

Happiness and Utility

Essays Presented to
Frederick Rosen



Edited by

Georgios Varouxakis

Mark Philp

UCLPRESS

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Frederick Rosen

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Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Mill on Pleasure and Virtue

Roger Crisp

John Stuart Mill's hedonism – in particular, his arguments for a qualitative distinction between pleasures and for virtue as a constituent of happiness understood hedonistically – has been subjected to a huge amount of scrutiny, especially since the publication of the monumental Toronto edition of his works under the general editorship of John Robson.¹ I have already contributed a few pebbles to this mountain of scholarly exegesis, and do not intend to add to it in this paper. Rather, I propose to focus on two British moral philosophers whose works in the eighteenth century could be described as broadly hedonist and who, like Mill, engaged closely with the questions of the relation of virtue and pleasure, and the roles of each in human happiness or well-being. Especially significant, perhaps, is the fact that both distinguished between higher and lower pleasures, placed virtue in the former category, and saw it as an important constituent of happiness.²

I. Shaftesbury

Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, was extremely influential on eighteenth-century thought, both philosophical and non-philosophical, in Britain and abroad. In philosophy, his impact on the sentimentalism of Hutcheson, Hume and others is often noted, though his own meta-ethics was a version of rationalist realism. That meta-ethics itself emerged from a broadly Platonic metaphysics, in which the potential for conflict between self and others was resolved through the postulation of a divinely created, ordered and governed universe, the

mind of each individual being seen as part of a general mind or nature, divinely construed (e.g. 21; R 14–17, 138–9).³

Shaftesbury's early education was overseen by John Locke, who was a member of the 1st Earl's household. Shaftesbury remained deeply attached to Locke, but was critical of many of his views, including some of those in ethics and political theory.⁴ Shaftesbury saw the attempt to understand society and social morality as developing out of a pre-social state of nature as deeply mistaken, since human beings are naturally social (e.g. 51). Shaftesbury also disliked the voluntarist and divine command elements in Locke's thought and, in particular, the importance attributed to reward and punishment in the afterlife. In his earliest publication, a preface to an edition of sermons by the Cambridge Platonist Benjamin Whichcote, Shaftesbury allows that Christianity is the 'greatest Blessing imaginable', partly because of the excellence of its precepts and its enforcement of moral duties, and that without it morality would collapse entirely (P iii–iv). But he believed that virtue was a good in itself for the agent and that virtuous motivation did not need to, indeed could not, depend on goods or bads external to virtue, so that reference to divine punishment is required only when the non-instrumental arguments for virtue have failed (269; NL 11–12). Shaftesbury's theism is as rooted in ancient as in Christian thought, and his discomfort with the notion of a hell created by a benevolent and merciful God was clearly shared by Whichcote himself, who claims that, though God has indeed arranged matters so that vice leads to unhappiness, this punishment is inflicted internally and by the sinner himself, not by God (P xiii).⁵

Most of Shaftesbury's works were written in the five or six years leading up to their being published together in his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1711. Shaftesbury revised the work over the two remaining years of his life, and a new edition was published in 1714. This book, which went through eleven editions between 1711 and 1790, will be my main focus,⁶ but it is also important to consider other writings, in particular the highly personal and revealing *Philosophical Regimen*, a collection of Shaftesbury's personal notebooks, apparently written only for himself and not published until 1900.⁷

Let us turn to pleasure. Shaftesbury frequently appears staunchly opposed to evaluative hedonism. He criticizes the philosophical and theological orthodoxy of his day, according to which we should 'rate life by the number and exquisiteness of the pleasing sensations' and so 'learn virtue by usury', valuing it for the pleasure it can produce (and presumably the pain it can prevent) (57; also NL 19). Shaftesbury also finds problems internal to hedonism itself. First, pleasure cannot be the foundation

of a 'rule of good', since those who aim at unrestricted pleasure are constantly changing their minds about what is and is not pleasurable (138; also 151–2, 252–3, R 50). Consistency can be found only through aiming at virtue: 'if honesty be my delight, I know no other consequence from indulging such a passion than that of growing better natured, and enjoying more and more the pleasures of society' (138–9; also R 54–5). Second, and relatedly, any evaluative claim must be universally true (R 56–7). To be happy requires contentment, and one can be content without unrestricted pleasure, just as one can without fame or power. Further, pain cannot be said to be evil, since some people can tolerate it.

These arguments, it has to be admitted, are somewhat weak. If aiming for unrestricted pleasure and avoidance of pain produces a lower balance of pleasure over pain than some other strategy, then an evaluative hedonist can recommend that alternative. Further, even though it is true that hedonic value can diminish marginally, there seems to be no reason why an evaluative hedonist should not take this into account in his/her calculations, shifting to a new source at the optimum level to maximize the overall balance of pleasure over the pains of disappointment and boredom. Nor need the hedonist reject the universality claim. S/he can insist that the greatest balance of unrestricted pleasure over pain is universally good, and note that, since contentment is a kind of pleasure, Shaftesbury's own view can be understood as hedonist.⁸

As we might expect, given his Stoic views on desire, Shaftesbury puts a very high value on contentment or tranquillity: one moment of it is more valuable than a lifetime of the 'tumultuous joy' of friendship (R 116). It is stable, does not lead to disgust, and is immune to the vicissitudes of fortune (R 151–2, 208). It is 'nothing else than the good ordering of the mind',⁹ and Shaftesbury describes its absence, and indulgence in the passions, as 'near to real madness' (R 160).

Shaftesbury's main argument against unrestricted hedonism is again solidly Aristotelian. According to Aristotle, since all animals, including the intelligent ones, aim at pleasure, it would be absurd to claim that it is not a good.¹⁰ But not all pleasures are worthy of choice, so unrestricted hedonism is mistaken.¹¹ The pleasure of virtuous actions is good, while that of vicious ones is bad, and the virtuous person is the touchstone of which pleasures are and are not valuable.¹² And these are primarily the pleasures really characteristic of a human being – that is, the pleasures of virtuous action itself.¹³ Shaftesbury is in broad agreement with Aristotle. Just as a man of 'breeding and politeness' will take care to develop his taste by focusing on the best architecture and paintings, so all of us should have 'the same regard to a right taste in life and

manners' (150–1; also e.g. 335). Shaftesbury's objection, then, is not to hedonism, but to unrestricted hedonism (250–1).

This brings us to the question of how Shaftesbury views the value of virtue to the virtuous agent him/herself. In his earliest publication, Shaftesbury drew a distinction between a justification of virtue grounded on the intrinsic 'Pleasure and Contentment in Works of Goodness and Bounty' (which were also experienced by God)¹⁴ and one that appealed to 'some Advantage of a different Sort from what attends the Actions themselves' (P 10). Further, as one would expect, he accepts reasons of self-interest: 'we should all agree – that happiness was to be pursued and in fact was always sought after' (56; also 170).

Shaftesbury is most plausibly understood as a substantive hedonist about well-being, insofar as he believes that happiness consists in pleasurable experiences arising from valuable objects, and in particular the state of mental contentment arising from virtue and virtuous activity.¹⁵ Again, this position is close to that of Aristotle, though Aristotle is most plausibly read as claiming that happiness consists *only* in (pleasurable) excellent or virtuous activity,¹⁶ and, as we shall see, Shaftesbury reverses Aristotle's order of priority of intellectual activity over the exercise of the virtues of character.¹⁷ Shaftesbury is clearly not committed to explanatory hedonism, according to which the only good-making property is pleasantness. Pleasure in worthless objects is itself worthless. The fact that an experience is one of taking pleasure in a valuable object is itself good-making, but the explanatory account of goodness here is complex and must include reference to Shaftesbury's views on God, nature and perfection.

Shaftesbury's view on the content of morality is, in many respects, close to that of common sense. He is committed to many standard virtues, and appears to accept certain standard deontological views on justice, promising and other issues. There is a strong welfarist element in Shaftesbury's thinking – e.g. virtue aims at 'the general good' (230) and 'the good of mankind' (244) – but his frequent mention of values such as justice alongside the promotion of overall good (e.g. R 71–2) suggests that we should not interpret him as any kind of utilitarian. When he says that making the most of life consists in doing the most good (R 346), he has in mind avoiding selfishness and living virtuously. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury's insistence on impartiality and the promotion of the good of the whole does introduce a consequentialist element into his normative ethics. It seems that he believes, like many pure consequentialists, that following the partial principles of common-sense morality will in most cases promote the overall good, though he may well accept that there are

non-consequentialist reasons for so doing (e.g. 255–6). So the practical implications of his impartiality principle are relevant only in those probably rare cases in which one is required to sacrifice the interests of those close to one for the sake of the overall good (see e.g. 205–7; R 6, 97). Further, there is no hint in Shaftesbury of the idea that one should adopt anything like Sidgwick's 'point of view of the universe', from which one's own good matters, as far as one's own practice is concerned, only as much as that of anyone else's. Some degree of partiality towards oneself is natural, and hence good and required. But there is no tension between the promotion of my good and the promotion of the overall good, since my good itself consists in the promotion of the overall good, as Shaftesbury conceives it. That is to say, the overall good does not consist in an overall sum of individual utilities, themselves calculated independently of that overall good. The overall good consists in the world's operating as it should, with each agent's following common-sense morality modified by the principle of impartiality.

Shaftesbury puts forward a series of suggestive and interrelated arguments to the conclusion that the life of the virtuous person is the happiest:¹⁸

(i) *Natural affections*. To lack 'honesty', that is, virtue, would be to lack the natural social affections, a life without which is wretched (56). When we consider some creature void of such affections, we suppose it will feel little pleasure and be inclined to moroseness and distress (194–5, 215–16, 431–2). The reason for its state, though we tend not fully to recognize it, is disharmony. If we 'strain' some affection, or act on some wrong passion, this will upset the balance of our mind, causing deep and lasting distress. Our dependence on society is greater than that of any other animal, and we all strongly desire to be in friendly relations with others. Suppressing that desire will lead to disharmony, discontent and unhappiness.

Shaftesbury's focus here, like that of Plato's in the *Republic*, is on the life of the entirely vicious person. Confronted by, say, some gangster, who appears to have genuine love and concern for his family and friends, Shaftesbury can only doubt that genuineness, or insist that such partial concern anyway puts the individual into a position of conflict with the good of the whole, which itself will result in discontent (the gangster's denial of that must again be taken to be disingenuous or the consequence of self-deceit) (194, 205–6; also Irwin, 360).¹⁹

(ii) *Identity and character*. In the *Regimen*, Shaftesbury appears to believe that continuity of correct moral opinion is required for identity over time. In the *Characteristics*, he makes the weaker claim that what a

person is – i.e. we must assume, what kind of person he is – depends on the person's character and affections, so that if 'he loses what is manly and worthy in these, he is as much lost to himself as when he loses his memory and understanding' (56).

In both cases, Shaftesbury appears to be speaking of moral decline. It is not clear why someone whose opinions and character have been continuously villainous from the start should be denied the self of identity or of character required to ground any notion of self-interest.

(iii) *Activity*. It might be claimed that the highest pleasure is that of passive freedom from any kind of distress (142). But this life is equivalent to being asleep. True happiness consists in 'action and employment'.

In following Aristotle here, who also stressed the importance of activity as opposed to the mere possession of virtuous dispositions,²⁰ Shaftesbury's position is plausible enough. But he fails to address the position of those who advocate a life of wakeful disengagement and, of course, those who press the claims of the life of vice tend to be recommending the life of vicious activity. Naturally, Shaftesbury will argue that luxury, like all vices, results in disharmony and hence discontent. But this is again an empirical claim, and it will be difficult for Shaftesbury plausibly to debunk apparent counterexamples. A more fruitful approach would be to accept the possibility of idle or vicious contentment but to question its value.

(iv) *Perfectionism*. Our own good or interest is itself the result of nature, and that good consists in fulfilling or perfecting our own nature (167, 205, 428; R 257). As we have seen, Shaftesbury sees each individual as having a role to play in the promotion of cosmic order. Our playing that role itself constitutes our good; if we do not, our relation to the cosmos is like that of an unhealthy part of the body that grows unnaturally to the detriment of the body as a whole (R 49; 193). Our social affections are to promote not our own interest, but that of our species (R 3). However:

for a creature whose natural end is society, to operate as is by nature appointed him towards the good of such his society or whole is in reality to pursue his own natural and proper good. (432)

This order is clearly the result of design by a 'universal mind' (276), and this provides Shaftesbury with the material for a second perfectionist argument, independent of the claim that the good of an individual constituent consists in it fulfilling its natural role in promoting the good of the whole. For there to be a tension between the good of the part and

the good of the whole, or between the self-interest of the individual and virtue, would itself be 'a blot and imperfection in the general constitution of things' (190).

Like most perfectionist arguments, Shaftesbury's can be accused of assuming what it is intended to prove. Shaftesbury himself accepts the naturalness of self-interest and the rationality of its pursuit, and so it is open to an egoist to argue that the perfection of any individual lies solely in promoting its own good. It is also possible to drive a wedge between the notions of perfection and well-being.²¹ An egoist may accept that my living virtuously and so promoting the overall good will perfect my human nature, but deny that this will advance my own good. Now this will, of course, introduce the kind of tension into the cosmos that Shaftesbury's second argument denies. But competition between individuals is fairly obviously part of the natural order, and the claim that the hierarchical order that results from competition is any less the result of divine intention than that which arises through cooperation is not well grounded.

(v) *Higher pleasures*. Shaftesbury claims that the pleasures (or perhaps rather 'enjoyments', 252) of virtue are superior to bodily pleasures. His discussion, in part II of the *Inquiry* in particular (200–30), is sophisticated and wide-ranging, and further subsections may be helpful.

(a) *Mind versus body*. Shaftesbury claims that most people will accept that the pleasures of the mind are greater than, and superior to, those of the body (200–2). As evidence, he cites the fact that those who have committed themselves to pursuing some mental pleasure cannot be diverted by bodily pleasures and pains. Even villains, on the basis of some principle of honour, will 'embrace any manner of hardship and defy torments and death'. In contrast, someone currently experiencing pleasures of the senses can easily be distracted by internal pain or distress.

These claims are, at the very least, somewhat hard to believe. But Shaftesbury also offers a dependency argument (211–12). Bodily pleasures depend on those of the mind – in particular, those of the natural affections. The pleasure of eating is insignificant without a table, company and so on; prostitutes know that their clients wish to believe that the pleasure the clients are feeling is mutual.

Besides again relying on dubious empirical premises, this argument brings out two further problems lying behind Shaftesbury's overall position. The first is an equivocation on the notion of 'social affections'. On the one hand, it can refer to the pleasures of virtuous activity; on the other, to the pleasures of company. It is at least arguable that vicious people can enjoy the company of others, even if they have no moral concern for those others and treat them purely as a source of entertainment.

The second problem is with the very distinction between pleasures of the mind and those of the body. It could be that there is some important difference between, say, the pleasures of working through some elegant mathematical proof, and those resulting from a massage. Here we might have a real contrast between the intellectual and the sensual or physical. But the pleasure of refined eating may involve a good deal of reflective thought on the nature and origin of the foods in question; and the pleasures taken in the company of others are sometimes sexual and, to that extent, bodily.

(b) *The Informed Preference Test*. As Mill was later to do,²² Shaftesbury revives one of Plato's arguments for the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures in the *Republic*²³ (202). To judge the relative value of two categories of pleasure adequately requires experience of each. The virtuous person understands sensual pleasure, while the vicious person cannot grasp social pleasure.

One worry here is again over whether there is empirical support for Shaftesbury's claim. Consider the objection as raised by Alan Ryan against Mill's argument in favour of mental over bodily pleasures: 'The philosopher who is a half-hearted sensualist cannot estimate the attractions of a debauched existence, any more than the sensualist flicking through the pages of Hume can estimate the pleasures of philosophy'.²⁴ We might, however, allow Shaftesbury that at least some ordinarily virtuous people do seem capable of wholeheartedly enjoying sensual pleasures. A more serious problem is whether those virtuous people who, in certain circumstances, choose the pleasures of virtue over those of sensuality are doing so on the basis that the pleasures of virtue are *more pleasant* than those of the body. We might expect many of them to say that they prefer virtue, rather than the pleasures of virtue in particular, to bodily pleasure; that their own virtue would anyway decrease the amount of pleasure available to them from sensuality, if non-virtuous; and that their reasons for preferring virtue are moral rather than self-regarding. We can be sure that the judgements of some virtuous people would fit Shaftesbury's description; but there would be many that did not.

(c) *Virtuous activity versus contemplation*. Earlier in this paper, I noted various ways in which Aristotle's ethics appears to have influenced Shaftesbury, either directly or through the development of his ideas by Hellenistic philosophers. Notoriously, at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle ranks the intellectual activity of contemplation above that of practically virtuous activity. Here, Shaftesbury does not follow him (202–3). Shaftesbury is prepared to accept that intellectual pleasures are superior to those of sense. Those who apply their understanding

of mathematical principles, for example, will experience an especially deep enjoyment resulting from 'love of truth, proportion, order and symmetry'. But even this pleasure is 'far surpassed by virtuous motion and the exercise of benignity and goodness ... For where is there on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a beautiful, proportioned and becoming action?'

Shaftesbury's ethical aestheticism again seems to involve reliance on empirically doubtful premises. Compare, for example, the pleasure Archimedes felt when he discovered the relation between volume and the displacement of water with that experienced by someone fulfilling a promise to a friend to post a letter for him/her on the way home.

(d) *Consequences*. Shaftesbury is prepared to identify the natural affections with mental enjoyments. But he also argues that certain mental enjoyments flow from those affections, in two ways (204–5). First, one is able sympathetically to experience a second-order, sympathetic enjoyment in the pleasure of others. Second, one can enjoy the admiration and esteem of others.

We have already seen the problems arising out of Shaftesbury's equivocation concerning the natural or social affections. A benevolent person will indeed take vicarious pleasure in the happiness of others, and may well enjoy his/her reputation. But the same will be true of at least some vicious people. The most that Shaftesbury can offer is an enticement to virtue for someone already attracted to it and the particular reputation that it will bring with it. It also has to be admitted that there is a tension between the argument from esteem and Shaftesbury's arguments elsewhere against attributing any great significance to reputation.

(e) *Self-review*. According to Shaftesbury, anyone who introspects will find that the pleasures he experiences alone or with others are 'wholly founded in an easy temper, free of harshness, bitterness or distaste, and in a mind or reason well composed, quiet, easy within itself and such as can freely bear its own inspection and review' (206, 208–10). By 'anyone' here, Shaftesbury must mean 'anyone virtuous', since he goes on to insist that the pleasures he has in mind are the result of the natural affections.

Some will wish to object that such self-review exemplifies a form of vanity or self-indulgence; but against this, it can plausibly be said that the absence of any kind of review is a sign of complacency. The problem is that many vicious people will also be able to bear or even enjoy this kind of self-review, in part because often the values against which they are assessing their own characters are themselves vicious (so while a virtuous person may be tormented by a single, uncharacteristically ruthless

action, a vicious person may reflect on his/her ruthlessness with pride). Shaftesbury insists that all rational creatures will feel shame or regret at doing what is hateful (209). But unless he is building a capacity to feel such emotions into his account of rationality itself, Shaftesbury's confident generalization again seems open to doubt. Many psychopaths seem perfectly rational, in the procedural sense, and yet they feel little or no shame. It is true, of course, that wrongdoers are often tormented by guilt; one way to avoid that is to refrain from action one knows is likely to cause guilt. But another is to adopt strategies to weaken one's own proneness towards such negative emotions, as Nazis involved in the holocaust were encouraged to do.

(f) *Excessive self-love and the unnatural affections.* Shaftesbury analyses several self-regarding affections, including love of life (which can lead to a miserable fear of death, for example), anger, luxury, sexual desire, love of wealth, pride, and love of ease, along with certain 'unnatural' affections such as sadism (216–29). He argues plausibly enough that such affections, especially if excessive, can cause distress to their subject.

But the truth is significantly more complex than Shaftesbury allows, and depends on the existing nature and situation of the person in question. Some vicious people appear to enjoy excessive indulgence in luxury, pride or sadism, and even possibly intrinsically unpleasant emotions, such as anger, may have instrumental benefits for the vicious agent who can use them, for example, to extort goods from others.

The upshot of the above is we cannot accept that Shaftesbury has shown '*every vicious action must be self-injurious and ill*', on the ground that such actions encourage and strengthen vicious traits. In some cases, virtue will be more advantageous than vice in hedonistic terms; but in others it will not (for example, in the case of the person morally required to allow him/herself to be tortured). Further, Shaftesbury will face objections to his account of well-being from two opposed directions. On the one hand, unrestricted hedonists will insist that the contentment on which Shaftesbury places so much weight is only one kind of enjoyment among others, all of which should be brought into the discussion; on the other, non-hedonists may insist that Shaftesbury should have gone further in the direction of the ancient view that virtue, or virtuous activity, matters independently of its hedonistic effects on the agent. Despite Aristotle's influence on him, and his rejection of various Lockean views, and of course his own inventiveness, Shaftesbury seems unable to shake off the egoism and hedonism that dominated British moral philosophy after Hobbes.

II. Hutcheson

Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) was born in Northern Ireland and educated at the University of Glasgow, where he took up the chair of Moral Philosophy in 1729. His work played a significant role in the Scottish Enlightenment, influencing Hume, Smith and Reid, as well as many thinkers beyond Scotland.²⁵ Hutcheson himself was modest about his own originality (S 1.xlvii: ‘*All who have looked into such subjects know that the general doctrine and foundation of morals may be found in the antients ... [Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Cicero], and in Dr. Cumberland, and in Lord Shaftesbury*’ (SI 5)).²⁶ It is true that his views in general have a good deal in common with these predecessors, but also that the detailed and powerful statement of those views, including not only his theory of moral sense but also his position on morality and self-interest, is imaginative, historically significant, and highly suggestive. Given our focus on Hutcheson as a precursor to Mill, it is worth noting that Hutcheson sees more deeply than Cumberland into the true nature of broadly utilitarian impartiality, while usually avoiding Shaftesbury’s equivocation between genuine impartiality and the pleasures of partial friendship. Further, although he is a devout Christian, and his ethics is theistic in certain important respects, unlike Shaftesbury he tends to maintain a clear distinction between religious and moral experience. Hutcheson is in this respect strongly committed to the idea of natural law, seeing the aim of moral philosophy as being to demonstrate to each person, with reference to nature rather than the supernatural, that their individual greatest happiness lies in virtue (I 179; E 174–5; S 1.1).²⁷

Hutcheson was, for most intents and purposes, an evaluative hedonist, at least at the substantive level, and held also that pleasure is the sole object of the will (LM 126).²⁸ The happiness of any individual is identical with ‘pleasant perceptions’, and public happiness is merely the aggregate of such perceptions (RL 42). These perceptions give us our first idea of natural goodness, and we attribute immediate goodness to those objects likely to produce such perceptions, such as drink or harmony, and mediate goodness to objects instrumental to immediate goodness, such as wealth (I 86). The same relations, of course, hold between pain and badness, and lead to aversion rather than positive desire (e.g. S 1.4; I 26). Hutcheson’s definitions of happiness are less precise than those of his successors in the hedonist tradition. For example, he defines happiness as ‘a state wherein there is plenty of such things as excite these general sensations or one kind or another, and we are free from pain’, and misery as ‘frequent and lasting sensations of the painful and disagreeable sorts,

excluding all grateful sensations'. Further, like Mill,²⁹ he did not sustain a clear distinction between happiness as pleasure, and happiness as the greatest balance of pleasure over pain within a life. But it is clear that he recognizes that pleasures and pains can be weighed against one another, and his advocacy of maximization at both the intra- and interpersonal levels suggests that he would have accepted a conception of well-being according to which it consists in the greatest balance of pleasure over pain. Degrees of pleasantness and painfulness depend entirely on their intensity and duration (e.g. E 37).

Often (e.g. E 9), Hutcheson appears to mean by 'intensity' degree of pleasurable-ness. At times he appears to distinguish between intensity and dignity. For example, the earlier statement of the seventh axiom of calm desire is: 'In computing the *Quantities* of Good or Evil, which we pursue or shun, either for our selves or others, when the *Durations* are equal, the Moment is as the *Intenseness*' (E 37). Hutcheson later added 'or Dignity of the Enjoyment' (E 210). Indeed, he allows that the dignity of certain individuals can justify choosing an outcome in which they benefit over another of equal hedonic value (E 39). At SI 9, he claims that we should compare enjoyments according to their dignity and duration, making no mention of intensity. And at SI 54, dignity appears to be equivalent to value at a time: the dignity of the sensual pleasures consists only in the 'intenseness of the pleasure in the sensation'; the superior pleasures have their own 'excellence'. Hutcheson does believe that dignity – understood as something like 'excellence' – can increase pleasurable-ness, because of the pleasure taken in dignity, claiming: 'These moral Pleasures do some way more nearly affect us than any other: They make us delight in our *selves*, and relish our very *Nature*. By these we perceive an *internal Dignity* and *Worth*; and seem to have a Pleasure like to that ascribed often to the Deity, by which we enjoy our own *Perfection*, and that of every other Being' (E 107; also S 1.132). But it is tempting to think that, like Mill, Hutcheson at least comes close to allowing that non-hedonic properties of experiences can increase a person's well-being directly, as well as indirectly through increasing pleasurable-ness. In other words, Hutcheson is a substantive but not an explanatory hedonist. The moral pleasures are best for us, but not merely because of their greater pleasurable-ness: their dignity also matters. Consider also S 1.117: 'By this intimate feeling of dignity, enjoyments and exercises of some kinds, tho' not of the highest degree of those kinds, are incomparably more excellent and beatifick than the most intense and lasting enjoyments of the lower kinds' (also I 4, 77; E 94–5; S 1.29, 117, 129, 2.380; SI 40, 56–7).³⁰ And, of course, there is a corresponding indignity in vice, which makes it the

greatest evil (S 1.139–40). Nevertheless, it would certainly be fair to say that the dominant idea emerging from Hutcheson's ethics is that the balance of pleasure over pain should be maximized at both individual and social levels, and that pleasantness and painfulness are the most significant good- and bad-making properties respectively.

As is standard in philosophical discussions of pleasures and pains, Hutcheson divides each into various different categories (SI 55–62, 70; also S 1.116–39). The most basic are bodily or sensual pleasures, which are felt when we satisfy those appetites we share with non-human animals. They have 'none of that dignity which is the object of praise'. Next are those pleasures that emerge from the 'elegance and grandeur of life', as well as those of the arts, sciences and intellectual activity in general. These pleasures are 'purer ... more honourable and joyful', and yet not absolutely the highest. The next highest are those of sympathy, as we can see from the fact that we will not envy a person with profuse bodily and intellectual pleasures, but no social pleasures. Unlike Shaftesbury, Hutcheson distinguishes clearly between these pleasures and those of the conscience or moral sense, which arise through reflection on one's own character and actions. And it is in the pleasures of virtue – in particular, acting virtuously – that we find the 'highest happiness'. Hutcheson's detailed arguments for this broadly hedonistic view are perhaps the most developed in the history of philosophy, though as with Shaftesbury some of them depend on dubious empirical claims.

Hutcheson takes care to reject those versions of Stoicism according to which what is central is making oneself immune to contingent harms (E 83). That would involve a failure of compassion for the suffering of others, an excessive focus on the self rather than others, and a move towards passive retreat from the world rather than active engagement with it (also S 1.132). Such a position is in effect inconsistent with true human nature, which reveals itself when the agent is calm – and hence impartially benevolent (I 164). Our benevolent nature is of course the result of benevolent design (RL 53; E 8; S 1.1.75; SI 23, 40), and so we should not be surprised to find that our moral sense is itself designed to give its possessors pleasure (I 100).³¹ Hutcheson also locates himself within the perfectionist Aristotelian tradition, according to which happiness itself consists in the perfection of one's nature (S 1.29). This general position resonates with his revival of the Shaftesburian argument that, since the self is independent of the body, the bodily pleasures are in that sense alien and inferior (E 107; S 1.147).

As we have seen, pleasures are of different kinds. How should we compare them? Referring appropriately to Plato and Shaftesbury, and

anticipating Mill,³² Hutcheson advocates reliance on the verdicts of a competent judge, rather than on each individual's position (rather than a pig, Hutcheson imagines a fly or maggot judging its pleasures to be superior to all others) (E 88–9; also S 1.120–1; SI 57). According to such a judge, there is no doubt that the pleasures of virtue are the highest. These include the pleasures of benevolence (I 134; S 1.140–1, 147), but also those of piety, which Hutcheson tends to classify independently and as the very highest (S 1.222, 234; SI 87).

As far as benevolence is concerned, pleasantness increases with impartiality (S 1.132). As we might expect, this pleasantness is at least to some extent aesthetic: 'in some extensive Principles of Action', as in certain theorems, we perceive a beauty analogous to that in sensible objects (I 24).³³ The approving awareness of one's own virtue is a great joy (SI 40–1), while vice brings with it the pains of guilt, regret and remorse (SI 40, 66, 145, 147), and of reproach by others (SI 148). These pains are themselves distracting, making it impossible for the subject to focus on the sources of external, or bodily, pleasure (SI 63). Remorse also often arises after indulgence in the bodily or sensual pleasures (SI 56, 126), whereas reflection on past virtuous deeds is deeply pleasurable (RL 45; SI 61) and the development of a virtuous habit increases pleasure even further (S 1.133). Even in the absence of such remorse, reflection on past external pleasures is hedonically neutral, and such pleasures are brief and transient, producing nauseous satiety and languor (I 164; E 105–8; S 1.124, 132, SI 56, 88–9). Just as the pleasures of virtue have the greatest duration, the same is true of those of vice (E 108; SI 66): unlike Mill, Hutcheson allows for different qualities of pain as well as pleasure (SI 100, 139).

The pleasures of virtue, unlike even those of the imagination, are a support in difficult times (E 105–6), and the virtuous can even rise above physical pain (RL 46; S 1.151–2). Further, if pain is an obstacle to a virtuous action, that of course only increases its value (I 165). The virtuous can enjoy the external pleasures, and do not need them in excess: a simple life is sufficient (I 1.106; S 1.127). In general, 'external' goods such as wealth are required for 'complete' happiness (SI 64, 222), but the virtuous gain more from them (E 104). Their moderation increases pleasures from such sources (SI 58), while unmoderated indulgence itself causes vexation. Further the virtuous, because others will feel affection for them, are more likely to be beneficiaries as well as benefactors.

The emotions of the vicious – anger, malice, and so on – make them miserable even when opportunities for external pleasure are open to them (I 164). In response to the objection that the vicious clearly do experience some valuable external pleasures, Hutcheson can respond

that this is true only of the majority of the vicious who are in a way partly virtuous (S 1.153, 191–2). Virtue consists in benevolent affections, and most of the vicious have some social affections, which are valuable in themselves and may make it possible for the vicious to gain some value also from external pleasures (SI 57).

These points are part of the explanation of why virtue is necessary for other goods to be valuable (I 165–7; S 1.126). But there is another component to this explanation. Consider the Roman Regulus who, set free by the Carthaginians on condition that he would return, did so only to be tortured. We might wish that he had not been tortured; but none of us would wish, for his sake, that he had broken his promise. This is a very clear example of the work being done by dignity in Hutcheson's account. Only pleasures are valuable, but their value depends not only on their being pleasant, but on their dignity. In this respect, then, Hutcheson, as Mill was tempted to do, moves away from a pure explanatory hedonism to allow in non-hedonic good-making properties. Many have wondered why Mill did not go the whole way, and move beyond substantive hedonism altogether, perhaps even allowing happiness to consist in more than subjective states – in particular, in virtuous actions. The same question arises for Hutcheson, as does the question of whether the approval we feel for Regulus's behaviour may be grounded in our view of the morality of his actions rather than whether he himself benefited from them.

We can now grasp the main outlines of Hutcheson's conception of the role of virtue in happiness. In general, his view is that the pleasures of impartial benevolence, combined with piety, are discontinuously more valuable than others, and for that reason virtue guarantees the best outcome for the agent, usually in terms of positive happiness but sometimes only in the diminution of misery (S 1.178; SI 78, 249). In certain passages, however, Hutcheson appears to accept weaker views. He allows that death may be preferable for a person 'under grievous bodily pain' (SI 65), implying that the exercise of courage in such circumstances is insufficient for happiness. At E 97–8, his argument for the superiority of virtue over the avoidance of bodily pain explicitly appeals to actions of great virtue, when his stated position elsewhere appears to be that all virtuous pleasure is superior to the avoidance of bodily pain of any kind. At E 143, he claims that the reasonable person will examine the *tendencies* of the various types of action s/he considers doing, and that the pursuit of the public good is the *most probable* route to the greatest happiness. These and other passages, though in a minority, suggest a certain – quite justifiable – reluctance on Hutcheson's part to accept the strong Stoic thesis that virtue guarantees the greatest happiness and hence immunity to

fortune. That reluctance may be explained partly by his commitment to substantive hedonism. It may be somewhat implausible to claim that the virtuous person who chooses to die in agony on the rack has lived the happiest or even the best life possible for him/her; but to claim that s/he has experienced the most pleasurable life is even harder to believe.

III. Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Mill

There is no doubt that John Stuart Mill was familiar with the works of both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Although he does not explicitly mention either as direct influences, it is instructive to consider the parallels between their work and his, and to reflect upon the standard questions, and range of answers, constituting the philosophical background against which all three philosophers were working. All were substantive hedonists about well-being, believing human happiness to consist only in pleasures. Shaftesbury is not an explanatory hedonist, but the role Hutcheson placed on dignity, and Mill on nobility in his own account of higher pleasures, is evidence that at the very least they were tempted by an Aristotelian, non-hedonist position. Shaftesbury's view is not a form of utilitarianism, but it is theoretically and practically close to it. All three philosophers distinguish between higher and lower pleasures, using, among others, the Socratic appeal to the experienced judge. All see virtue as a central component in happiness, though here we do see a contrast between Mill and his two predecessors. Mill's attempt to close the apparent gap between self-interest consists in the very brief second stage of his famous proof in the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, along with a somewhat vague and optimistic appeal to the potential of moral education in the third chapter. Unlike Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Mill had to work hard to defend hedonism, and the opposition to utilitarianism was in Mill's day a good deal more developed than that faced by Hutcheson. Given the weakness of any hedonist defence of a complete overlap between happiness and virtue, which he may well have noted in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Mill may have decided to focus on battles he had a better chance of winning.³⁴

Notes

1. This paper uses material from chapters 7 and 9 of my book *Sacrifice Regained: Morality and Self-Interest in British Moral Philosophy from Hobbes to Bentham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2019). I am grateful to Oxford University Press for permission.

2. The J. S. Mill library at Somerville College, Oxford, contains the 4th edition of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1727) and a 1st edition of Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755). Both contain annotations in Mill's hand, along with textual side-markings. Some of these concern happiness and virtue. For example, at the very end of the second volume of the *System*, Mill includes the following notes (Mill, 2018): '25 Approbation from others, excites pleasurable feelings; disapprobation painful. Again; why stop short? These feelings, not the idea of the good the man who approves may do us. True; but they are the train of pleasurable ideas (a much richer collection) of all the advantages which the favour of mankind yields to them who obtain it'; '42 Acts good for others done by us for the good they will do to us, not virtuous. True, in the sense you now use the phrase, "good to us". But an act done by us, to produce a good to others which calls up all the train of pleasurable ideas which spring from the idea of good acts done mutually by men to one another is virtuous'; '100 The value of pains + pleasures measured, by intensity + durability'.
3. All unattributed page references are to Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. L. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Other Shaftesbury abbreviations used in the text are as follows: 'Preface' to *Select Sermons of Dr Whichcot* [P]; *Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man at the University* [NL]; *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury* [R]; *Second Characters or the Language of Forms* [SC].
4. At SC 178, for example, Locke and Hobbes are classed together – apparently as 'barbarians' – for their denial of ethical aestheticism.
5. Shaftesbury describes such punishment as 'inherent', which it insofar as the painfulness is a property of the vicious action itself. But it is not clear (*pace* M. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 79) that this conception of inherent punishment (and reward) entitles Whichcote or Shaftesbury to the claim that we should care about virtue for its own sake, rather than for its inherent benefits.
6. The *Inquiry*, included in the *Characteristics*, has usually been seen as Shaftesbury's most significant contribution to philosophical ethics. As noted by I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, vol. 2: *Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 108, also 111, it is unwise to read the *Inquiry* independently of *The Moralists* (note especially her quotation from Leibniz at 108n108).
7. That edition itself is problematic: see R. Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671–1713* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 354. An annotated version of the manuscripts is now available in Shaftesbury, *Standard Edition II*, 6: *Askēmata*, eds. W. Benda et al. (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011). Many themes are common between the *Characteristics* and the *Regimen*. The overlap is most noticeable in the *Soliloquy* and *The Moralists*, both of which are printed in the *Characteristics* (see J. Sellars, 'Shaftesbury, Stoicism, and Philosophy as a Way of Life', *Sophia*, 2015, 7–8. DOI: 10.1007/s11841-015-0483-z).
8. H. Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, 5th edn (London: Macmillan, 1902), 185n1.
9. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations, Books 1–6*, tr. C. Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.
10. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. R. Crisp, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1172b35–1173a1.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1174a8–11.
12. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1176a15–16.
13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1176a22–9; see 1198a16–17.
14. Shaftesbury's point here is reminiscent of Aristotle's suggestion that we ought to 'take on immortality as much as possible, and do all that we can to live in accordance with the highest element within us' (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b33-4).
15. Shaftesbury's aim in Pt. 2 of the *Inquiry* is to show that having the natural affections is to have 'the chief means and power of self-enjoyment', and that having excessive private affections, or having unnatural affections, leads to misery; he notes that happiness is 'generally computed' from 'pleasures or satisfactions' (200–1, 216). T. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 2: *From Suarez to Rousseau* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 358 – see S. Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1967), 229–32 – referring to 250–1, claims that, according to Shaftesbury, the pleasant is merely what we think eligible. But Shaftesbury can be understood here to be objecting to a particular

version of unrestricted hedonism. Seeing will and pleasure as 'synonymous' is equivalent to calling everything that *pleases us* 'pleasure'.

16. R. Crisp, 'Aristotle's Inklusivism', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 12 (2004): 111–36.
17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7–8.
18. Gill, *The British Moralists*, Ch. 9, finds in Shaftesbury a separate teleological argument for virtue, independent of the 'mental enjoyment' account, and argues for tensions between the two. I read Shaftesbury's teleology as supporting the mental enjoyment account (if anything, Gill sees the relation running the other way: see Shaftesbury, *Standard Edition*, sect. 4, penult. para.; also E. Albee, 'The Relation of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to Utilitarianism', *Philosophical Review* 5 (1896): 29). In outlining the teleological argument, Gill (120) quotes the question Shaftesbury suggests asking one of the 'sporty gentlemen' about a bitch who eats her puppies: 'whether he thinks the unnatural creature who acts thus, or the natural one who does otherwise, is best in its kind and enjoys itself the most' (430) [my italics].
19. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 360.
20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b30–1096a2; 1098b18–20.
21. P. Glassen, 'A Fallacy in Aristotle's Argument about the Good', *Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1957): 319–22.
22. J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. R. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.5.
23. Plato, *Republica*, ed. S. R. Slings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 581e–583a.
24. A. Ryan, *J. S. Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 111.
25. See, for example, T. Campbell, 'Francis Hutcheson: "Father" of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. R. Campbell and A. Skinner (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), 167–8.
26. Hutcheson abbreviations used in the text are as follows: *Reflections upon Laughter and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees* [RL]; *A System of Moral Philosophy* [S]; *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* [E]; *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind* [LM]; *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria, with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* [SI]; and *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* [I].
27. Hutcheson's central ethical texts fall into three broad groups. The fundamentals of his ethics were stated in the four influential treatises in I and E. Twenty or so years later, the *Institutio* appeared, to be translated into English as SI in 1747. In the meantime, Hutcheson had been working on S, which was published posthumously by his son. His views did change, but in general on the nature of morality and self-interest they remained largely consistent (see L. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1876), 2.57). For helpful discussions of the development, or lack of it, in Hutcheson's views, see W. R. Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), Chs 9, 10, 11 (1), 12; J. Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: On the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 37–59; S. Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Ch. 8; J. Bishop, 'Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 277–95. Note that the Liberty Fund prints, in a revised edition, the second edition of I, but with complete textual notes of variations in the other three significant editions.
28. In his later writings (e.g. SI 48), Hutcheson spoke of the love of virtue itself, which may be taken as a source of non-hedonic motivation independent of both self-interest and morality: see Bishop, 'Moral Motivation', 289–91.
29. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 2.2.
30. For an interpretation of Hutcheson as a purely 'quantitative' hedonist, see D. Dorsey, 'Hutcheson's Deceptive Hedonism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48 (2010): 445–67. By quantitative hedonism, Dorsey means the view that the welfare value of a pleasure is simply a function of its pleasurable-ness (446). He later cites the link made by Hutcheson at S 100 between 'supreme happiness' and 'the most intense and durable pleasures' as evidence for a quantitative interpretation (Dorsey, in fact, says 'qualitative', but he has confirmed to me that this is a typographical error). But if by 'intensity' Hutcheson means degree of pleasurable-ness-at-a-time, the passage seems consistent with forms of qualitative hedonism according to which pleasurable-ness depends partly on dignity and/or welfare consists in the greatest pleasures, the welfare value of which depends at least partly on dignity as well as pleasurable-

- bleness. M. Strasser, 'Hutcheson on the Higher and Lower Pleasures', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 521–2, suggests that Hutcheson is not open to Moore's objection to Mill that allowing quality as well as quantity of pleasure to count commits Mill to a non-hedonist position, because 'Hutcheson does not believe in the intrinsic moral worth of happiness or pleasure'. But, as Strasser himself notes, Hutcheson does believe in the intrinsic natural value of pleasure, and Moore's argument – for what is it is worth – could be directed against that position.
31. This teleological element in Hutcheson's thought is a problem for any account of the role of the moral sense in the origin of our moral distinctions that rules out teleology (e.g. Gill, *The British Moralists*, 177–8).
 32. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 2.5–8.
 33. Hutcheson almost certainly has impartial benevolence in mind here; see e.g. the reference to 'extensive affections' at § 1.59–60. In a later edition, Hutcheson stated that the purpose of geometry is to show how what is true of one figure is also true of others; from the practical perspective, he may have in mind the extension of the scope of practical principles from egoism, through partial benevolence, to impartial benevolence.
 34. This essay is dedicated to Fred Rosen, in admiration of his scholarship and in gratitude for his guidance, support and friendship over many years. I wish also to thank the editors for their invitation to present an earlier version at a symposium in honour of Fred, held at the Royal Historical Society in October 2017, and the audience for discussion and comments.

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