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Stuart-Buttle, Timothy John orcid.org/0000-0003-4104-9807 (2020) *Hume, Cicero and eighteenth-century moral philosophy*. In: Johnston, Alexandre and Loughlin, Felicity, (eds.) *Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture. Metaforms* . Brill

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Hume, Cicero, and Eighteenth-Century Moral Philosophy

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The Ciceronian age held a particular allure for early modern philosophers, who were confronted with the bloody aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the continuing schisms to which it gave rise. In an age of rampant religious, political, and philosophical partisanship, in which rival sects defended their definitions of truth with the pen and sword, the late Roman Republic appeared to those of eirenic tastes to be an epoch of intellectual freedom. Humanist proponents of religious toleration, from Erasmus onwards, observed how in Cicero's time philosophers could disagree on even the most fundamental of doctrines, and yet do so politely. Cicero's dialogues, in which he mediated between the arguments of the rival philosophical sects, provided a model of how intellectual debate ought to be conducted. Notwithstanding their differences on speculative questions, the heathen philosophers lived peaceably together in a society guided by a shared, practical concern for the common good.² Even in the mid-eighteenth century the Ciceronian age retained its appeal for those philosophers, such as David Hume, who chafed against the tendency of less enlightened individuals to refuse to break bread with any whose views on purely speculative questions happened to differ from their own. To one of his critics, Hume proposed reviving "the happy times, when Atticus and Cassius the Epicureans, Cicero the Academic, and Brutus the Stoic, could, all of them, live in unreserved friendship together".³ As this chapter will attempt to show, however, Hume's admiration for "Cicero the Academic" went beyond this rather conventional yearning for the recrudescence of the benign spirit of the *libertas philosophandi*. As a philosopher in his own right, Hume argued, Cicero had something unique—and uniquely important—to say about the question which, in a Christian age, was the most vexed of all: the proper relationship between moral philosophy and moral theology. Hume invited his readers, almost all of whom could be expected to be well-versed in their Cicero, to recognise how his own moral theory and philosophy of religion were constructed upon Ciceronian (and sceptical) foundations. In so doing, however, Hume asked his readers to interpret Cicero's philosophical commitments in a very particular (and, when set against the context of most contemporary readings of Cicero, a very unusual) way.

In a footnote added to the 1764 edition of the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), Hume declared in uncharacteristically oracular fashion that "CICERO, ... in a dispute, which is chiefly verbal, must, on account of the author, carry an authority, from which there can be no appeal" (*EPM*, 106 n.72).⁴ Here, as Isabel Rivers observes, Hume "breath-takingly attributes a quasi-scriptural status" to Cicero's philosophical writings.⁵ Even more breath-taking, however, was the range of questions which Hume denominated "chiefly verbal". These were precisely the seemingly intractable issues upon which recent moral and political philosophers had disagreed most profoundly. The most pertinent included "the vulgar dispute concerning the *degrees* of benevolence or self-love,

¹ I am grateful to seminar audiences in Edinburgh and Antwerp for commenting helpfully on earlier versions of this essay.

² Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996).

³ Hume to [James Balfour], 15 Mar. 1753, in *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), i, 173. For a similar plea, see the "Dedication" (to John Home), in *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), ii; and for discussion, see James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 297–302.

⁴ *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): page references are provided in brackets in the text, as above.

⁵ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000), ii, 299.

which prevail in human nature”; whether morality, justice, and society were natural or artificial (*EPM*, 98-99); whether “pride” was “good or bad”; and whether only those actions motivated by disinterested benevolence were to be deemed virtuous (*EPM*, 106). These questions were, in turn, intimately related to another, denominated “merely verbal” by a dying Hume in a paragraph added to the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* in 1776: this regarded the nature and attributes of a divine being.⁶

In treating of all of these highly contentious points, Hume claimed to draw from Cicero’s incontestable authority. Whilst Hume’s general esteem for Cicero has been widely noted, the literature on the subject has scarcely scratched the surface. In part, this is because scholars interested in Hume’s relationship to Cicero have sought to address two, seemingly separable issues. The first is the nature of Hume’s epistemological scepticism, most fully developed in Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and subsequently offered in revised form in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748); and the second, the position adopted by Hume in a work—the *Dialogues*—which was clearly modelled on Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*.⁷ I contend that Hume’s presentation of Cicero can tell us a great deal more about his most fundamental philosophical objectives, and how he sought to advance them.

Hume’s interpretation of Cicero’s philosophical commitments was highly distinctive. Cicero was, in Hume’s hands, a uniquely eclectic philosopher, whose academic scepticism set him apart from the dogmatic philosophical sects by which he was surrounded.⁸ Most notably, this interpretation suggested that Cicero had been critical of many of the cardinal philosophical doctrines of both the Stoics and Epicureans: the two late Hellenistic sects whose thinking was widely held by contemporaries to exercise a pervasive influence on how early modern philosophers framed, and sought to address, the most important questions under discussion in the period.⁹ This, Hume suggested, explained why Cicero—unlike the dogmatic Stoics and Epicureans—had avoided “chiefly verbal” hypothetical questions, and instead offered a treatment of morals which was founded, like Hume’s own in *A Treatise*, on “the experimental method” (that is, experience and observation). Although this presentation of Cicero as adopting an empirical approach in his moral inquiries was distinctive, it was not unique to Hume. John Locke, whom Hume credited as pioneering the “science of MAN”, read Cicero in a very similar way (*T*, Introduction, 5 n.1).¹⁰ As in the case of Hume, even as many scholars have noted Locke’s abundantly attested admiration for Cicero’s philosophy, they have paid insufficient attention to the question of *how* Locke read Cicero—that is, as an academic

⁶ *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 92–93. M.A. Stewart considers Hume’s late addition to the *Dialogues* to be his “dying testament to posterity”: “The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts”, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. Paul Wood (Woodbridge: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 303.

⁷ On the former, see (*inter alia*): Stephen Buckle, “British Sceptical Realism”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 7:1 (1999), 1–29; and John P. Wright, “Hume’s Academic Scepticism: a Reappraisal of his Philosophy of Human Understanding”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16:3 (1986), 407–35. There is an extensive literature on the *Dialogues*, and Cicero’s presiding presence within them, but see especially: John V. Price, “Sceptics in Cicero and Hume”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25:1 (1964), 97–106; Christine Battersby, “The *Dialogues* as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of Hume’s Skepticism”, in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David F. Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade L. Robison (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1979), 239–52; and Peter S. Fosl, “Doubt and Divinity: Cicero’s Influence on Hume’s Religious Skepticism”, *Hume Studies* 20 (1994), 103–20.

⁸ For the significance of interpretations of Cicero as an academic sceptic in an earlier period, see Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972).

⁹ For a brief review of the (now extensive) scholarship on the pervasive interest in Stoicism and Epicureanism in the period, see Ben Dew, “Epicurean and Stoic Enlightenments: The Return of Modern Paganism?”, *History Compass* 13:1 (2013), 486–95.

¹⁰ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): where appropriate, references to Book, Part, Section and Paragraph are provided in parentheses in the text.

sceptic—and *why* he considered Cicero’s writings to be so uniquely valuable.¹¹ This shortcoming alerts us to the more general need to consider carefully the intellectual, institutional, and polemical contexts in which early modern philosophers turned to ancient philosophy, and invoked particular predecessors as vindicating both the approaches they adopted and the substantive conclusions they drew. As Dmitri Levitin has argued forcefully in a valuable recent contribution, in an important sense there *were* no Stoics, Epicureans, or academic sceptics in the early modern period. Philosophers were selective in their interpretation and borrowings, and their approaches to the philosophical bequest of the ancient world were mediated by centuries of humanist scholarship, commentary, and critique (and usually framed by Christian apologetic concerns).¹² It is, then, important to ask what they took themselves to be *doing* in “picking out certain characteristics of an ancient position and using them to denote a modern one”.¹³

As I show in the first section of this essay, Cicero occupies a central place in Locke’s deeply problematic attempt to construct a moral theology. The heathen philosopher, on Locke’s reading as on Hume’s, had something uniquely valuable to say about the vexed relationship between morality and religious belief, and between reason and revelation as the two sources of human knowledge. Yet Hume’s explanation of what Cicero had to say here was very different indeed to that offered by Locke. In the second section I argue that it was, in part, through his interpretation of Cicero that Hume forcefully denied what Locke had sought to establish: that an empirical science of morality could only get so far, because a full understanding of moral obligation relied upon theological postulates which had been revealed rather than discovered. By placing Hume’s interpretation of Cicero “after” Locke’s, I contend, we are better placed to appreciate that Hume’s primary objective—and, from his perspective, greatest achievement—was to explain society and morality in terms which were entirely independent of the question of God’s attributes, will, sanctions, and even existence. Even as the focus is placed squarely on them, it should nonetheless be noted that Locke and Hume were quite consciously intervening in a much wider, long-running, and heated European debate regarding Cicero’s philosophical commitments, in which the relationship between morality and religious belief occupied a central place.¹⁴

In the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke distinguished between moral motivation and obligation in a quite novel way. “It must be allowed”, Locke argued, “that several Moral Rules, may receive, from Mankind, a very general Approbation, without either knowing, or admitting the true ground of Morality” (*EHU* 1.3.6). Locke pointed to the heathen world to substantiate this claim. “Even in the Corruption of Manners,” Locke declared, “the true Boundaries of the Law of Nature, which ought to be the Rule of Vertue and Vice, were pretty well preserved” (*EHU* 2.28.11). The heathens—and here Locke’s primary example was the late Roman Republic in the age of Cicero—had clearly failed to comprehend “the true ground of Morality” in God’s will and

¹¹ For discussions of Locke’s esteem for Cicero, see especially Giuliana di Biase, *La Morale di Locke: Fra Prudenza e Mediocritas* (Rome: Carocci, 2012); John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 157–204, 292–326; Phillip Mitsis, “Locke’s Offices”, in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45–61; Raymond Polin, *La Politique Morale de John Locke* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960); and Neal Wood, *The Politics of Locke’s Philosophy: A Social Study of “An Essay concerning Human Understanding”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 29–30.

¹² Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4 and *passim*.

¹³ István Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, edited by Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 11.

¹⁴ For a sense of this broader context, see Tim Stuart-Buttle, *From Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy: Cicero and Visions of Humanity from Locke to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2018).

command. In ancient Rome, moral philosophy and divinity were “two parts or provinces of knowledge” between which there was no overlap.¹⁵ As a result, philosophers had sought—vainly—to explain the nature and foundations of moral duty on the basis of human nature alone, and without any reference to divine will and command. “The philosophers of old”, Locke declared, “did in vain enquire, whether the *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation: And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best Relish were to be found in Apples, Plumbs, or Nuts” (*EHU*, 2.21.55). Here Locke was as sceptical as Hobbes regarding the ancient moralists’ success in identifying man’s true end on the basis of autonomous reason.¹⁶ Yet Locke’s reasoning here was importantly different to that of Hobbes: they had failed, Locke argued, because of their ignorance of the true God, who imposed duties on men and would reward or punish them on the Day of Judgment. Meanwhile, Locke argued that in most areas of human life, particularly those of greatest concern (morality, religion and justice), the individual would necessarily deal in probabilities: something the dogmatic sects, craving certainty, had been unwilling to recognise.¹⁷ Yet in practice heathen societies had nonetheless been led to behave in ways broadly in accordance with the immutable duties of natural law, even as the individuals within them did not understand why they *ought* to do so. Here it is important to ask two questions: why did Locke separate moral motivation and obligation, and how did he explain the relationship between them?

The *Essay* was intended to explore a question which, Locke argued, had been unsatisfactorily addressed: that of the relationship between “the principles of Morality and reveal’d Religion”.¹⁸ Even as the individual’s natural faculties were “sufficient” to establish all the knowledge they required to perform their duties, this did not mean that in the absence of revelation they could grasp all the truths they now considered to be essential. In his mature, published writings, Locke argued that revelation had provided what reason had not: a normative theory of morals, and thus an explanation of why humanity’s duties under natural law were obligatory.¹⁹ Christ’s revelation affirmed, explained, and enlarged upon those insights gained through the individual’s experience in a morally ordered cosmos. In this regard, true philosophy and revealed theology were in perfect harmony. In making this case, Locke offered up a classical moralist as an exemplar of how to practice true philosophy, and used him as proof that the right cultivation of one’s natural faculties led to insights which were perfectly consistent (although far from coextensive) with the truths revealed by Christ. This classical moralist was Cicero, whose academic scepticism (as defined in the *Academica*) privileged probability whilst nonetheless emphasising the duty to labour for truth even as certain

¹⁵ Bodleian Library: MS Locke, Film 77, 93 (1698); Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), in *Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 194–95.

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ii, 150 (1.11). Locke would have found similar depreciations of the value of classical moral philosophy in the writings of, *inter alia*, Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi. On moral scepticism in this period, see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, rvd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ For Locke’s elision of the conventional scholastic distinction between *scientia* and *opinio*, see Douglas Casson, *Liberating Judgment: Fanatics, Sceptics, and John Locke’s Politics of Probability* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ See James Tyrrell’s marginal note in his copy of the *Essay* in the British Museum, quoted by John Colman, *John Locke’s Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 1–2. As early as 1661, Locke noted that “the greatest caution should be taken lest, having trusted too much in our reason, we neglect faith, and, by not having given due regard to the mysteries of the gospel, we embrace philosophy instead of religion”: The National Archives, Shaftesbury Papers, 30/24/47/33 (c. 1661–1662). (The entry is in Latin; the translation is Nuovo’s: *Writings on Religion*, 71). For discussion, see Richard Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy”, in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John W. Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 194–223.

¹⁹ Locke’s earliest treatment of natural law, dating from c.1663–1664, was rather more optimistic regarding man’s ability, by reason alone, to identify the most cardinal truths in morality and theology, even as he was witheringly sceptical of the ancient philosophers’ attempts to do so: see *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

knowledge in many areas of life might be unattainable.²⁰ The harmony between Cicero's philosophy and Christ's teachings was repeatedly alluded to by Locke: on the title-page of the *Essay*, where a citation from *De Natura Deorum* was (from 1700) accompanied by another from the Scriptures; at multiple points in the *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695); and in his educational writings, in which Locke recommended *De Officiis* as the sole work of moral philosophy to which youths ought to be introduced, and which along with the Gospels provided all the moral guidance they required.²¹

In the account of how the individual might acquire true moral knowledge in the *Essay*, Locke indicated why he considered Cicero's philosophy to be unique. Unlike the dogmatic philosophical sects, Cicero had recognised the impossibility of establishing a definition of man's true end and happiness on the basis of autonomous reason alone. Here Locke alluded to Cicero's focus in his moral teachings, and especially in *De Officiis*, on the utility (*utile*) and agreeableness (*dulce*) of virtue to oneself and others rather than on its normative truth (*honestum*). "It is never beneficial to do wrong", Cicero declared in *De Officiis*, "because it is always dishonourable; moreover, because it is always honourable to be a good man, it is always beneficial".²² This was precisely the point developed at length by Locke in the *Essay* which, as with Locke's thinking as a whole, is indelibly structured by a divine teleology. Locke argued that God had ordered the world (and human nature) in such a way as to ensure that what conduced to the collective happiness of mankind in this world was consistent with the immutable duties of natural law. To be sure, estimations of pleasure and pain shaped the individual's ideas of what was good or evil: here Locke adopted a hedonic psychology which reflected his engagement with contemporary French philosophical currents of thought (and notably with Pierre Gassendi).²³ Yet God was the author of man's desires, as well as his reason. Man had been created so that, in society, he found it in his interest to behave in ways which served God's ends, even as he might fail rationally to understand his *duty* to do so.²⁴ God in His goodness had, "by an inseparable connexion, joined *Virtue* and publick Happiness together; and made the Practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of Society, and visibly *beneficial* to all, with whom the Virtuous Man has to do" (*EHU* 1.3.6). By pursuing comfort, security and happiness in society, individuals tended to act in ways consistent with the dictates of the divinely authored law of nature—even as they lacked any comprehension of the true origins and nature of that law, or of the eternal sanctions enforcing it.

The individual's greatest concern, Locke argued, was to secure the good opinion of his neighbours (praise), and to avoid their contempt (shame). It was "a Burthen too heavy for humane Sufferance", Locke declared, "to live in Society, under the constant Dislike, and ill Opinion of his Familiars, and those he converses with" (*EHU*, 2.28.12). This pervasive desire for "esteem and reputation" served effectively, insensibly, and quite naturally to render the individual's sense of their own interest broadly conformable to that of the society of which they were a part, so concerned were they to win the approval of others. Led by their "needs and wants" to gather together in society, the individual's ideas concerning good and ill were shaped by what, in the *Second Treatise*, Locke called

²⁰ See, for one such statement, *Academica*, trans. Harry Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 2.3.7-8.

²¹ Cf. *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), ed. John W. Yolton & Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 239; "Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study" (1703), in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 399-400.

²² *On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin & E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.64.

²³ For the most forceful statement of Locke's intellectual debt to Gassendi, see T.M. Lennon, *The Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655-1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 149-90.

²⁴ The classic work on the development of the language of "interest" in this period, and on the increasingly positive role accorded to it in facilitating social harmony and cooperation, is Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

“the mutual influence, sympathy, and connexion” they experienced with others.²⁵ As Locke repeatedly emphasised, this gave rise to a “law of *propriety*”, by which almost all men found it useful and agreeable to abide, and which was contingent and developed according to what was found to be publicly useful.²⁶

This, for Locke, emphatically did not mean that public utility and pleasure were sufficient to explain moral good and ill. “The rightness of an action”, Locke declared, “does not depend on its utility; on the contrary, its utility is a result of its rightness”.²⁷ This was a point which the Epicureans—and their modern admirers, such as Hobbes—had failed to comprehend. Even in the ancient world, however, only Cicero, Locke argued, had recognised these moral distinctions to have developed solely on the basis of their communal utility as attested by experience and observation (*EHU* 2.28.11). Cicero nonetheless identified the limits of reason properly to understand the true foundations of moral obligation: these had been revealed in full by Christ, rather than discovered by reason. This explained, Locke argued, why in his writings on morality Cicero had exhorted men to virtue on account of its utility and agreeableness, rather than on the basis of its normative truth. This also helps us to understand why, for Locke, Cicero’s moral philosophy was so uniquely valuable: it left a conceptual space which had subsequently been filled by Christ’s revelation. Locke’s Cicero, as an academic sceptic, recognised the limits of reason in the face of God’s omnipotence. In *De Officiis*, Cicero had sought to outline those moral qualities which conduced to the well-being of society in all times and at all places, in order to construct immutable ideal archetypes—such as the Golden Rule (“do unto others”). “The Truth and Certainty of *moral* Discourses”, Locke declared, “abstracts from the Lives of Men, and the Existence of those Vertues in the World, whereof they treat: Nor are *Tully*’s Offices less true, because there is no Body in the World that exactly practises his Rules, and lives up to that pattern of a vertuous Man, which he has given us, and which existed no where, when he writ, but in *Idea*” (*EHU* 4.4.8). It was only with Christ’s ministry, something discussed at length in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, that a “vertuous Man” appeared who *was* able exactly to practise these rules and, as importantly, to explain to mankind why they ought to do likewise as God’s created beings, accountable to Him on the Day of Judgment.

On Locke’s account, Cicero nonetheless employed his “Reason to *understand* those *Truths*, which have given [the virtues their] reputation” in the first place (*EHU* 1.4.23). Yet Cicero was constrained to rest content with communal utility and agreeableness as his fundamental explanatory principles. The total separation between ethics and divinity in ancient Rome precluded even Cicero from locating moral obligation in the divine will: in the *Reasonableness*, Locke included “*Tully*” among those ancients who had failed to establish ethics upon its true foundations.²⁸ It is nonetheless important to note that Locke’s own, distinctly anti-metaphysical philosophical “proofs” for the existence of God and a future state were drawn directly and explicitly from Cicero.²⁹ Locke alighted upon Cicero as an example of how far reason could reach in the absence of revelation. This had real implications for Christian apologetic: that is, for the foundations upon which Christians should establish and defend their faith. In the *Reasonableness*, Locke declared that all too many so-called

²⁵ Locke *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), *Second Treatise*, §212.

²⁶ For an extensive discussion of this neglected aspect of Locke’s thinking, see Tim Stuart-Buttle, “‘A Burthen Too Heavy for Humane Sufferance’: Locke on Reputation”, *History of Political Thought* 38:4 (2017), 644–80.

²⁷ *Essays on the Law of Nature*, 215.

²⁸ *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 196.

²⁹ For Locke’s distinctly anti-metaphysical proofs for the existence of God, drawn primarily from Cicero’s *De Legibus*, see *EHU* 4.10.6. John Dunn calls Locke’s proofs “flaccid”: *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the “Two Treatises of Government”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 14; see, too, Victor Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment: Interpretations of Locke* (London: Springer, 2011), 53–73. Meanwhile Leo Strauss and his followers have interpreted Locke’s equivocal treatment of these questions as illustrating his supposed religious scepticism.

Christian philosophers, like their dogmatic heathen predecessors, sought to establish the foundations of men's moral duties on the basis of philosophy—failing to recognise how revelation had enlarged upon reason on this point:

... many are beholden to Revelation, who do not acknowledge it. 'Tis no diminishing to Revelation, that Reason gives its Suffrage too to the Truths Revelation has discovered. But 'tis our mistake to think, that because Reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain knowledge of them from thence, and in that clear Evidence we now possess them. The contrary is manifest, in the *defective morality of the Gentiles* before our Saviour's time ...³⁰

All too many Christian philosophers, Locke argued, sought to establish the truth of Christianity on the basis of speculative philosophy (metaphysics). In so doing they—unlike Cicero—disturbed the natural harmony between reason and revelation: by giving too much to the former, they failed to recognise both the reasonableness and necessity of the latter.

Despite the centrality of a future state to his moral theology, Locke maintained that, whilst there were good moral arguments for the soul's immortality, the primary argument used by Christians to defend it—immateriality—was weak at best. Here once more Locke turned to Cicero, in this instance the *Tusculan Disputations*, to re-establish how far reason could reach, and *had* reached in this question in the absence of revelation: that is, to recover the *status quo ante*. Cicero's evaluation of the evidence for and against the immateriality of the soul, Locke emphasised, did not lead him to deny its immortality: the question of immateriality, on which Locke was similarly studiously agnostic, was “academic” in every sense. Only once the limits of reason on this point were grasped might the necessity of Christ's teachings, and the harmony between true philosophy and revealed theology, again come into view:

So unmoveable is that truth delivered by the spirit of truth, that though the light of nature gave [Cicero] some obscure glimmering, some uncertain hopes of a future state; yet human reason could attain no clearness, no certainty about it, but that it was “JESUS CHRIST alone who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”. Though we are now told, that to own the inability of natural reason to bring immortality to light, or, which passes for the same, to own principles upon which the immateriality of the soul (and, as it is urged, consequently its immortality) cannot be demonstratively proved; does lessen the belief in this article of revelation, which JESUS CHRIST alone has brought to light, and which consequently the scripture assures us is established and made certain only by revelation.³¹

For Locke, one, if not *the* strongest, argument attesting to the truth of revealed Christianity was that it offered what philosophy could not: an account of moral obligation and man's true end. Cicero's academic scepticism had led him, in his philosophical dialogues, to criticise the dogmatic and exclusivist theories of the *summum bonum* concocted by his fellow philosophers, whilst nonetheless remaining open to the delivery of revealed truth.

In Book II of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), Hume famously declared that “moral philosophy is in the same condition as natural, with regard to astronomy before the time of *Copernicus*” (T 2.1.4: 30). This comment bears a marked resemblance to a passage in Hume's letter

³⁰ *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 200.

³¹ *A Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester...*, in *The Works of John Locke*, 9 vols. (London, 1794; repr. London: Routledge/ Thoemmes, 1997), iii, 489 (Locke cites 2 Tim. 1.10).

to a physician of 1734, in which he observed that “the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity” remained “entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience”. As Hume’s invocation of Copernicus suggests, modern philosophers had proved no more successful than the ancients on this score. This insight led Hume, in the years which followed, “to seek out some *new Medium*, by which Truth might be establish’t”.³²

Hume made this point powerfully in a letter to one such modern philosopher, Francis Hutcheson, in response to his criticisms of a draft of Book III (“Of Morals”) of *A Treatise*. Hutcheson’s own ethical theory, Hume observed, remained “founded on final Causes; which is a consideration, that appears to me pretty uncertain & unphilosophical. For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or the next? For himself or for his Maker?” These were precisely the sort of “endless” questions which Hume would later dismiss as “merely verbal”. Hutcheson’s moral theory fell into the same trap which, Locke had argued, bedevilled ancient Stoic ethics: it assumed that men might be motivated to virtue for virtue’s sake. Cicero, Hume argued, recognised that “Virtue can never be the sole Motive to any Action”: pleasure and utility must occupy a central place in any account of moral motivation. Hume invited Hutcheson to review both *De Officiis* and Book IV of the dialogue *De Finibus*.³³ As for Locke, the signal merit of *De Officiis* for Hume was that it offered a treatment of morality which focused squarely on the utility and agreeableness of virtue. Meanwhile in Book IV of *De Finibus*, the definition of the *summum bonum* furnished by the Stoic Cato was refuted by the academic sceptic (Cicero himself). Hume noted in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” (1742) that, in *De Finibus*, Cicero was so anxious to critique Cato’s Stoic ethical theory that he failed to observe “the true spirit of dialogue” which, in his other writings, was such a conspicuous feature of Ciceronian philosophy. In this regard, Hume intimated, Cicero’s academic scepticism in no sense precluded the drawing of firm conclusions in his moral theory: indeed, it underpinned, rather than mitigated his unequivocal and rather dogmatic rejection of final causes in moral philosophy.³⁴

If Hume’s presentation of Cicero bears an unmistakeable resemblance to Locke’s, it is nonetheless clear that from an early stage Hume rejected what Locke had strenuously maintained: that revealed Christianity could provide what moral philosophy alone had not. Cicero had something rather different to say on the question of the relationship between morality and religious belief. In the Introduction to *A Treatise*, Hume opined that natural theology was “in some measure dependent on the science of MAN” (*T*, “Introduction”, 4). If, for reasons of prudence, Hume largely avoided exploring this point in *A Treatise*, his correspondence indicates that his inquiries from the later 1720s led to a profound questioning of the philosophical foundations of religious belief.³⁵ Even in the

³² Hume to ?, 1734, in *Letters*, i, 12–18 (italics added). For discussion of the importance of this letter for our understanding of Hume’s early intellectual development, see Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, 35–77; and M.A. Stewart, “Hume’s Intellectual Development, 1711–1752”, in *Impressions of Hume*, ed. Marina Frasca-Spada and Peter J.E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11–58.

³³ Hume to Hutcheson, 17 Sept. 1739, in *Letters*, i, 33. On Hume’s critique of the teleological dimension of Hutcheson’s moral theory, see James Moore, “The Social Background of Hume’s ‘Science of Human Nature’”, in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. Nicholas Capaldi, David F. Norton, and Wade L. Robison (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1976), 23–41.

³⁴ “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences”, in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 623 n. H (this passage was withdrawn from all editions from 1768).

³⁵ In 1751 Hume noted that he had only recently “burn’d an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty [c.1729]; which contain’d, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts” on religion: Hume to Gilbert Elliot, 10 Mar. 1751, in *Letters*, i, 154. In a letter to Henry Home, dated 2 Dec. 1737, Hume regretted that he was engaged in “castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts” before sending it to Joseph Butler, and he enclosed “some Reasonings concerning Miracles, which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much offence, as the world is disposed at present”: *Letters*, i, 23–25. M.A. Stewart declares that in “Of Miracles”, Hume’s “project is, in effect, to make Locke consistent”: “Hume’s Historical View of Miracles”, in *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, ed. M.A. Stewart and John P. Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 183. Stephen Buckle similarly emphasises how the incorporation of Essays X and XI of the *Philosophical Essays* into the *Treatise*

“castrat[ed]” form in which it was published, *A Treatise* nonetheless made the argument clearly enough that the question of God’s attributes, will, design, and sanctions had no place in true moral philosophy.³⁶ Locke’s attempt to tie the moral codes by which societies were regulated inextricably to God’s will and command—and hence to *justify* them on the basis of their truth, rather than *explain* them in terms of their public utility and agreeableness—was untenable. It once again reintroduced “final causes” which could not be established on the basis of reason. Hume made this point most forcefully in his famous passage in Book III of *A Treatise* denying that an “ought” could be deduced from an “is”: this represented an “imperceptible” departure from the “ordinary way of reasoning”, and took place as soon as the existence of God had (supposedly) been established (*T* 3.1.1: 27). Meanwhile the existence—or otherwise—of a future state, which for Locke ought to offer the strongest incentive to virtue for the Christian, was utterly irrelevant to any explanation of moral motivation (e.g.: *T* 1.3.9: 13).

The scholarship on Hume’s critical engagement with Lockean philosophy has focused almost exclusively on Hume’s epistemology in Book I of *A Treatise*.³⁷ For the purposes of this discussion, however, I want to divert attention elsewhere: to the second *Enquiry*, and to the two works to which it is intimately related: the *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and the *Dialogues*.³⁸ Cicero occupies a central place in all three works. Hume repeatedly opined that the *Enquiry* was “incomparably the best” of his writings.³⁹ In it, he addressed most directly what he recognised in 1734 to be the greatest challenge facing philosophers, and one which Cicero had apparently confronted: that of offering a complete moral theory which did not depend on “final causes”.⁴⁰ In a highly revealing statement, Hume alerts us to this point: “whatever is valuable in any kind so naturally classes itself under the division of *useful* or *agreeable*, the *utile* or the *dulce*, that it is not easy to imagine, why we should ever seek farther” (*EPM*, 72).

When set against Locke’s interpretation of Cicero, we are better placed to grasp the extent of Hume’s claim here. In confining himself to utility and agreeableness, Hume argued that Cicero had correctly understood what a theory of morals and justice could and could not offer. As James Moore has noted, Hume quite explicitly claimed to follow Cicero in banishing the question of normative truth (the *honestum*) from moral philosophy: there was no need ever to “seek farther”, and push beyond the principles of utility and agreeableness. The empirical moral philosopher confined his enquiry to the question of recognition—how and why men identified particular qualities (in themselves and others) as morally estimable or opprobrious—rather than asking whether they were

would have indicated far more clearly to Hume’s contemporary reader the extent to which the work ought to be read as a critical response to Locke’s *Essay*: “Marvels, Miracles, and Mundane Order: Hume’s Critique of Religion in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 79:1 (2001), 1–31.

³⁶ For a discussion of the largely implicit, but evident irreligious implications of *A Treatise*, see Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume’s Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism and Irreligion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁷ Hume himself laid claim to novelty primarily for the manner in which he had taken Lockean insights—on the association of ideas, and on probability—in a quite different direction: *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published ...* (1740), in *Treatise*, i, 416, 408–409.

³⁸ The *Natural History* was probably composed at the same time as, or shortly after, Hume’s initial draft of the *Dialogues* (that is, at Ninewells in c.1749–1751). In a letter to his publisher, Andrew Millar, of 12 June 1755, Hume noted that it was one of “four short Dissertations, which I have kept some Years by me”: *Letters*, i, 223.

³⁹ “My Own Life” (1776), in *Essays*, xxxvi; Hume to David Dalrymple, 3 May 1753, and to the Abbé le Blanc, 5 Nov. 1755, in *Letters*, i, 175, 227.

⁴⁰ A similar explanation of Hume’s high valuation of the *EPM* is offered by James Moore, “Utility and Humanity”, *Utilitas* 14:3 (2002), 365–86. This is not to suggest that the *EPM* departed in any particularly significant way from the *Treatise*; merely that Hume developed his central contentions more expeditiously. As in the *Philosophical Essays* (later the first *Enquiry*), “the philosophical Principles” were the same as those of the *Treatise*, but “by shortening & simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete”: Hume to Gilbert Elliot, Mar./Apr. 1751, in *Letters*, i, 158.

correct in these judgements.⁴¹ Hume's blunt denial in *A Treatise* that there "is a real right or wrong; that is, a real distinction in morals, independent of [the] judgments" made by men in the course of "common life" should be taken seriously (*T* 3.1.1: 14).⁴² Locke's similar scepticism regarding philosophy's claim to identify man's true end was informed by a conviction that the Christian revelation could make good the deficit: this was absolutely necessary to prevent the slide into ethical relativism. Hume, taking Cicero as his guide, accepted the first point and denied the second.

Hume, as (on his presentation) had Cicero, refused to "fetter his moral sentiments by narrow systems", and defined virtue solely in terms of its utility and agreeableness (*EPM*, 106 n.72). Explicitly adopting Cicero's "Catalogue of the Virtues", Hume encompassed every quality "which contributes to the happiness of society, [and] recommends itself directly to our approbation and good will", thereby including those "natural Abilitys" with which men were endowed (good looks, strength, and so forth) with little effort on their part (*EPM*, 38).⁴³ Hume expressed his surprise that so few philosophers had been willing to admit the principle of utility into their "systems of ethics" (*EPM*, 34). Yet Cicero had not committed the error of modern Epicureans, such as Hobbes and Mandeville, who scandalised contemporaries by reducing all virtue to base self-interest and self-love. Here, once again, Hume's approach mirrored Cicero's own in its refusal to identify one, ultimate principle which explained the ethical universe. "It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others", Hume declared (*EPM*, 38 n. 19). In *A Treatise*, Hume had called this "sympathy"; but in the *EPM*, he preferred "humanity", a term with unmistakably Ciceronian resonance (*humanitas*).⁴⁴ The individual's willingness to abide by the moral codes which regulated their society—that is, their sense of the obligatory character of the duties enshrined within them—was primarily the consequence of man's natural concern for the esteem of others, in ways Locke had similarly sought to theorise but with considerably less nuance or complexity. Men came to take pleasure ("pride") in behaving in a manner approved of by others—even to the point of actively exerting themselves on others' behalf ("benevolence"), sometimes in ways which seemingly contradicted their own narrow self-interest. Hume similarly cited Cicero in support of his claim that natural and positive law developed in tandem, according to what was found to be in the public interest. Locke's separation of the two, and foundation of a right of resistance on the basis of natural law, was as untenable as Hobbes's and Mandeville's political account of the origins of ethics (*EPM*, 13).

Hume first discussed the implications of his ethical theory for religion in a letter to William Mure of 1743. Men, Hume noted, were naturally attuned to experience "love and gratitude for whatever is benevolent and beneficial". This echoed Cicero's claim in *De Officiis* that "when we think people possess these virtues, we are compelled by nature to love them".⁴⁵ Although a deity *might* possess the moral "attributes in the greatest perfection", it was evident that unlike one's fellow man "he is not the object of any passion or affection". Hume observed that even a "remote ancestor, who has left us estates and honours" was sufficiently "unknown to us" as to fail to stimulate any considerable affection or gratitude. This being so, how could any affection be felt towards "an invisible infinite spirit" that was utterly incomprehensible to man?⁴⁶ This example of the remote ancestor was lifted, without acknowledgement, from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. In that work the academic sceptic Cotta pronounced both justice and morality to be "the offspring of human society

⁴¹ A point properly emphasised by Annette Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on the Mind and Morals* (London: Methuen, 1985), 257.

⁴² For the most sustained attempt to interpret Hume as a moral realist, see David F. Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁴³ As Hume observed, Hutcheson—along with most of his contemporaries—denied that the natural abilities ought to be defined as virtues: *Letters*, i, 33–34.

⁴⁴ As noted by Moore, "Utility and Humanity".

⁴⁵ *On Duties*, 2.32 (italics added).

⁴⁶ Hume to Mure, 30 June 1743, in *Letters*, i, 50.

and of the commonwealth of man”.⁴⁷ “The divine bestowal of reason upon man”, Cotta continued, “is not in itself an act of beneficence, like the bequest of an estate”. The latter act stimulated a degree of affection and gratitude towards one’s (immediate) benefactor, whereas men experienced no such sentiments with regard to any deity.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Cotta observed, “our virtue is a just ground for others’ praise and a right reason for our own pride, and this would not be so if the gift of virtue came to us from a god and not from ourselves”.⁴⁹ The conclusion to be drawn from this, Hume informed Mure, was that piety and religious devotion were both unnatural and potentially corrupting of the socialised individual’s affective responses.⁵⁰

Hume’s moral theory, as Thomas Holden has convincingly argued, went well beyond a Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment when it came to the question of God’s nature and attributes.⁵¹ In this regard Hume advertised the fact that he went further than had Cicero, who on this point had broadly accepted a Pyrrhonian submission to custom and tradition in matters of religion. Hume declared that in *De Natura Deorum*, “CICERO, being a great sceptic in matters of religion” was “unwilling to determine any thing on that head among the different sects of philosophy”.⁵² Here the operative word is “unwilling”: there is no suggestion that Cicero was *unable* to “determine anything on that head”. Why might Cicero have refrained from drawing more determinate conclusions regarding the various truth-claims made for religion by his contemporaries? Here Hume drew attention to the morally and politically benign character of Roman paganism. The national religion in Rome “hung loose upon the minds of men”, embraced no contradictions, and contained no moral component (*NHR* XII: 75). Cicero, it followed, had defended the national Roman religion solely on account of its political utility and ethical benignity. Had Cicero deemed it necessary or desirable, Hume intimated, he could have offered a far more thoroughgoing critique of religion. If ancient polytheism was largely harmless in its moral consequences, however, the same could not be said for Christian theism. It was for this reason that it was more incumbent on the *modern* philosopher to examine the truth-claims of religion than it had been in Cicero’s age. In more recent times, “philosophy of all kinds, especially ethics, have been more closely united with theology than ever they were observed to be among the Heathens”. Here Hume shared Locke’s conviction regarding the separation between ethics and divinity in the heathen world. The consequences of the subsequent union between the two fields in a Christian age were quite different for Hume than for Locke: the introduction of a theistic God as moral legislator had “warped from their natural course” the “unbiassed sentiments of the mind” and corrupted all “reasoning” in ethics (*EPM*, 108-109). As a result Hume, writing in a Christian age and for a predominantly Christian audience, offered to make explicit the implications of Ciceronian moral philosophy for religion.

In *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero’s Cotta challenged his Stoic and Epicurean friends (Balbus and Velleius) to convince him “of this fundamental tenet of the divine existence, not as an article of faith merely but as an ascertained fact”.⁵³ Unless they were able to do so, all subsequent debate regarding the deity’s supposed nature and attributes was nothing more than a “verbal” discrepancy.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ *De Natura Deorum*, trans. Harry Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 3.15.38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.28.71.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.36.87.

⁵⁰ Hume to Mure, 30 June 1743, in *Letters*, i, 50.

⁵¹ This general interpretation of Hume as a “strong” moral atheist—one who positively denied that the deity possessed moral attributes, rather than merely asserting that those attributes could not be known—supports the recent thesis of Thomas Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity. Hume’s Moral Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Compare and contrast with James Noxon, “Hume’s Agnosticism”, *Philosophical Review* 73:2 (1964), 248–61.

⁵² “Rise and Progress”, 623 n. H (italics added). This passage is misinterpreted by Price, “Cicero and Hume”, who suggests that Hume made precisely the opposite point (that Cicero always declared his opinion in such matters). For a more accurate reading, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, 251.

⁵³ *De Natura Deorum*, 1.22.61.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.7.16.

His antagonists, however, were reluctant to begin with the question of the bare existence of the deity: it was for this reason that Cicero's academic interlocutor, Cotta, accused them of lacking "the courage ... to deny that the gods exist".⁵⁵ In the *Dialogues*, Hume's Philo similarly sought to return the debate to this essential starting-point. If one did so, the consequences were clear. *Even if* one were willing to accept the highly "ambiguous" proposition that "*the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*", this was a proposition that "affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance" (*DNR* XII: 101-102). Reason not only afforded no grounds whatsoever for envisaging a deity possessed of moral attributes. It could go further, as Hume had suggested most forcefully in the second *Enquiry*. Men's moral sentiments were confined to human life and were the product of an affective psychology possessed solely by men. Any religion which entertained the idea of a deity (or deities) as a moral legislator and governor, and thereby possessed of moral attributes, was demonstrably false, and a form of superstitious anthropomorphism. Here Hume quite consciously moved beyond Cicero: something that, he intimated, was necessary in a Christian age in which religion asphyxiated rather than "hung loose upon the minds of men".

This point can be illustrated most succinctly by considering "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (1777), which reads like a digest of extracts drawn from Cicero's philosophical writings.⁵⁶ Hume began precisely where Locke had left off, citing 2 Timothy 1.10 (the doctrine was ultimately "brought to light" by Christ). Hume emphasised the importance of establishing religious principles on cognitive rather than affective grounds, since "all doctrines are to be suspected, which are favoured by our passions".⁵⁷ Hume was in no doubt that the doctrine of a future state originated in the "hopes and fears" that actuated the human mind. The question remained as to whether it had a foundation in reason. As had Locke, Hume divided the evidence into three categories: metaphysical, physical, and moral. As had Locke, Hume paraphrased the *Tusculan Disputations* almost verbatim in order to reject the metaphysical and physical arguments, and show that both led to atheism. When he came to consider the moral arguments upon which Locke had laid such weight—and which, Locke claimed, Cicero had endorsed—Hume drew from a source that Locke had studiously avoided in his discussion.⁵⁸ This was *De Natura Deorum*, the work in which Cotta had similarly challenged his antagonists to prove the principles they sought to defend on reason alone. Hume's arguments to undermine the moral evidence in favour of the doctrine were identical to those employed by Cotta to refute Balbus. Moral arguments, both argued, were grounded on the fallacious assumption that God could be known to possess attributes—justice, goodness, benevolence, power—"beyond what he has exerted in this universe", but which "according to *human* sentiments" were "essential parts of personal merit". This was to once again fall into the error of supposing "that human sentiments have place in the deity", when the "chief source of moral ideas", as with men's ideas regarding justice, "is the reflection on the interests of *human* society".⁵⁹ Hume's point was not simply that a truly Ciceronian, empirical moral theory had no need to invoke God or a future state in order to explain moral obligation. Rather, its ability to explain morality with exclusive reference to the unique characteristics of human nature illustrated the inherent groundlessness and falsity of moral theologies of every stripe.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.31.87.

⁵⁶ This point is missed entirely by commentators including J.C.A. Gaskin, who provides the most thorough discussion of the essay: *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 166–82.

⁵⁷ "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (1777), in *Essays*, 590–98 (on 598).

⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that Locke was Hume's sole target, not least since Butler had similarly defended the doctrine primarily on the basis of moral evidence: Paul Russell, "Butler's 'Future State' and Hume's 'Guide to Life'", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42:4 (2004), 425–48.

⁵⁹ "Immortality of the Soul", 592–96 (*italics added*).

For Locke, Cicero's moral philosophy, by banishing final causes and focusing on utility and agreeableness, left a conceptual space which had subsequently been filled by Christ's revelation. This vindicated Locke's own, highly distinctive conceptual separation between moral motivation and obligation. Revelation delivered what men both desired and required, but could not establish by their own natural lights: an account of the *summum bonum*, and an explanation of why the duties they were nonetheless motivated to perform on the basis of their utility and agreeableness were also morally *obligatory*. Hume, conversely, presented Cicero as entirely closing off this avenue.⁶⁰ In Hume's hands, Ciceronian academic scepticism unequivocally denied the very possibility of a harmony between empirical moral philosophy and Christian moral theology.

Hume's interpretation of Cicero, it should be said, might bring this essay to a close but in no way represents the end of this story. Hume's critics, especially in Scotland, recognised the importance of this interpretation of Cicero to Hume's exposition of his own philosophy more clearly than have modern scholars. From the first such critic of his moral theory, Francis Hutcheson, onwards, the attempt to challenge the devastating consequences of Hume's moral theory for Christian ethics was accompanied by a rejection of his interpretation of the meaning and significance of Cicero's philosophy.

In 1742, shortly after the publication of *A Treatise*, Hutcheson denied in his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria* what Hume had implicitly maintained: that in *De Officiis* Cicero offered "a complete system of morals or ethics", and thereby banished the question of "the supreme good, which is the principal part of ethics". *De Officiis* was, in this regard, merely a theory of politeness intended for youths seeking to make their way in the world, rather than a theory of morals properly so-called. Instead Hutcheson argued that in his more systematic works of moral theory—*De Finibus* and the *Tusculan Disputations*—Cicero had in fact followed the Stoics in maintaining that utility and agreeableness alone were insufficient to explain moral obligation: virtue must be its own reward.⁶¹ James Beattie similarly opined that "Cicero seems to have been an Academic rather in name than in reality", as "when the subject of his inquiry is of high importance, as in his books on moral duties, and on the nature of the gods, he follows the doctrine of the Dogmatists, particularly the Stoics; and asserts his moral and religious principles with a warmth and energy which prove him to have been in earnest".⁶² Notwithstanding his very different treatment of morals, Thomas Reid followed Beattie on this point: "though an Academic, [Cicero] was dogmatical" in his moral theory, identifying "self-evident truths" in ethics as in religion.⁶³ By this means Hume's critics sought to deny his claim that Ciceronian academic scepticism represented a discrete (and superior) tradition in the history of moral philosophy. As this essay indicates, the question of Cicero's philosophical commitments was deemed to be of the utmost importance to early modern philosophers, for whom the relationship between ethics and religion remained a profoundly vexed issue. By the nineteenth century, in contrast, this earlier interest in Cicero as a philosopher in his own right—rather than merely a doxographer,

⁶⁰ Here Rivers's claim that Hume's intention in the *Dialogues* may have been "to rescue Cicero from his Christian readers and restore him to scepticism" can be applied more broadly to a far greater number of Hume's writings: *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, 277.

⁶¹ I have cited the English translation of the work: Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1747), I, vi–vii.

⁶² James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (Edinburgh, 1770), 2.2.1, 243–44.

⁶³ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), ed. Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 6.2, 452–53 (referring to *De Oratore*); 6.6, 500 (to *De Finibus*).

crudely summarising the teachings of others but contributing little that was novel to western philosophical thought—had come to seem curious indeed.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Here the central figure in disparaging Cicero's significance was Theodore Mommsen: see Nicholas P. Cole, "Nineteenth-Century Ciceros", in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 337–49.

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