

Introduction

Most histories of aesthetic theory in the Western world begin in earnest with the first decades of the eighteenth century. Conventional wisdom takes this to be the moment when medieval speculative philosophizing about beauty finally began to give way in much of Europe to a recognizably modern enterprise: the systematic and empirically oriented analysis of the perception of beauty as a mental phenomenon.¹ The list of theorists whose work marks this transition is almost as conventional as the transition's date. Many historians of aesthetics mention Joseph Addison (1672–1719) in England; David Hume (1711–76), Alexander Gerard (1728–95), and Archibald Alison (1757–1839) in Scotland; Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750) in Lausanne; and Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (1670–1742), and Charles Batteux (1713–80) in France. Some add Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776) in Zurich, or Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) in Naples. But almost all give pride of place to Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) in England, Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) in Ireland and Scotland, and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62) in Brandenburg-Prussia. Each of them has been influentially credited with breaking important new ground. Shaftesbury has been called the “inventor” of aesthetics and the author of “the first . . . comprehensive and independent philosophy of the beautiful.”² Hutcheson, a “father” of the Scottish Enlightenment and

¹ The many examples of this general view include W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, v. 3 of 3 (Paris: Mouton, 1974), xix; W. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (London: Nijhoff, 1980), 310–11, 319–20; *Aesthetics*, prod. C. O'Donnell, dir. P. Garcia, 51 min., Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2004, digital video disc; D. Kliche, “Die Institutionalisierung der Ästhetik,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, ed. K. Barck et al., v. 1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), s.v. “Ästhetik/ästhetisch,” 318; and G. Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9–10.

² J. Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), lv; E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. C. A. Koelln and J. P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 312;

first major exponent of the “moral sense,” has been described as the first philosopher “to write a clearly recognizable, extended, and self-contained work on what we would now call aesthetics or the philosophy of art.”³ Baumgarten, professor of philosophy in the cities of Halle and Frankfurt (Oder), coined the very term *aesthetica* in 1735 as the name of a new philosophy and, in Ernst Cassirer’s words, allowed philosophical aesthetics to “constitute itself as a philosophical discipline in its own right.”⁴

What precisely was modern about early-eighteenth-century aesthetic theories?

Historians of aesthetics usually regard as modern those theories that offer coherent, self-contained, and empirically informed discussion of the constellation of topics comprehended within the philosophical subdiscipline we now call *aesthetics*. They include the metaphysics of beauty; the psychology of human beings’ experience of beauty; the nature of art or the arts as such; and various other elements of art-making and criticism, such as taste, imagination, and genius. None of these topics, of course, emerged *ex nihilo* in the eighteenth century. Individual aspects of each of them can be found in treatises and practical manuals on rhetoric, architecture, and painting and the other visual arts, not to mention a plethora of academic textbooks, extending back from the seventeenth century into the Middle Ages and antiquity.⁵ But insofar as the eighteenth century saw self-contained analysis of all these topics coalesce into a single genre or philosophical discipline,⁶ it witnessed the emergence of aesthetic theories worthy of the designation *modern* in the loose sense of that term.

Historians of aesthetics also tend to measure the modernity of an aesthetic theory by a different, narrower criterion – the degree to which it approximates what many of them have considered the supreme or first important model of modern aesthetic theory: Immanuel Kant’s

cf. P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, v. 1 of 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 30.

³ P. Kivy, “The ‘Sense’ of Beauty and the Sense of ‘Art’: Hutcheson’s Place in the History and Practice of Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 355; cf. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, 1.98; and *Aesthetics*, prod. Camila O’Donnell.

⁴ Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 342. Cf. T. Kinnaman, “Aesthetics before Kant,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. S. Nadler (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 578–79; and K. Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

⁵ As described in, e.g., Tatariewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, v. 1 and 2 of 3; and U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. H. Bredin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁶ Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, 1.21; Hammermeister, *German Aesthetic Tradition*, ix; and, on the difficulty of defining the subject of the discipline: K. Barck, “Einleitung: Zur Aktualität des Ästhetischen,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, v. 1, s.v. “Ästhetik/ästhetisch,” 308–9.

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Critique of Judgment, first published in 1790. This narrower criterion is the chief principle by which a mere parade of stars – such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten – has long been presented as a coherent narrative.

Some authors of such narratives present early-eighteenth-century aesthetic theories as valiant but inadequate attempts to pose and solve a problem ultimately and more convincingly addressed by Kant. The central problem is sometimes described as a conflict over whether human judgment of a thing's beauty – or, more generally, whether knowledge itself – is ultimately a matter of sensation or reason. Bernard Bosanquet calls the problem a conflict between “individual” and “universal” philosophical tendencies;⁷ Ernst Cassirer describes the problem as “the schematic conflict” between experience and reason;⁸ Howard Caygill describes the problem as the paradox, addressed in different ways by two competing traditions, one British and the other German, of how to judge the rules according to which we use our own judgment to achieve a “union of sensible and intelligible”;⁹ and Ted Kinnaman describes the problem as a paradox arising from the question, bequeathed to the modern world by René Descartes (1596–1650), whether beauty is a “subjective” or an “objective” quality.¹⁰ Kant – so the stories go – resolved these problems.¹¹

Other histories of early-eighteenth-century aesthetic theory present pre-Kantian theories as having anticipated concepts that came to fruition with Kant and thereby set the stage for later discussion.¹² The most heavily

⁷ B. Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1904; repr., 1934), 170–76.

⁸ Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 322. Cf. M. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1966; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975), whose seventh and eighth chapters (“Cartesian Rationalism” and “Empiricism”) immediately precede the chapter on Kant; A. Riemann, *Die Aesthetik Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus nebst einer Übersetzung dieser Schrift* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1928; repr., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1973), 76; U. Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis: Die Rolle der Sinnlichkeit in der Aesthetik des Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens*, Studia Leibnitiana, suppl. vol. 9 (Wiesbaden, 1972), 7.

⁹ H. Caygill, *Art of Judgment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 4–7, 37.

¹⁰ Kinnaman, “Aesthetics before Kant,” 572.

¹¹ A similar story, though with the important difference that Kant is presented as having resolved such problems far less convincingly than his German predecessors, can be found in F. Beiser, *Diotima's Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² The explicit purpose of such histories is sometimes, but not always, a deeper understanding of Kant himself, as in studies of Baumgarten by Bernard Poppe, Karl Raabe, and Alfred Bäumler. Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis*, 6. Cf. K. Raabe, *A. G. Baumgarten aestheticae in disciplinae formam redactae parens et auctor*, PhD diss. (University of Rostock, 1873); B. Poppe, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: Seine Bedeutung und Stellung in der Leibniz-Wolffischen Philosophie und seine Beziehungen zu Kant* (Borna-Leipzig, 1907); and A. Bäumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975).

cited of these is the concept of the “aesthetic attitude,” a particular type of contemplative experience characterized by “disinterestedness” and “autonomy,” in the sense that the judgment it involves is subject to its own rules and is not directed toward any goal outside itself. What precisely the aesthetic attitude entails, and whether it is distinguishable from other kinds of experience, has long been a subject of controversy, and the lack of consensus about it among twentieth-century aesthetic theorists is reflected in the variety of stories about how it emerged as an object of investigation among eighteenth-century predecessors of Kant. Benedetto Croce, for example, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, traced his own concept of aesthetic experience as a type of nonconceptual cognition, or *intuition*, back through Kant to Vico, and, in an imperfect form, to Baumgarten.¹³ Jerome Stolnitz, in a series of articles beginning in 1961, developed the influential argument that a concept of “disinterested aesthetic experience” – much like his own – first appeared in the work of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson before Kant gave it more elaborate exposition.¹⁴ Paul Guyer, in a more recent argument untarnished by the heavy criticism endured by Stolnitz,¹⁵ has looked to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Du Bos, Addison, and, above all, Baumgarten for anticipations of Kant’s concept of aesthetic experience as necessarily involving the free play of the imagination.¹⁶

¹³ B. Croce, “The ‘Aesthetica’ of Baumgarten,” in *Philosophy, Poetry, History: An Anthology of Essays*, trans. C. Sprigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); cf. P. Romanell, introduction to *Guide to Aesthetics*, by B. Croce (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995), ix. Umberto Eco evidently has Croce’s aesthetic theory in mind as he measures the modernity of medieval aesthetics in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1.

¹⁴ J. Stolnitz, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness,’” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20.2 (1961), 133; M. Rind, “The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40.1 (2002), 67–68; and summarizing Stolnitz, G. Dickie, “Stolnitz’s Attitude: Taste and Perception,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43.2 (1984), 195–98.

¹⁵ E.g., by Rind, “The Concept of Disinterestedness,” 70–74 (most convincingly, 73); Dickie, “Stolnitz’s Attitude,” 201; and P. Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 48–130, cited in Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, I.37. Evidence that Stolnitz’s discovery of the aesthetic attitude in the works of Shaftesbury can no longer be accepted uncritically is provided by P. Ayres, introduction to *Characteristicks*, by Shaftesbury (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xxviii. Ayres notes scholarly agreement that Shaftesbury moved *toward* aesthetic disinterestedness, thereby implicitly acknowledging that Stolnitz’s discovery of aesthetic disinterestedness itself in Shaftesbury has been rejected.

¹⁶ P. Guyer, “The Origins of Modern Aesthetics, 1711–1735,” in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, by P. Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5, 28–36; cf. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, I.9 (and I.339–40) on the pleasure of the “free exercise of our human capacities of mind and . . . body,” one of three ideas around which Guyer organizes his narrative of the history of modern aesthetic theory in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Other histories of aesthetic theory that measure pre-Kantian theorists by the degree to which they anticipated a paradigm established by Kant include Hammermeister, *German Aesthetic Tradition*.

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Kantian concepts are equally central to another category of histories of aesthetic theory: those oriented not toward unearthing the origins of Kant's ideas, the origins of problems Kant tried to solve, or the origins of later aesthetic theories, but rather toward answering questions addressed famously by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, among others, about the connections between aesthetic theory and fascist or capitalist ideologies. Like their counterparts among historians of aesthetics who avoid all trace of Marxist vocabulary, authors of these histories tend to take the concept of "autonomous" aesthetic experience, articulated influentially by Kant, as the essential element of modern aesthetic theory and to discuss Kant's predecessors with a view to establishing the ways in which they anticipated later uses of the concept.¹⁷ Their histories, too, in other words, present Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten as milestones on the road to Kant and beyond.

Nor does the road adorned by these milestones lead only to modern aesthetic theory. According to a significant body of recent scholarship, it also leads to recognizably modern artistic institutions and cultural norms. Eighteenth-century Europe, on one influential account, witnessed the emergence of concepts of the "fine arts" as distinct from crafts and of the artist as distinct from the craftsman – distinctions unknown in the Middle Ages and antiquity.¹⁸ By contrast with the craftsman, the artist was a person of genius: inspired, spontaneous, and original. These new artists, as imagined in the eighteenth century, produced their work not primarily for a

¹⁷ Examples of this kind of approach include works by Terry Eagleton, Jonathan Hess, and Christoph Menke. Eagleton traces the concept of the autonomous aesthetic artifact – which he takes to be the essential subject of aesthetic theory – through the canon of aesthetic theorists, warning contemporary representatives of "Left moralism" not to forget that in the eighteenth century and at every later stage in its history, the concept not only reinforced bourgeois ideology, as is often assumed, but also served as a bulwark against "instrumentalist" thinking and provided the foundation for Marx's critique. Hess uses an analysis of works by Karl Philipp Moritz and Kant to argue that the concept of aesthetic autonomy did not emerge as a defense of high culture under pressure from burgeoning consumerism (contra Martha Woodmansee), and should be considered neither "protofascist" (contra Walter Benjamin) nor a progenitor of the public sphere (contra Jürgen Habermas), but was developed specifically as a means of ascribing freedom to intellectuals under an absolute monarchy. Menke reconstructs and elaborates on Theodor Adorno's use of Kant's concept of "antinomy" to resolve the tension between apparently mutually contradictory conceptions of aesthetic experience as "autonomous" and as "sovereign." T. Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), esp. 3, 8–9; J. Hess, *Reconstructing the Body Politic* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), esp. 16–23, 31–32, 59–80; C. Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art*, trans. N. Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), vii–xi.

¹⁸ L. Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), elaborating on P. O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–527 and 13 (1952): 17–46; and P. O. Kristeller, "Origins of Aesthetics: Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M. Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

commissioning patron but for the emerging art market, driven in large part by growing middle-class demand in societies reaping the economic benefits of commercial expansion and the growth of manufacturing. Their works were to be enjoyed not for crass utilitarian reasons but primarily for the refined pleasure that a person of good taste could derive from contemplating them in a “disinterested” way. These new ideals were reflected in, and reinforced by, a slew of art-related institutions that developed simultaneously with them, including art museums, concert halls, and theaters.¹⁹ Why exactly the concept of disinterested aesthetic experience began to emerge amid these other cultural and institutional developments is a matter of debate,²⁰ but its centrality to those developments is seldom disputed.²¹

Among all these histories of aesthetic theory that look to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten as Kant’s forerunners, many contain a great deal of truth. But almost every one of them unites the protagonists of its story with an ahistorical bond: to a greater or lesser extent, they all produced approximations of a theory – or participated in the construction of a discipline – that none of them knew would emerge. The story is coherent, but from the perspective of a historian interested primarily in the early eighteenth century, its coherence must seem disappointingly teleological. Insofar as the theories resembled each other, the causes of that resemblance still demand explanation. The occasional suggestion that the theorists themselves had common aims usually bears no weight, signaling instead a momentary lapse in the conscientiousness with which historians need to distinguish what foreshadows a later innovation from what their history’s protagonists intended to achieve. George Dickie illustrates the problem well in his own introduction to aesthetic theory, when he purports, in a historical prelude, to “trace the central, organizing strains of the field and thereby set the stage for discussion of present-day problems in aesthetics.”²² Even putting aside the question of whether a single field of aesthetics has in fact persisted from the eighteenth century to

¹⁹ Shiner, *Invention of Art*, 3–7, 79–146.

²⁰ Various proposals can be found in, e.g., Shiner, *Invention of Art*, 130–51; M. Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 11–33; and Hess, *Reconstructing the Body Politic*. Cf. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, I.9–10, I.21.

²¹ Important exceptions include J. Porter, “Is Art Modern? Kristeller’s ‘Modern System of the Arts’ Reconsidered,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49.1 (2009): 1–24; J. Porter, “Reply to Shiner,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2009): 171–78; J. Porter, “Why Art Has Never Been Autonomous,” *Arethusa* 43.2 (2010): 165–80; and J. O. Young, “The Ancient and Modern System of the Arts,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55.1 (2015): 1–17. Cf. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, I.28.

²² Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, ix.

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the present, Dickie's silence about whether early aesthetic theorists perceived the "central, organizing strains" of the field as we now perceive them opens the door to the questionable inference that in addressing questions and problems occupying aesthetic theorists today, eighteenth-century theorists were intentionally organizing their concepts and theories exclusively around those questions and problems.²³

My purpose is to forestall this inference by offering an alternative to the conventional history of modern aesthetic theory before Kant, an alternative history whose coherence is not teleological. This history accepts the widespread designation of early-eighteenth-century theories as *modern* in the minimal sense that they contained coherent discussions of still-familiar aesthetic topics, and in that respect it accepts the classification of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten as modern aesthetic theory's pioneers. At the same time, it leaves aside the question of how closely their theories resembled Kant's, and by extension, it excludes any assessment of the validity of their theories relative to his. Instead, it excavates another, broader intellectual context in which these authors were working, in order to bring to light a different set of questions and problems they consciously designed their own theories to address. The result is a causal explanation for the creation of those theories and, thereby, a substantial basis – more substantial than the mere fact of their modernity – for including them in the same historiographical narrative. This narrative turns out to be considerably different from the histories of aesthetics in which early-eighteenth-century theories have hitherto featured so prominently.

According to this new narrative, aesthetic theories were part of a larger pattern of responses in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in much of Europe, to what could be called aspects of the Augustinian legacy of early modern Christianity.²⁴ For all its shortcomings, probably the most lucid portrait of this larger pattern remains Hugh Trevor-Roper's "Religious Origins of the Enlightenment," a forty-page comparative study, now more than fifty years old, of proto-Enlightenment repudiations of seventeenth-century Calvinism in Holland, England, Scotland, France,

²³ Alexander Broadie's summary of aesthetics in the Scottish Enlightenment, a brief tour of eighteenth-century Scottish philosophical treatments of several problems important to modern aesthetic theory, exemplifies the consequences of this inference: the problems have been highlighted primarily because of their later importance. A. Broadie, "Art and Aesthetic Theory," in *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. A. Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴ A condensed version of the following several paragraphs can be found in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., ed. M. Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), s.v. "Origins of Aesthetics: Theological Origins of Aesthetics," by Simon Grote. Reused here by permission of Oxford University Press.

and Switzerland.²⁵ Trevor-Roper portrays the birth of the Enlightenment in all these places as, in essence, a restaging of the famous 1524–25 pamphlet exchange between Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1467–1536) on the freedom of the human will. One of the chief points of conflict in that exchange had been the extent to which sinful human beings are naturally capable of improving their own prospects for salvation. Against Luther, who insisted that salvation be regarded as an utterly unmerited gift bestowed on sinful human beings by an inscrutable but merciful God, Erasmus protested that God is also supremely just, and as such he must have given human beings a capacity to perform the virtuous actions he explicitly commands. By the late seventeenth century, following the lead of such theologians as Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) in the Netherlands, resurgent partisans of Erasmus within Europe’s established churches and among a variety of dissenting groups had placed the heirs of John Calvin (1509–64), Theodor Beza (1519–1605), George Buchanan (1506–82), and John Knox (1505–72) (“What a gallery of intolerant bigots, narrow-minded martinets, timid conservative defenders of repellent dogmas, instant assailants of every new or liberal idea, inquisitors and witch-burners!”²⁶) on the defensive. What united these “Erasmian” and “Arminian” bearers of Enlightenment’s torch was not only their endurance of a wide range of slurs – including *Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, *deism*, *Pelagianism*, and *atheism* – but also their general antipathy toward the hitherto mainstream Protestant teaching that as a consequence of original sin, human beings are by nature radically depraved, which is to say, naturally incapable of doing good in this life without the supernatural assistance of divine grace.²⁷

²⁵ H. Trevor-Roper, “The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,” in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, 3rd ed. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984). The usefulness of Trevor-Roper’s study can be appreciated especially if his descriptions of the evidence are salvaged from the polemical frame (that the Enlightenment should be regarded as the legacy of the political Right rather than the Left) in which he presents them.

²⁶ Trevor-Roper, “Religious Origins,” 206.

²⁷ Attention to the rise of “Arminianism” as a largely pan-European phenomenon has not become standard in scholarly overviews of Enlightenment Christianity, where the greatest emphasis has long fallen on the development of “rationalism.” Classic examples of the latter emphasis include G. R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648–1789* (New York: Penguin, 1960, repr. 1990); and, still definitive for the study of Christianity in eighteenth-century Germany, K. Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1929). Cragg’s emphasis more or less persists in M. Heimann, “Christianity in Western Europe from the Enlightenment,” in *A World History of Christianity*, ed. A. Hastings (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). Trevor-Roper corrects not only this emphasis but also Paul Hazard’s somewhat exaggerated association of the rise of theories of natural morality with the abandonment of “the Christian system,” in *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1963), 160. Essentially in line with Trevor-Roper are Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 137–60; and, more recently, J. McManners, “Enlightenment: Secular and Christian (1600–1800),” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. J. McManners

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The dynamics of this controversy, sketched so vividly by Trevor-Roper and elucidated with greater precision by others after him,²⁸ can be observed in the churches and universities of all the places in which historians and philosophers have recently observed aesthetic theory's emergence – and not only in the context of theological debate. They were also evident in the university-taught subjects of moral philosophy and natural jurisprudence, where the subject of the controversy had by the early eighteenth century acquired a common name: “the foundation of morality” or, in the German-speaking world, *Grundlage der Moral*.²⁹ At issue, in schematic terms, was the extent to which human beings can become genuinely virtuous by exercising faculties they naturally possess. Crucial subquestions included (1) the identity of the natural faculties that needed to be exercised and (2) the extent to which the exercise of these faculties must involve discovering God's existence and understanding divine law.³⁰ In the Scottish Presbyterian and German Lutheran versions of this debate, two of the versions now best reconstructed by modern scholarship – and, happily, best suited to illuminate the goals of Baumgarten, Hutcheson, and the closest disciples of Shaftesbury, if not Shaftesbury himself – two basic positions were represented.

One position held that human beings in their natural state are simply incapable of acting in accordance with moral principles, including divine law, with any motivation other than the crass self-interest represented by a fear of divine punishments and a desire for divine rewards. Genuine virtue,

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 289–92; and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764*, v. 1 of 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50–71.

²⁸ Exemplary recent accounts of the controversy's many aspects and regional inflections can be found in I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 2 v. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000); T. Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); A. Schubert, *Das Ende der Sünde: Anthropologie und Erbsünde zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2002); T. O'Connor, *An Irish Theologian in Enlightenment France: Luke Joseph Hooke 1714–96* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995); and T. O'Connor, *Irish Jansenists: Religion and Politics in Flanders, France, Ireland and Rome* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008).

²⁹ In English, one variation was the “foundation of morals.” On the prominence of the term in England and Scotland: D. F. Norton and M. Kuehn, “The Foundations of Morality,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-century Philosophy*, ed. K. Haakonssen, v. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 941–44.

³⁰ This account of the central questions harmonizes with Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, II.199–237; G. Hartung, *Die Naturrechtsdebatte: Geschichte der Obligatio vom 17. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1998); and K. Haakonssen, “German Natural Law,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. M. Goldie and R. Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Alternative accounts include Norton and Kuehn, “The Foundations of Morality,” which tends to elide the question of human beings' capacity for virtue with the question of moral distinctions' existence, and which implausibly denies the importance of these questions in the early-eighteenth-century German-speaking world.

on this view, requires a fundamental change or “regeneration” of the human soul by God in the course of a person’s life, such that the motivation to act in accordance with moral principles ceases to be a desire for reward and fear of punishment and becomes instead a disinterested love of God and neighbor. In early-eighteenth-century Scotland, this view was represented by so-called orthodox Presbyterians. Key aspects of it – above all the assumption that human beings are naturally motivated only by crass self-interest – were understood by its critics, albeit sometimes unfairly, to reside also in the works of other authors familiar to Scottish university students, including Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94), and Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733).³¹ In Halle, the Brandenburg-Prussian university city where Baumgarten began developing his aesthetic theory, a similar view was represented by a number of theologians and jurists who defy easy placement under a single heading but who included canonical representatives of German Pietism and putative adherents to a tradition of natural jurisprudence with roots in the works of Pufendorf.³²

Another position in the debate, represented by many of Trevor-Roper’s “Erasmians,” held that without paying attention to the rewards and punishments attached to divine law, human beings are indeed capable of reaching a substantial degree of virtue, simply by cultivating and exercising a naturally inborn, more or less instinctive human desire for virtue itself. Elements of this view have been traced by modern scholars not only to Erasmus but also to ancient and medieval accounts of *synderesis* as a spark of divinity within the human soul, such as that of Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74); to the well-known argument by Grotius that natural law would remain obligatory even if it were conceded that God does not exist; and to the “federal theology” of Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–63), which introduced late-seventeenth-century Calvinism and Lutheranism to the possibility of human beings’ progressive moral improvement, thereby undermining long-standing notions of original sin.³³ Between 1720 and 1750, the best-known and most committed Scottish representative of this view was Francis Hutcheson, who devoted his career as a moral theorist and university professor to demonstrating that human beings possessed an

³¹ I thank Katerina Mihaylova for impressing upon me the respects in which this characterization of Pufendorf by his critics was unfair.

³² E.g., Johann Franz Buddeus (1667–1729), Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling (1671–1729), and Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) – on all of whom, see Chapter 1.

³³ E.g., R. A. Greene, “Instinct of Nature: Natural Law, Synderesis, and the Moral Sense,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.2 (1997): 175–98; Schubert, *Das Ende der Sünde*; S. Borchers, *Die Erzeugung des ganzen Menschen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), esp. 136–62.