001: Vol. 2, 16). With leanings on the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury expounds a conception of the moral sense as part of a rational faculty, approaching the Stoic *hêgemonikon*, and he rejects Locke’s attack on innate ideas by invoking a *sensus communis* and preconceptions, or *prolēpseis*. Given the belief in a universe ordered by a benevolent Deity for the good of its creatures, the discipline of our desires and emotions, and of the judgments and “fancies” which underlie them, plays a crucial role in Shaftesbury’s

moral philosophy, as does the cultivation of the moral judgment through philosophizing. Commentators have pointed out that Shaftesbury has an elitist conception of moral virtue, which might be interpreted as another Stoic feature. The extent to which Shaftesbury sees his moral enterprise inspired by Stoicism, especially in the variety of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, becomes even more obvious when one consults his unpublished works, in particular his notebooks, the *Askêmata*, and manuscripts like the *Pathologia*. All over Europe, and throughout the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury's philosophy was very influential, and he may be considered one of the crucial thinkers through whom Stoic ideas made their way into the Enlightenment.^v

Hutcheson was furthermore influenced by the Cambridge Platonists (who were in turn very important for Shaftesbury), and by Protestant natural law theory. This latter's connecting virtues like justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude to the language of duties to God, others and self, its elaborate accounts of self-cultivation, and its efforts to combine Stoic and Christian ideas, proved particularly fruitful to the transporting of Stoic ideas into early eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy. The moral philosophy of Hutcheson's English contemporary Joseph Butler, which incorporated a variety of Stoic elements, most crucially an interpretation of the Stoic conception of virtue as *vita secundum naturam* in his own moral psychology, and a notion of conscience with both Christian and Stoic leanings, also played a role in the development of Hutcheson's philosophy. Hutcheson's affinity with Stoic ideas clarifies some of his criticisms of Mandeville, the notorious author of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714/1723). Mandeville attacked Shaftesbury and the Stoics in an ambiguous Augustinian tone, insisting on the dominance of pride, vanity and flattery in human nature and society, and on the artificiality of human virtues like honor and politeness.

Hutcheson's moral philosophy influenced much of the Scottish Enlightenment, and his blend of a relatively selective use of Stoic ideas with his interpretation of Christianity reflects

some of the fundamental changes in philosophy and religion in the early eighteenth century. In tension with the orthodox emphasis on corruption, Hutcheson insisted on the practical dimension of moral philosophy as an effective guide to self-cultivation, allowing us to “*improve* our natural Powers, and to rectify accidental Disorders incident unto them.” (Hutcheson 2002: 4) Hutcheson argues most famously for two claims: firstly, that we have a moral sense indicating the moral value of an action without the necessary interference of reason or education, and secondly, that we are naturally motivated by benevolence in the sense of an ultimately disinterested desire to promote the good of others.

Hutcheson presents this second claim as a refutation of the position that explains every action as ultimately motivated by self-love, a view he attributes to Hobbes, Pufendorf, the Epicureans and the “Christian Moralists” – which may mean the French Augustinians and the Scottish Presbyterians alike (Hutcheson 2002: 134; Maurer 2013: 291ff.). Hutcheson’s own view, that there is natural benevolence, he sees endorsed by thinkers like Shaftesbury and the “Antiqui” or ancient moralists – meaning in particular the Stoics and Cicero (Hutcheson 2006, 205; Brooke 2012, 161). Hutcheson thus makes the Stoics precursors of his claim that we are naturally sociable. It is telling, however, that he does not acknowledge that many interpretations of the Stoic *oikeiôsis* mention a psychological primacy of self-preservation – he focuses on the Stoics’ emphasis on the reality of other-directed affections, such as the *storgê* and friendship. Hutcheson’s interest in the theme of sociability makes him treat Hobbes and the Stoics as opponents, like Shaftesbury, whereas in the dominant seventeenth-century focus on questions of free will and determinism, Hobbes and the Stoics were often grouped together. In any case, given that the Stoics were suspicious from the point of view of orthodox Calvinism, Hutcheson’s position seems quite bold, and his claim that benevolence is a natural virtuous tendency – his interpretation of *vita secundum naturam* – creates tensions

since it can equal rejecting the doctrines of postlapsarian corruption and dependence on grace.^{vi}

His claims about the moral sense Hutcheson sees again backed by Shaftesbury and the Stoics. In his inaugural oration *De naturali hominum Socialitate (On the Natural Sociability of Mankind)* (1730), Hutcheson uses the Stoic term *hêgemonikon* to refer to natural conscience and the moral sense, appropriating the traditions he finds in both Stoicism and Christianity (Hutcheson 2006: 199; Rivers 2000: 213f.; Brooke 2012: 161ff.). Following the Stoics, Shaftesbury and the Cambridge Platonists on this point means again positioning himself against Calvinist orthodoxy, according to whom our corrupt faculties are ineffective in directing us towards the good without the Bible and divine grace. This contrast is most clearly visible in their respective views of the present moral state of human nature, where for Hutcheson evident signs are preserved that we are “designed for every virtue, for all honest and illustrious things” (Hutcheson 2006: 200). One of the key sources for this positive view of Hutcheson is clearly Stoicism.

Another crucial feature of Hutcheson’s moral philosophy that resonates well with Stoicism is his assertion in the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* that the “Perfection of Virtue consists in ‘having the *universal calm Benevolence*, the prevalent Affection of the Mind, so as to limit and counteract not only the *selfish Passions*, but even the *particular kind Affections*’” (Hutcheson 2002: 8). Calm universal benevolence towards humanity is the highest virtue, as opposed to passionate partial forms of benevolence such as pity, and calm partial forms of benevolence, such as parental love. This might echo the Stoic cosmopolitanism inherent in the theory of *oikeiôsis*. Partly inspired by the natural law theories of Pufendorf and Carmichael, Hutcheson formulates recommendations for the cultivation of virtue: Violent passions should be stopped from leading into action, opinions should be corrected and assent suspended in cases of uncertainty,

benevolence should be strengthened with the support of self-love (Maurer 2010, 42f.). Similarly, the moral sense should be strengthened against potential corruption from custom and education, spirit of faction, false opinions of divine Laws and happiness, or violent passions (Hutcheson 2004: 137–46). Still, Hutcheson's general confidence in the natural power of the moral sense seems more robust than Shaftesbury's and the Stoics', and he attributes reason a more limited role.

In the *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson proposes a calculus for computing the moral value of actions (Hutcheson 2004: 128–32). An agent's virtue is determined by his benevolent intentions to promote the public good, in proportion to his natural abilities. The perfection of virtue is “when the Being acts to the utmost of his Power for the publick Good” (Hutcheson 2004: 130). Thus, even a quite powerless agent may reach the most perfect virtue – a point Hutcheson links with an interesting reference to the Stoics: “And this may shew us the only Foundation for the boasting of the Stoicks, ‘That a Creature suppos'd Innocent, by pursuing Virtue with his utmost Power, may in Virtue equal the Gods.’” (*Ibid.*) Hutcheson's own, similar claim, which is hardly compatible with the Calvinist doctrine of postlapsarian corruption, is that “no external Circumstances of Fortune, no involuntary Disadvantages, can exclude any Mortal from the most heroick Virtue” (Hutcheson 2004: 134).

In his ethics of benevolence, Hutcheson strictly distinguishes between the natural good or the *utile* (pleasure), and the moral good or the *honestum* (benevolence). The importance of this distinction is highlighted by a quotation from Cicero's *De officiis* I.iv. on the title page of the *Inquiry* (Hutcheson 2004: 3). Hutcheson argues that the highest pleasures we can experience are those of virtue. The *honestum*, however, is irreducible to the *utile*, as proven by the moral sense: if an action is performed with the goal of experiencing the moral pleasures, these cannot be gained, since the action is not disinterested and thus not an instance

of benevolence. Given God's providence, the two dimensions ultimately coincide in that benevolent actions provide the agent with the pleasures of the moral sense, compensating her for the potential pains involved in virtue (Hutcheson 2002: 106f.). This is Hutcheson's interpretation of the Stoic idea that virtue is its own reward, or that the *honestum* and the *utile* ultimately converge. Benevolence is so central for Hutcheson that he also analyses the four cardinal virtues in terms of it: These "obtain that Name, because they are Dispositions universally necessary to promote publick Good, and denote Affections toward rational Agents; otherwise there would appear no Virtue in them." (Hutcheson 2004: 102)

Hutcheson's affinities with some Stoic ideas should not make us think that he endorses all the central Stoic tenets, let alone that he would develop a coherent Neo-Stoic system – James Moore is right to point out that Hutcheson was "eclectic" in his Stoicism (Moore 2007: 135ff.). Some Stoic ideas about theology, for example, were hardly compatible with Hutcheson's understanding of Christianity. Regarding moral philosophy, Hutcheson places much less emphasis on reason, and he has a much more favorable view of the emotions, in line with earlier critics of the Stoic teaching on apathy. Referring to Cicero's presentation of the Stoic theory of the emotions, Hutcheson takes on board the distinction between calm and violent emotions by distinguishing between affections and passions, using however Cicero's table of the four Stoic *perturbationes* or *pathê* to classify the calm affections, and not mentioning the three *constantiae* or *eupatheiai*. Passions he defines as affections coming with additional "violent *confused Sensations*, connected with *bodily Motions*" (Hutcheson 2001: 51). The outcome is that for Hutcheson, there is a calm, and thus acceptable affection towards a present evil. This was famously absent from the original Stoic table with only three *constantiae*, which was tied to their distinction in moral ontology between internals and externals (Maurer 2010: 39f.).

This significant deviation dovetails with Hutcheson's insistence on our natural concern for the well-being of others. Take the example of pity, the emotional reaction upon facing the misery of others: Hutcheson mentions that pity could block reason and motivate harmful actions, but the passion is an expression of our social nature and should thus not be eradicated in self-cultivation. What counts is the right government of our emotions – the ideal of apathy is part of the “Vanity of some of the lower rate Philosophers of the *Stoick Sect*”, whose “boasting of an undisturbed Happiness and Serenity” is inconsistent with the order of nature (Hutcheson 2002: 83). Virtue involves being vulnerable to the well-being of others.

Hutcheson's attempt to combine Christian ideas with what he sees as the Stoic emphasis on natural sociability is most apparent in his and James Moor's anonymously published edition of *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonius* (1742). Hutcheson and Moor see the *Meditations* as inciting “a constant inflexible charity, and goodwill and compassion toward our fellows” (Hutcheson and Moor 2008: 3). They align Marcus Aurelius' references to the *hêgemonikon* with conscience and the moral sense, stress the theme of governing the passions and cultivating virtue, and highlight his confidence in the goodness and sociability of human nature. The emperor's humble submission to providence, and his conception of the universe as a system ordered by a beneficent deity for the ultimate good of its creatures is regularly highlighted. One of Hutcheson's notes explains that “many evils are even requisite means of reclaiming the less perfect beings from their vices, and setting them upon the pursuit of their truest happiness” (Hutcheson and Moor 2008: 64n). In the *Essay*, Hutcheson wrote, referring to Simplicius on Epictetus: “We know that our State is *absolutely Good*, notwithstanding a considerable Mixture of Evil” (Hutcheson 2002: 43). Regarding Christianity more specifically, Hutcheson's and Moor's *Introduction* deplores the persecutions of Christians by Christians, mentions the Apostle Paul's own persecutions, and

stresses the importance of morality over doctrine, which is the tone of much of the Scottish Enlightenment:

'Tis needless, I hope, to prevent another silly prejudice; as if because the author was not a Christian, he could have no real piety or virtue acceptable to God, none of these divine influences, which we are taught are necessary to every good work. (Hutcheson 2008: 21f.)^{vii}

The Skeptic Hume on the Stoics and religion

Hutcheson's moral philosophy and his blend of Stoic and Christian ideas contributed to shaping the Scottish Enlightenment. His optimistic view of human nature as naturally benevolent and capable of cultivating virtue, his semi-Stoic treatment of the passions, his account of providence, his interpretation of the possibility of being happy relatively independent of one's circumstances thanks to the pleasures of the moral sense, his understanding of the Stoic dictum that virtue is to live according to our benevolent nature, and his emphasis on a dichotomy between Epicureans and Stoics regarding the reality of benevolence constituted much of the background from which authors like Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, Hugh Blair and others continued their philosophical efforts. If commentators generally agree that the Scottish Enlightenment was characterized by a blend of Christian and Stoic ideas, they also agree that David Hume (1711–1776) is an exception to this trend – both regarding Christianity and Stoicism. Hume's epistemology is marked by Skeptic ideas, broadly speaking. This affects his moral philosophy, and his writings on religion suggest that he was at least very critical of the central tenets of Christianity. In

general, when it comes to positioning Hume with respect to ancient thinkers, he is seen in proximity of the Epicureans or the Sceptics, and as a critic of Stoicism (Harris 2009: 163f.).

The philosophical and personal differences and tensions between the “Skeptic” Hume and the “Christian Stoic” Hutcheson have been widely discussed. Hume’s confidence in human sociability and benevolence is much more limited than Hutcheson’s, and his conception of virtue and the moral sense make room for features Hutcheson rejects. (Moore 2007: 162) points out Hume’s aspiration to be a truthful “anatomist” rather than a “painter” of human nature, his treating natural abilities like intelligence and good humor as virtues, and not just benevolence, his linking the moral sense to sympathy, and his conception of justice as an artificial virtue rather than as grounded on natural benevolence. Such differences also emerge in their respective views of Stoic ideas. Commentators have discussed how Hume’s interpretation of Cicero’s *honestum* as humanity in the sense of a faint “feeling for others that links all mankind in an aversion to cruelty” differs from Hutcheson’s understanding of the *honestum* as benevolence, that is the desire to promote the public good (Moore 2002: 385; Harris 2009: 173).

A passage from the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) will serve to introduce Hume’s criticisms of Stoic moral philosophy:

It is certain, that, while we aspire to the magnanimous firmness of the philosophic sage, and endeavour to confine our pleasures altogether within our own minds, we may, at last, render our philosophy like that of *Epictetus*, and other *Stoics*, only a more refined system of selfishness, and reason ourselves out of all virtue, as well as social enjoyment.
(Hume 2000: 35)

Hume takes up the Augustinian criticism that the Stoic system is ultimately selfish and morally problematic, yet the target is different. Rather than denouncing the vanity of the Stoics’ confidence in self-cultivation, Hume points at the problematic dimensions of the ideal

of apathy. Discussing the Stoic attitude to compassion and humanity, Hume's later withdrawn *Essay Of Moral Prejudices* attacks the treatment of pity by Epictetus – in a similar tone Hutcheson used when speaking only of the “lower Stoicks”:

When your Friend is in Affliction, says *Epictetus*, you may counterfeit a Sympathy with him, if it give him Relief; but take Care not to allow any Compassion to sink into your Heart, or disturb that Tranquility, which is the Perfection of Wisdom. (Hume 1987: 540)

Similarly, the fourth Appendix to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) accuses Epictetus of having “scarcely ever mentioned the sentiment of humanity and compassion, but in order to put his disciples on their guard against it” (Hume 2006: 107). Many moral philosophers who, like Hutcheson, tied their accounts of morality to principles like sympathy or benevolence (which are in some cases presented as “Christian” principles), might have agreed that the conception of virtue presented by *some* Stoics requires a too detached and morally problematic stance towards our fellow human beings. Hume, however, directs his criticism against the central Stoic figure Epictetus himself, and not just against some “lower Stoicks”.

More generally, Hume criticizes the effects of the grave philosophic Endeavour after Perfection, which, under Pretext of reforming Prejudices and Errors, strikes at all the most endearing Sentiments of the Heart, and all the most useful Byasses and Instincts, which can govern a human Creature. The *Stoics* were remarkable for this Folly among the Antients; and I wish some of more venerable Characters in latter Times had not copy'd them too faithfully in this Particular. (Hume 1987: 539; see also Stewart 1991: 285f.; Moore 2007: 156f.)

The *philosophical ideals* of the Stoics, who want us to eradicate some of the most natural “Sentiments of the Heart”, such as compassion and humanity, are to be condemned – Hume's conception of human nature does not accord with their perfectionism. From a different angle,

Hume alludes to the Stoics' vanity in the *Natural History of Religion* (1757), where he reproaches them for having bestowed "many magnificent and even impious epithets on their sage, that he alone was rich, free, a king, and equal to the immortal gods" (Hume 1998, 174; see also Stewart 1991: 287; Brooke 2012: 179f.).

Hume also expresses serious doubts about the *practicability* of Stoicism, since too much power is attributed to reason, the weakness of which Hume emphasizes throughout his philosophy. In the frequently discussed *Letter to a Physician* (1734), allegedly written after a mental breakdown, Hume points out the negative influence of the Stoic ideal of self-cultivation on our lives.^{viii} He writes how, impressed by Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch's

beautiful Representations of Virtue & Philosophy, I undertook the Improvement of my Temper & Will, along with my Reason & Understanding. I was continually fortifying myself with Reflections against Death, & Poverty, & Shame, & Pain, & all the other Calamities of Life. (Hume 2011: 14)

The crucial theme is the rejection of externals such as riches, life and health as indifferent, and the exclusive focus on the internal good of virtue, which is advertised in Stoic therapy and self-cultivation. In an active life, such ideas might serve as guidelines, but "in Solitude they serve to little other Purpose, than to waste the Spirits" (*ibid.*) This dovetails with Hume's general criticism that the Ancient moralists philosophized "without regarding human Nature" (*ibid.*: 16).

The unnatural Stoic ideals of self-perfection have their equivalent on the side of religion, where Hume rejects the problematic moral consequences of equally unnatural "monkish" (and Calvinist) virtues like self-denial and humility (Hume 2006: 73; Hume 1998: 163). In *A Dialogue*, Hume writes about the Augustinian Pascal that he "made constant profession of humility and abasement, of the contempt and hatred of himself; and endeavoured to attain these supposed virtues, as far as they are attainable." (Hume 2006: 122)

Pascal's austerities, and his rejection of even the most innocent pleasures ultimately lead to an artificial life, departing from the maxims of common reason and bound by religious superstition and philosophical enthusiasm (Hume 2006: 123).

In his philosophy of religion, Hume attacks the Stoics not only for their superstition and enthusiasm, but more particularly for their ideas about providence – a point with significant implications. In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he addresses the question of liberty and necessity, and his criticism against the Stoics evidently concerns the religious hypothesis in general. Hume's target is the idea of a whole "ordered with perfect benevolence", according to which every "physical ill" has its specific place:

From this theory, some philosophers, the ancient *Stoics* among the rest, derived a topic of consolation under all afflictions, while they taught their pupils that those ills under which they laboured were, in reality, goods to the universe; and that to an enlarged view, which could comprehend the whole system of nature, every event became an object of joy and exultation. (Hume 2000: 76)

This philosophical theory is ineffectual in ordinary practice, and irritates the man "under the racking pains of the gout" rather than consoling him. The conclusion lies at hand that the religious hypothesis as held by many of Hume's contemporaries, has the same defect. Contrasting Hume's position with Hutcheson's aforementioned remarks on providence reveals one of the most striking differences between the two authors' attitudes to both Christianity and Stoicism. Whereas Hutcheson tried to combine some broadly Christian and broadly Stoic streams of thought, Hume confronts them both. However difficult it may be to reach an adequate interpretation of Hume's four essays on happiness (*The Epicurean*, *The Stoic*, *The Platonist* and *The Sceptic*) (1742), the voice of the Skeptic, who objects to the Stoic – who insists that virtue produces happiness – that "no perfect or regular distribution of

happiness and misery is ever, in this life, to be expected” (Hume 1987: 178) seems to echo Hume’s own views.^{ix}

Smith and Christian Stoicism: Conscience, self-command and humanity

Adam Smith (1723 – 1790), who studied in Glasgow under Hutcheson, and later followed him in the chair of moral philosophy, is another central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment quite commonly classified as “Christian Stoic”. In their *Introduction* to Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D. D. Raphael and J. Macfie wrote:

Smith’s ethical doctrines are in fact a combination of Stoic and Christian virtues – or, in philosophical terms, a combination of Stoicism and Hutcheson. Hutcheson resolved all virtue into benevolence, a philosophical version of the Christian ethic of love. At an early stage in TMS, Adam Smith supplements this with Stoic self-command. (Raphael and Macfie 1976: 6)

That such general claims need further specification is evident from the discussion of Hutcheson, whose very emphasis on benevolence was considered as incompatible with true Christianity by one faction in the Kirk as it contradicts the doctrine of postlapsarian corruption. In Smith’s time, doctrinal orthodoxy was less pressed upon, partly due to the Moderate party’s influence in the Kirk. This institutional shift considerably changed the context for philosophers like Smith, encouraged the spreading of new ideas, and connected with a favorable reception of Stoicism, which seems to have offered interesting options especially for moral philosophy.^x Explicit discussions of Stoic ideas in Smith’s moral philosophy exemplify interesting features of their reception in the aftermath of Hutcheson, and commentators have suggested that a variety of central themes in Smith’s *The Theory of*

Moral Sentiments (1759, 6th edition 1790) are rooted in Stoicism, in particular Smith's account of sympathy, his insistence on self-command, his concept of conscience and his treatment of providence and tranquility.^{xi} Smith's changing views of Christianity should also be kept in mind: (Rivers 2000: 260) suggests that "[t]owards the end of his life [Smith] became increasingly critical of Christian doctrine and Christian virtues".

Smith is often interestingly ambiguous in his use of Stoic and Christian concepts. He calls the moral faculty, or conscience, the "great demigod in the breast" (Smith 2002: 291 – *TMS* 6.3.25). This is reminiscent of the Stoic *hêgemonikon*, and of the tradition continued by the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. However, Smith strongly emphasizes the gradual development through social interaction of the "idea of exact propriety and perfection" upon which the "wise and virtuous man directs his principal attention" in his moral judgments (*ibid.*). Smith's developmental and naturalizing approach distinguishes his conception of conscience from much of the earlier writers, and with questions about his account of providence this has provoked discussions about his relation to both Christian natural theology and Stoicism (Heydt, *forthcoming*).

Smith highlights the importance of self-command in connection with the moral faculty: self-command supports the fixing of the person's attention on the impartial spectator, so that the agent can "identify himself with the ideal man within the breast" (Smith 2002: 171 – *TMS* 3.3.28). This helps to establish impartial moral judgments and happiness independent of one's misfortunes. Self-command furthermore aims at controlling selfish passions and partial natural feelings, such as anger, pride and vanity (Smith 2002: 282 – *TMS* 6.3.7; 299ff. – *TMS* 6.3.32ff.). For Smith, then, "the man of the most perfect virtue [...] is he who joins, to the most perfect command of his own original and selfish feelings, the most exquisite sensibility both to the original and sympathetic feelings of others" (Smith 2002: 176 – *TMS* 3.3.35) – in other words, Smith's moral ideals combine the allegedly Stoic virtues of self-command and

humanity. The connected distinction between two standards for morality – ideal virtue and accessible propriety – and its roots in the Stoic distinction between *honestum* and *decorum* has again provoked numerous discussions amongst commentators (Waszek 1984; Hanley 2009: 98; Forman-Barzilai 2010: 107–12).

For Smith too, the command of one's feelings should not aim at apathy. Smith criticizes the Stoic philosophy:

By the perfect apathy which it prescribes to us, by endeavouring, not merely to moderate, but to eradicate all our private, partial, and selfish affections, by suffering us to feel for whatever can befall ourselves, our friends, our country, not even the sympathetic and reduced passions of the impartial spectator, it endeavours to render us altogether indifferent and unconcerned in the success or miscarriage of every thing which Nature has prescribed to us as the proper business and occupation of our lives.
(Smith 2002: 345 – *TMS* 7.2.1.46)

In addition to the aspiration to indifference regarding outer events that concern others or ourselves, Smith's rejection of apathy condemns indifference regarding the inner "passions of the impartial spectator" – the seat of the moral faculty. The boundless cultivation of Stoic principles could lead to moral insensitivity. However, Smith also stipulates that when external events are not in our power, we should submit to divine providence in tranquility, a recommendation that one could interpret as both vaguely Christian and Stoic.

Smith's tonality regarding self-cultivation differs from Hutcheson's and the Stoics' in an interesting point. Hutcheson presented universal benevolence as the perfection of virtue and the proper aim of self-cultivation. Smith, however, strongly warns us not to neglect the inner circles in favor of cultivating the most distant one: To man is allotted "the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country: that he is occupied in contemplating the more sublime, can never be an excuse for his neglecting the more humble

department” (Smith 2002: 279 – *TMS* 7.2.3.6). Accordingly, commentators have highlighted that Smith rejects Stoic cosmopolitanism (Forman-Barzilai 2010: 124f.; Hanley 2009: 187), and that he insists on the importance of the inner circles for the moral reality of human creatures.^{xii} This becomes particularly clear in Smith’s discussion of parental love as a justified form of partiality. We rarely blame an excess in parental affection, and the “stoical apathy is, in such cases, never agreeable” (Smith 2002: 164). In the other dimension, Smith’s insisting on not neglecting the self in general, and on the positive aspects of self-love in particular oppose Hutcheson’s more critical view of self-love.

Smith’s aversion to both Stoic universalism and rigorist conceptions of Christianity becomes apparent when he discusses the need for “some sort of impartiality between ourselves and others”, and the need to “correct the inequalities of our passive feelings” regarding ourselves and others (Smith 2002: 160 – *TMS* 3.3.7). He juxtaposes two “severe” philosophical attempts to achieve this, namely that of the “whining and melancholy moralists” (which include Pascal), and that of the Stoics. The former “have laboured to increase our sensibility to the interests of others” (*ibid.* – *TMS* 3.3.9, 8) by attracting attention solely to the calamities of others – which leads to artificial commiseration and is useless, since we cannot help those who are “out of the sphere of our activity” (*ibid.* – *TMS* 3.3.9). Stoics like Epictetus, by contrast, have attempted to achieve impartiality “by diminishing our sensibility to what peculiarly concerns ourselves” (Smith 2002: 162 – *TMS* 3.3.11). Especially when we are directly concerned, self-command is crucial, but “stoical apathy” or extreme insensibility are misplaced regarding oneself and regarding others. (Smith 2002: 164 – *TMS* 3.3.14; 181 – *TMS* 3.3.44)

In book VII of *TMS*, Smith discusses different streams of Stoicism: “The independent and spirited, but often harsh Epictetus” mainly taught the “contempt of life and death” and “the most entire submission to the order of Providence”, whereas “the mild, the humane, the

benevolent Antonius” taught “the most complete contentment with every event which the current of human affairs could be possibly cast up” (Smith 2002: 339 – *TMS* 7.2.1.35). Smith seems more attracted to the second tonality in Stoicism, given his emphasis on humanity, sympathy, and public spirit. Yet even if Smith may lean towards the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius, the Epictetan theme of submission to providence with the goals of rendering oneself less vulnerable to external circumstances, and of acquiring happiness and natural tranquility, is important for him. The idea of a well ordered whole underlies Smith’s ethical outlook, and he combines this with an emphasis on the importance of the individual *qua* part of the whole. (Smith 2002: 325 – *TMS* 7.2.1.19) Most importantly, Smith sees morality, happiness and providence bound together:

[B]y acting according to the dictates of our moral faculties, we necessarily pursue the most effectual means for promoting the happiness of mankind, and may therefore be said, in some sense, to co-operate with the Deity, and to advance as far as in our power the plan of Providence. (Smith 2002: 193 – *TMS* 3.5.7)

Building on the theme of providence, it has furthermore been argued that Smith’s conception of the unintended beneficial effects for the public good of self-interested commercial behavior, or the “invisible hand” in his economic theory, should be understood in terms of a Stoic conception of providence that emphasizes the ultimate harmony of individual interests (Force 2003: 82f.; 234f.).

Concluding remarks

Various other proponents of the Scottish Enlightenment adopted Stoic ideas. William Robertson, historian and principal of Edinburgh University, had a lively interest in Stoicism,

and Hugh Blair's *Sermons* (1777) discuss many broadly Stoic themes like self-discipline and the government of the passions, constancy and tranquility. Adam Ferguson famously expressed his admiration for Stoic philosophy in his *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792), advertising its active dimension as opposed to retreat. This aspect is highlighted in Dugald Stewart's *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* (1828) as well, where the Stoics are also discussed through the lens of the *Dialogue concerning Happiness* (1744) by Shaftesbury's nephew James "Hermes" Harris. Thomas Reid's more critical discussion of Stoic ethics in the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788) as occasionally "beyond the pitch of human nature" because of their rejection of anything that is not in our power, is balanced by his admiration for their system and for "some who sincerely embraced it" (Reid 2010: 162f.).

The general impression that Enlightened thinkers in Scotland had indeed quite positive views of various Stoic ideas seems well grounded. In the attempt to combine less conservatively orthodox conceptions of religion with a new philosophy, Stoic ideas about providence, parts of their moral psychology, their emphasis on sociability, and their account of virtue as being in some sense in our nature were quite widely embraced and adapted, often accompanied by an emphasis on practical virtue's value over doctrinal orthodoxy. For the debates on innate ideas and reason, the Stoics offered interesting impulses. Their views of apathy and of the passions, and the connected moral ontology, however, were quite univocally rejected, and so were their paradoxes, much of their theology, and their favorable attitude to suicide.

Hume was the Enlightenment's exception in being generally more critical of the Stoics – but then again, he was an exception regarding suicide, since he questioned arguments against it. However, there were of course also attacks on the Stoics and their eighteenth-century proponents from another angle: orthodox Calvinists continued to condemn the very

combination of Christianity and Stoicism. John Witherspoon's *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753), a grim satirical attack on the members of the Moderate Party and Hume, exemplifies the conservatively orthodox Calvinists' views of the Moderates' leaning towards Stoicism. Witherspoon attacks Hume's expulsion of self-denial and humility from the virtues (Witherspoon 1763: ix), condemns the Moderates' emphasis on moral practice over doctrinal orthodoxy (*ibid.*: 29f.), and their interest in Shaftesbury and in the heathen philosophers. Marcus Aurelius in particular is mentioned in a sarcastic tone (*ibid.*: 30f.): "an eminent person, of the moderate character, says, his Meditations are the BEST book, that ever was written for forming the heart" (*ibid.*: 31; see also Rivers 2000: 188f.; Sher 1985: 57–9). Examples like these demonstrate that the answer to the question whether Stoicism and the Christian religion were compatible was far from univocally positive.^{xiii}

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Further Reading

For a concise introduction to the Scottish Enlightenment, see e.g. A. Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011). C. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) is the most recent book providing an excellent discussion of crucial themes in the reception of Stoicism in early modern Europe, with several chapters of relevance for understanding the Scottish Enlightenment (see esp. Chapters 5 and 7). I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* (2 Vols. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 and 2000) gives a broader context to the debates. J. Moore's and J. Harris' articles on Hutcheson and Hume provide fine insights into the reception of Stoicism by these two authors. G. Vivenza's *Adam Smith and the Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and F. Fonna-Barzilai's *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) address the issue in Smith in a detailed manner.

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i See e.g. Sher, 1985: 175ff.; Stewart 1991: 274, 289f., 294; Broadie 2009, 208; Broadie 2011: 146f.

ii See Brooke 2012, in particular chapters 4 and 6, for European examples.

iii See e.g. Adamson 1653; Forbes 1680.

iv Interestingly enough, orthodox thinkers in the eighteenth century were often emphasizing not the weakness but the strength of natural reason in combination with inexcusability, in order to counter Hume's skeptical attacks. See Ahnert, *forthcoming*.

v For a more extensive discussion of Shaftesbury's relation to Stoicism, see e.g. Rivers 2000: 120–32; Brooke 2012: 111–24; Maurer and Jaffro 2013.

vi See Moore 2013 on the tensions between Hutcheson and the orthodox Scottish Presbyterians.

vii Besides Moore and Silverthorne's *Introduction* to Hutcheson and Moor 2008, see Moore 2007: 157–9 on the translation of the *Meditations*, and Harris 2008 on the importance of the theme of providence elsewhere in Hutcheson's philosophy.

viii See e.g. Stewart 1991: 275f.; Moore 2007: 140; Harris 2009: 162; Brooke 2012: 175f.

ix For a more extensive discussion, see Stewart 1991: 278–83; Harris 2007: 223f.

x For more extensive discussions of these processes, see Sher 1985; Ahnert, *forthcoming*.

xi See Rivers 2000: 260; Forman-Barzilai 2010. However, commentators have suggested to interpret Smith's insistence on the virtue of propriety as an Aristotelian element (see Broadie 2010; Hanley 2009: 176). Haakonssen in Smith 2002: xxi interprets Smith as going "beyond the traditional opposition between Stoicism and Epicureanism". See also Vivenza 2001: 81–3.

xii This echoes Butler's Stoic interpretation of the Christian dictum that we should love our neighbors as ourselves in *Sermon* 12 (1726). Due to our limited capacities, we should not cultivate *universal* benevolence, but increase our sympathetic sensibility for "that part of the

universe, that part of mankind, that part of our country, which comes under our immediate notice, acquaintance, and influence” (Butler 1970: 111f.).

xiii I wish to thank Alexander Broadie, Peter Fosl, James Harris, Colin Heydt, Laurent Jaffro, Tom Jones, John Sellars and Jan Swearingen for comments on earlier versions of this chapter. This work was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation, grant number P300P1_147813.