

Hutcheson's Deceptive Hedonism - Forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*

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Francis Hutcheson's theory of value is often characterized as a precursor to the qualitative hedonism of John Stuart Mill. The interpretation of Mill as a qualitative hedonist has come under fire recently; some have argued that he is, in fact, a hedonist of no variety at all.¹ Others have argued that his hedonism is as non-qualitative as Bentham's.² The purpose of this essay is not to critically engage the various interpretations of Mill's value theory. Rather, I hope to show that Hutcheson should not be read as a qualitative hedonist.

The evidence for Hutcheson as a qualitative hedonist is strong and striking. The most commonly cited passages are taken from his posthumous opus *A System of Moral Philosophy*. However, a closer look at Hutcheson's moral psychology, including his account of the interplay between pleasure and the moral and evaluative senses, shows that Hutcheson's hedonism is best read quantitatively. Hutcheson's hedonism is for that reason deceptive, and deceptively *simple*.

1. *Hutcheson as Qualitative Hedonist*

Hedonism is a wide and varied philosophical program. Because hedonism comes in many shapes and sizes, there are—at least—two important questions relevant for any hedonist doctrine: first, “hedonism about what?”; second, “hedonism of what sort?” With regard to the first question, there are many different lines of inquiry one might approach with a form of hedonism, includ-

¹David Brink, “Mill's Deliberative Utilitarianism” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20 (1992).

²Jonathan Riley, “Millian Qualitative Superiorities and Utilitarianism, Part I” in *Utilitas* 20 (2008). Riley claims that, for Mill, pleasures of higher quality are *infinitely more pleasant* than pleasures of the lower variety.

ing the psychological nature of human motivation, the nature of happiness or well-being, or the foundation of moral obligations.³ In this essay, I leave aside Hutcheson's views concerning motivation and moral obligation to focus on his account of happiness, well-being, or prudential value. Hutcheson is explicit about the distinction between moral goodness, motivation, and "natural goodness" or well-being.⁴ And it is clear that Hutcheson is at least some sort of hedonist when it comes to the latter topic. In the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson writes:

Because we shall afterwards frequently use the Words Interest, Advantage, natural Good, it is necessary here to fix their Ideas. The Pleasure in our sensible Perceptions of any kind, gives us our first Idea of natural Good, or Happiness; and then all Objects which are apt to excite this Pleasure are call'd immediately Good. . . Our Sense of Pleasure is antecedent to Advantage or Interest, and is the Foundation of it. We do not perceive Pleasure in Objects, because it is our Interest to do so; but Objects or Actions are Advantageous, and are pursu'd or undertaken from Interest, because we receive Pleasure from them. Our perception of Pleasure is necessary, and nothing is Advantageous or naturally Good to us, but what is apt to raise Pleasure mediately, or immediately.⁵

Further, as he writes in opening the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, "In the following Discourse, *Happiness* denotes pleasant *Sensation* of any kind, or a continued State of such *Sensations*; and *Misery* denotes the contrary *Sensations*."⁶

Hutcheson is thus a hedonist about human happiness or well-being. (For brevity, I will hereafter use "hedonism" to mean "hedonism about happiness or well-being".) But that he is a hedonist leaves many questions about

³For a helpful introduction to the various theories described as "hedonism", see Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 30-31.

⁴See, for instance, Francis Hutcheson, "Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions" in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Garrett (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002 [1728]), II iii, 34-36. In referring to the *Essay*, I will precede textual citations with *Essay*, followed by the section number, sub-section number, and page number

⁵Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Liedhold (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004 [1725]), II intro. 1, 86. Hereafter, *Inquiry*, followed by treatise, section, subsection, and page numbers.

⁶Francis Hutcheson, "Illustrations on the Moral Sense" in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, op. cit., intro., 133.

his value theory unanswered; views of very different characters are properly described as versions of hedonism. And though there are many distinctions when it comes to types of hedonic theory, the question I seek to answer here concerns whether Hutcheson is best described as a *quantitative* or *qualitative* hedonist. According to quantitative hedonism, the prudential value of a pleasure is given simply as a function of its *pleasurableness*. When attempting to compare two distinct pleasurable sensations, quantitative hedonism declares that the only features of the sensations relevant to their evaluative assessment are intensity and duration. A pleasure can be made less valuable by shortening its duration, or dulling its intensity, but in no other way.

Qualitative hedonism is different. Qualitative hedonism maintains that there is a third bit of information relevant in assessing the prudential value of different pleasures. Pleasures differ not only in intensity and duration, but also in *quality*. Different qualitative hedonists will assess the criteria of “quality” differently. One—surely too simple—way is to separate various pleasures by a distinction between “bodily” pleasures and the pleasures of the “mind”. So, for instance, it might be that the raw sensory pleasurable-ness of, say, drinking margaritas is higher than the raw sensory pleasurable-ness of, say, solving a complicated problem in mathematics (if measured purely in terms of intensity and duration). But one might argue that the pleasurable-ness of solving this math problem is of higher quality than the pleasurable-ness of drinking margaritas. Though the pleasure of a margarita wins out when it comes to intensity and duration, mathematical achievement wins when it comes to quality.

Qualitative hedonists can differ in the associated evaluative weight apportioned to intensity, duration, and quality. A hedonist will be a qualitative hedonist so long as pleasurable quality of itself matters to welfare—even though it might matter, evaluatively speaking, little in comparison to intensity and duration. Although Mill occasionally appears to do so,⁷ the qualitative hedonist need not hold that difference in quality *trumps* difference in intensity and duration. A qualitative hedonist must say only that, of two pleasures of equal intensity and duration, the higher quality pleasure is more valuable.

Mill—at least on the traditional reading of his value theory—offers a paradigmatic example of qualitative hedonism. As he writes in *Utilitarianism*:

It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures

⁷See, for instance, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1861]), ii 6, 56-7.

chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, &c., of the former—that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should depend on quantity alone.⁸

Thus, if Mill is a hedonist, he appears to be a straightforwardly qualitative hedonist. He admits that, rather than simply intensity and duration (i.e., “quantity”), pleasures should be judged on the basis of quality as well. Previous “utilitarian writers,” have been in the thrall of quantitative hedonism. It is beyond this Mill desires to move.

Most read Hutcheson as a precursor to Mill in shrugging off the purely quantitative superiority of the “higher“ pleasures.⁹ In his brief discussion of qualitative hedonists of old, Rem B. Edwards mentions Hutcheson as an early innovator of qualitative hedonism: “Most traditional hedonists such as Epicurus, Bentham, and Sidgwick have been quantitative hedonists, but Francis Hutcheson and John Stuart Mill introduced an interesting complication into the modern theory of hedonism by insisting that pleasures differ qualitatively as well as quantitatively.”¹⁰ Jonathan Riley has recently argued that far from being a quantitative hedonist, Hutcheson was no hedonist at all: “pleasure is not the good for Hutcheson any more than it is for Aristotle, and quantity of pleasant feeling plays a subsidiary role in his ethical system. . . [F]or Hutcheson, qualitative superiority so far outweighs quantitative superiority as to render it, in comparison, of small account.”¹¹

⁸Mill, ii 4, 56.

⁹Mark Strasser argues for Hutcheson as a qualitative hedonist, though his view will share one important feature of my argument: Strasser recognizes that Hutcheson believed that the higher pleasures are better than lower pleasures also along the dimension of quantity. See Strasser, “Hutcheson on the Higher and Lower Pleasures” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987), 518.

¹⁰Rem B. Edwards, *Pleasures and Pains: A Theory of Qualitative Hedonism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 30.

¹¹Cf. Riley, 275. Riley’s reading is idiosyncratic; for Riley, no one is properly characterized as a hedonist unless that person believes that all facts about value make reference only to *inherent* facts about particular pleasurable sensations. Because there are no inherent facts about particular pleasurable sensations save intensity and duration (i.e., *quantity*), qualitative hedonism, for Riley, is impossible. (Cf. Riley, 270.) Hence, for Riley, Hutche-

It is important, first, to investigate what sort of evidence would—and would not—point to a non-quantitative reading of Hutcheson’s hedonism. For instance, Hutcheson divides pleasures by “kinds”, and explicitly links the inquiry into the various “kinds” of pleasure with the inquiry into our “true happiness.” But mere talk of “kinds” of pleasure need not mark out Hutcheson as a qualitative hedonist. The quantitative hedonist can distinguish kinds of pleasure if the “higher” kinds are not marked out as such in qualitative terms. For instance, Hutcheson might identify kinds of pleasure in terms of the bodily/mental distinction—while claiming that the superiority of the mental pleasures is to be understood in quantitative terms (as Mill attributes to previous “utilitarian writers”) . Furthermore, the quantitative hedonist can distinguish pleasures in terms of pleasurable quality so long as “quality” is not itself a *per se* determinant of welfare value. For example, a Benthamite might also claim that certain pleasures are of higher quality, which might be determined by some objective account of pleasurable quality. (One might index pleasurable quality to moral quality, for instance.) Nevertheless, for the Benthamite, quality itself will have no *per se* relevance to well-being or happiness. The Benthamite might also claim that a pleasure’s quality matters to its welfare value, but only indirectly: higher quality pleasures just happen to be those that are most pleasurable quantitatively. A qualitative hedonist, on the other hand, must claim that a pleasure’s quality matters of itself.

Despite these caveats, there is a good deal of evidence that Hutcheson’s favored view is a qualitative hedonism. For instance, in *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Hutcheson writes:

To discover wherein our true happiness consists we must compare the several enjoyments of life, and the several kinds of misery, that we may discern what enjoyments are to be parted with, or what uneasiness to be endured, in order to obtain the highest and most beatifick satisfactions, and to avoid the most distressing sufferings.

As to pleasures of the same kind, ’tis manifest their values are in a joint proportion of their intenseness and duration. . . . In comparing pleasures of different kinds, the value is as the duration and *dignity* of the kind jointly. We have an immediate sense of

son fails to be a hedonist in virtue of rank-ordering pleasures by a factor of quality. I do not wish to dispute Riley’s taxonomy. If the reader is inclined to follow Riley’s taxonomy, she is welcome to read this paper as a defense of Hutcheson as a genuine hedonist, as opposed to arguing that Hutcheson is one type of hedonist rather than another.

a dignity, a perfection, or beatifick quality in some kinds, which no intenseness of the lower kinds can equal, were they also as lasting as we could wish.¹²

In this passage, Hutcheson appears to evaluate pleasures in qualitative terms: “a dignity, a perfection, or beatifick quality”, for instance. Hutcheson distinguishes pleasures of different kinds based not only on their intensity and duration, but also their *dignity* (or perfection, or “beatifick quality”, or, occasionally, “excellence”). Hutcheson also seems to link differences in dignity or quality directly to differences in value. He appears to claim that pleasures of greater quality have the power to outweigh the pleasures of the “lower kinds”, no matter the intensity and duration of the lower kinds. This suggests that not only does Hutcheson think that pleasurable quality matters *of itself*, but also that pleasurable quality is of substantial weight—*no* intenseness of the lower kinds can equal the value of the higher pleasures. Hutcheson thus seems to be making reference *explicitly* to three operators when it comes to the welfare value of a particular pleasure: intensity, duration, and “beatifick quality”.¹³

Further, Hutcheson declares that “No intenseness or duration of any external sensation gives it a dignity or worth equal to that of the improvement of the soul by knowledge, or the ingenious arts; and much less is it equal to that of virtuous affections and actions,” (*System*, I ii 7 i, 117). He goes on to say that “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 other kinds,” (*System*, I ii 7 i, 117). Again, for Hutcheson, pleasures that are of greater “dignity” will, simply for this reason (“*By* this intimate feeling of dignity”), outweigh the most intense and lasting enjoyments of an undignified pleasure. It is worth noting here that Hutcheson *explicitly* links the notion of “dignity” with pleasurable quality: it is *by* the feeling of dignity that certain kinds of pleasure are more excellent than others, and hence, presumably, more valuable. Again worth noting is the comparative claim. Hutcheson appears to be insisting on some form of discontinuity or lexical priority between pleasures: *no* intenseness or duration of a lower pleasure could allow it to outweigh the excellence of higher pleasures.

It is worth pausing here to better examine Hutcheson’s use of the term

¹²Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Carey (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005 [1755]), I ii 7 i, 116-117, my emphasis. Hereafter, *System*, followed by the Book, Part, Chapter, Sub-chapter, and page numbers.

¹³Cf. Strasser, 518-19.

“dignity” and the relationship between “dignity”, “beatifick quality” and pleasurable “excellence”. According to Hutcheson, human beings are born with a collection of moral and evaluative senses. The most important of which—for Hutcheson’s moral theory—is obviously the *moral* sense, which, according to Hutcheson, is the sense “by which we perceive *Virtue*, or *Vice* in our selves, or others,” (*Essay* I i, 17). In the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson appears to claim that the moral sense also perceives ideas of “dignity”: “some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness; or, that by a superior Sense, which I call a Moral one, we Approve the Actions of others, and perceive them to be their Perfection and Dignity, and are determin’d to love the Agent; a like Perception we have in reflecting on such Actions of our own without any View of further natural Advantage from them,” (*Inquiry* II intro. i, 88).¹⁴ In the *Essay*, however, Hutcheson also introduces the idea of “perceptions” of dignity, independent of the moral sense: “There are perhaps other *Perceptions* distinct from all these Classes, such as some Ideas of *Decency*, *Dignity*, *Suitableness to human Nature* in certain Actions and Circumstances; . . . even without any conception of *Moral Good* or *Evil*,” (*Essay* I i, 18). By the time of the *System*, Hutcheson speaks of a unique “sense of dignity” (*System*, I i 2 vii, 27). Hence in claiming that “By this intimate feeling of dignity”, some pleasures are “incomparably excellent and beatifick,” Hutcheson appears to believe that through these evaluative senses (either the moral sense itself, or the non-moral sense of dignity), we come to see that certain pleasures are suitable to human nature, or contribute to our perfection, just as we would perceive the virtue or vice of a particular action or character; doing so constitutes perceiving a “dignity” in a particular pleasure. On the qualitative reading of Hutcheson’s hedonism, when we perceive a “dignity”, this establishes that such pleasures are of greater “excellence” or “beatifick quality”. And because the sense of dignity perceives the “perfection” or “suitability to human nature” of certain pleasures, the excellence or quality of a particular pleasure is accounted for in perfectionist terms: the quality of a pleasure is ascertained by the sense of dignity (or our various perceptions of dignity), and is ascertained *as such* by the sense of dignity given their suitability to human nature.

Hutcheson’s *System* is a late—indeed, posthumous—account of his moral philosophy. But shades of qualitative hedonism appear to crop up even in his earliest works. For instance, in the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson writes: “we are indeed determin’d to judge *Virtue* with *Peace* and *Safety*, preferable to *Virtue* with *Distress*; but that at the same time we look upon the *State* of

¹⁴This passage occurs in the fourth, or “D” (1738) edition of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry*.

the Virtuous, the Publick-spirited, even in the utmost natural Distress, as preferable to all affluence of other Enjoyments,” (*Inquiry*, II vi 1, 165). Furthermore, in the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, Hutcheson asks, in rhetorical fashion, “Who has ever felt the Pleasure of a generous friendly *Temper*, of *mutual Love*, of *compassionate Relief and Succour* to the distressed; of having *served a Community*, and render’d the Multitudes happy. . . Who would not, upon Reflection, prefer that *State of Mind*, these *Sensations of Pleasure*, to all the enjoyments of the *external Senses*, and of the *Imagination* without them?” (*Essay*, V iii, 94.) Here Hutcheson appears to be suggesting that the various moral pleasures—those that, in the *System*, he declared to display a form of dignity—are worth whatever the price in the pleasures of the external senses and pleasures of the imagination. How this suggestion could be coherently held unless Hutcheson supported some index of evaluation beyond mere intensity and duration is difficult to see. However, this passage is particularly interesting because Hutcheson adds a footnote deferring to Shaftesbury’s *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, itself plausibly reflecting a qualitative hedonism: “The *Pleasures of the Mind* being allow’d, therefore, superior to those of *the Body*; it follows, ‘That whatever can create in any intelligent Being a constant flowing Series or Train of mental Enjoyment, or Pleasures of the Mind, is more considerable to his Happiness, than that which can create to him a like constant Course or Train of sensual Enjoyments, or Pleasures of the Body.’”¹⁵

Hutcheson’s value theory appears to be not only a version of qualitative hedonism, but a qualitative hedonism of particular sophistication. Hutcheson makes fine-grained distinctions in the quality of different pleasures. Rather than, like Mill, grouping pleasures into two relevant kinds (higher and lower), Hutcheson notes several different kinds of pleasure: first are the pleasures of the “external senses”, second the pleasures of the “imagination” (such as the “improvement of the soul by knowledge and the ingenious arts”), third the pleasures of sympathetic engagement with others, and fourth the pleasures of virtue. These pleasures are listed in order of increasing quality. As Riley notes, “In Hutcheson’s ethical system, the ‘moral pleasures’ of the ‘virtuous affections and actions’ are ranked as the highest kind, followed by the pleasures of the ‘sympathetic and kind feelings’ (typically confined to kin and a few close friends), and then by the pleasures of the intellect and of the imagination, with the ‘sensual pleasures’ (largely of the palate and of sex) as ‘the meanest’ kind.”¹⁶ (Cf. *System*, I ii 7 iii-viii, 122-134.)

¹⁵Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit” in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001 [1711]), II i 58.

¹⁶Riley, 276. Riley’s reading of Hutcheson’s axiology is to some degree problematic

Furthermore, even in comparing the pleasures of the external senses with the pleasures of the internal senses, Hutcheson appears to commit himself to a strong evaluative relationship: “The Pleasures of the *internal Senses*, or of the Imagination, are allowed by all, who have any tolerable Taste of them, as a much Superior Happiness to those of the *external Senses*, tho they were enjoyed to the full,” (*Essay*, V ix, 104). Thus these distinctions in pleasurable quality appear to directly affect welfare value: the pleasures of the internal senses constitute a “Superior Happiness to those of the *external Senses*”, even if the latter were “enjoyed to the full.” Thus the difference in types of pleasures also appears to illuminate a *per se* evaluative difference.

In short, there is very good evidence available for the claim that Hutcheson admits a third dimension of hedonic assessment beyond mere intensity and duration, perceived by our sense of dignity (or moral sense, operative as perceiver of dignity) and that this dimension plays a direct role in the welfare value of pleasures. I argue, however, that this reading is mistaken. The plan for the remainder is as follows. In §2, I examine Hutcheson’s discussion of the superiority of the pleasures of virtue in his early works, in particular, the *Inquiry* and *Essay*. Importantly, in explaining the prudential importance of virtue, Hutcheson makes no mention of pleasurable quality, instead explaining this evaluative superiority in terms of pleasurable intensity and duration. In §3, I respond to the possibility that Hutcheson’s pre-*System* writings are incongruous with the *System*, which itself presents a form of qualitative hedonism. I argue that though Hutcheson’s moral psychology evolves between these works, his value theory does not: the very same psychological mechanism that renders virtue prudentially significant renders the dignified pleasures prudentially superior to the undignified pleasures in a way that is explained in purely quantitative terms. In other words, for Hutcheson, though he wishes to discuss the excellence of various pleasures, the quality of a pleasure is only relevant to its welfare value insofar as excellent pleasures are, or yield, pleasures of greater intensity and duration. In §4, I respond to an important objection, viz., that Hutcheson’s strong comparative axiological claims (both in his pre-*System* writings, and in the *System*) are incompatible with quantitative hedonism. Section 5 concludes.

2. Quantitative Hedonism pre-System

because it appears to leave out various pleasures Hutcheson admits, including the pleasures of the sense of honor (*Essay* V vii, 101-102). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

Though—as noted above—Hutcheson makes some claims reminiscent of a qualitative hedonism (especially of the qualitative hedonism found in John Stuart Mill) in his pre-*System* writings, there is substantial evidence, some of it quite direct, that Hutcheson prior to the *System* held a straightforward quantitative hedonism. Consider, for instance, the following passage from the *Essay*: “The *Value* of any Pleasure, and the *Quantity* or *Moment* of any Pain, is in a compounded Proportion of the *Intenseness* and *Duration*,” (*Essay* V i, 87). However, this passage (and others like it) presents a puzzle. If Hutcheson believed that the value of pleasures were solely measured by their intensity and duration, how are we to explain passages from the *Essay* and *Inquiry* in which he appears to judge pleasures qualitatively? For instance, how are we to explain his explicit commitment to the value of the pleasures of virtue (e.g., *Essay* V iii, 94), or the state of the “Publick-spirited”, as “preferable to all affluence of other enjoyments” (*Inquiry* II vi 1, 165)?

Throughout Hutcheson’s career, it was important to him to claim that virtue was a prudential benefit to the virtuous. Hutcheson’s account of the value of virtue (concentrating on the *Essay* and *Inquiry* for the moment) runs more or less in two stages. First, according to Hutcheson, as people we are led to reflect upon our own behavior. If our behavior is virtuous, this triggers the pleasures of the moral sense: we perceive virtue in our own conduct and take pleasure as a result. (As Hutcheson states in the *Essay*, a “sense” just *is* a “*Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain*” (*Essay* I i, 17).) Second, Hutcheson believes that the source of this pleasure is prudentially crucial—the pleasures generated by the moral sense are of supreme welfare value. Consider, for instance, the following passage from the *Inquiry*:

[W]hen we are under the Influence of a virtuous Temper, and thereby engaged in virtuous Actions, we are not always conscious of any Pleasure, nor are we only pursuing private Pleasures, as will appear hereafter: ’tis only by reflex Acts upon our Temper and Conduct that we enjoy the Delights of Virtue.¹⁷ When also we judge the Temper of another to be virtuous, we do not necessarily imagine him then to enjoy Pleasure, tho’ we know Reflection will give it to him. . . A virtuous Temper is called Good or Beatifick, not that it is always attended with pleasure in the

¹⁷There is some dispute as to the authoritative statement of this last sentence. Hutcheson appears to have revised the sentence to read: “’tis only by reflex Acts upon our Temper and Conduct that Virtue never fails to give Pleasure.” In any event, the upshot of this passage is identical.

Agent; much less that some small pleasure attends the Contemplation of it in the Approver: but from this that every Spectator is persuaded that the reflex Acts of the virtuous Agent upon his own Temper will give him the highest Pleasures. (*Inquiry* II i 8.)¹⁸

This passage clearly illustrates the psychological process by which we come to take pleasure in our own virtue. It is not the case, according to Hutcheson, that every virtuous action is guided or motivated by some pleasurable or happy feeling. Far from it. (Indeed, Hutcheson appears to insist that the motive to virtue, rather than involving the pleasurable reflection on our own conduct, rather involves the pleasures of the “publick sense” or “*disinterested Affections* towards our Fellows,” (*Essay* IV v, 83). Rather, virtue is in our interest given our own “reflex Acts”: reflection on our own conduct and character. When the moral sense is active it provides a certain pleasure—the pleasure *of* the moral sense. Thus the prudential importance of virtuous behavior is explained in the *Inquiry* via the pleasures of the moral sense (the “highest” pleasure) that are obtained in reflection upon our own conduct.

This passage is neutral between qualitative and quantitative readings of Hutcheson’s hedonism. Indeed, the qualitative reading might seem to offer a plausible explanation for the welfare value of these “reflex Acts”: the moral sense delivers pleasure of high quality, hence in activating the moral sense the pleasure one achieves is of tremendous value. Though this is perhaps a plausible account of the prudential value of virtue, it is *not* Hutcheson’s account (or, at least, not Hutcheson’s account in the pre-*System* writings). In explicating the value of the pleasures of the moral sense, Hutcheson commits himself to an explanation told in purely quantitative terms. In section VI of the *Inquiry*, Hutcheson considers the “Importance of this moral Sense to the present Happiness of Mankind”, and explicitly seeks to prove that the moral sense “gives us *more* Pleasure and Pain that all our other Facultys,” (*Inquiry* II vi 1, 162).¹⁹ Taking Hutcheson at his word, it would appear that the reason the reflection on our own virtuous conduct is prudentially beneficial is not that the pleasures of the moral sense are of higher quality or dignity, but rather that the moral sense, when active, grants *more pleasure*. Thus, as when he refers to the “highest Pleasures”, Hutcheson appears—at least in the *Inquiry*—to understand pleasurable “height” in quantitative terms: the “highest” pleasures just are those pleasures that are of greatest quantity.

One obviously wonders how it is that the pleasures of the moral senses

¹⁸Again, this passage appears in the “D” (1738) version of the *Inquiry*, 217n47.

¹⁹My emphasis.

are of greater quantity. By way of a response, it is helpful to consider a rather Millian passage from the *Essay* extolling the pleasures of virtue. Hutcheson declares that in trying to ascertain the value of any particular pleasure, one must consult the opinions of *competent judges*. “It is obvious that ‘those alone are capable of judging, who have experienced all the several *kinds of Pleasure*, and have their *Senses* acute and fully exercised in them all,’” (*Essay*, V ii, 89). Like Mill, Hutcheson claims that the final verdict on the value of a particular pleasure must belong to the competent judges. Of course, competent judges, Hutcheson surmises, will be on the side of virtue; the pleasures of virtue are the most valuable, not just in a one-to-one comparison with other pleasures, but also in comparison to “all others jointly” (*Essay*, V ii, 89).

Hutcheson’s explanation of the affection of the competent judges for the pleasures of the moral sense, however, is given in explicitly quantitative terms. As noted above, Hutcheson claims that the value of a pleasure is established in terms of its intensity and duration (*Essay* V i, 87). Duration, according to Hutcheson, is easily established, by considering the “*Constancy of our Relish or Fancy*” (cf. *Essay* V x-xi, 105-110). But in ascertaining the intensity of a pleasure, we have no recourse but to consult competent judges:

To compare these several Pleasures and Pains as to their *Intenseness*, seems difficult, because of the Diversity of *Tastes*, or *Turns of Temper* given by *Custom* and *Education*, which make strange *Associations of Ideas*, and form *Habits*; from whence it happens, that, tho all the several kinds of original *Senses* and *Desires* seem equally natural, yet some are led into a constant Pursuit of the Pleasures of the one kind, as the only Enjoyment of Life, and are indifferent about others. . . . Now upon comparing the several Pleasures, perhaps the Sentence of the *Luxurious* would be quite opposite to that of the *Virtuous*. The *Ambitious* would differ from both. Those who are devoted to the *internal Senses* or *Imagination*, would differ from all three. (*Essay*, V i, 88.)

For Hutcheson, the competent judges solve an epistemic problem. He sees that certain people have different backgrounds, tastes, or proclivities, and hence that people will disagree in their perception of the intensity of various pleasures. This is why, in trying to ascertain the genuine comparative intensity of pleasures, we are led to ask those who have had substantial experience of the higher as well as lower pleasures. Like Mill, Hutcheson grants

the final authority over the value of a particular pleasure to the competent judges. However, unlike Mill (or unlike Mill as generally read), Hutcheson does not claim that the competent judges will issue verdicts that are guided by pleasurable quality independently of pleasurable quantity. Rather, the competent judges are judges of intensity. Hence in explaining the superiority, i.e., the greater welfare value, of the pleasures of the moral sense, Hutcheson claims that the pleasures of the moral sense are not of greater quality, but rather that the moral sense is “the Fountain of the most *intense Pleasure*,” (*Essay V x*, 106).²⁰

This fact itself should be enough to cast significant doubt on Hutcheson *qua* qualitative hedonist. After all, in explaining the prudential value of “reflex Acts” upon our own virtuous conduct, Hutcheson makes no *per se* reference to pleasurable quality. He instead insists that the superiority of the moral pleasures is explained by the greater intensity of the pleasures of the moral sense. This does not, by itself, prove that Hutcheson is a quantitative hedonist: after all, Hutcheson might have revised his views by the time of the *System*. Furthermore, it might be that Hutcheson holds that *in addition* to being of greater intensity, the pleasures of the moral sense are of higher quality (in a way that is directly relevant to welfare value). But Hutcheson’s explicit reliance on a quantitative evaluation of pleasures in justifying the prudential benefits of virtue is strong evidence of a quantitative hedonism.

Before I move on to discuss the *System*, I should note one potential objection to a quantitative reading of Hutcheson’s early axiology.²¹ For Hutcheson, one important feature of the virtuous person (and that is present, to some degree, in all persons) is a strong “publick sense,” or a “Determination to be pleased with the *Happiness* of others, and to be uneasy at their *Misery*” (*Essay I i*, 19). But because the world contains *so much* suffering (on Hutcheson’s own admission), the *pain* of the “publick sense” might very well be thought to outweigh any purely quantitative amount of pleasure derived from one’s “reflex Acts”. Thus Hutcheson would appear unable to account for the prudential value of virtue if the pleasures of the moral sense are deemed superior only quantitatively: only if the moral sense provides higher *quality* pleasure could Hutcheson guarantee that the pains of the public sense (which accompany a virtuous attention to the suffering of others) are outweighed. Indeed, Hutcheson notes this very phenomenon in the *Es-*

²⁰Furthermore, Hutcheson considers the pleasures of the moral sense and the other higher pleasures to be longer lasting—but the long duration of the pleasures of the moral sense is to some degree imperfect, and cannot guarantee pleasure free of “*Uneasiness*,” (*Essay V x*, 106-107).

²¹Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for inspiring this objection.

say: “The *publick Happiness* is indeed, as to external Appearance, a very uncertain Object; nor is it often in our power to remedy it, by changing the Course of *Events*. There are perpetual Changes in Mankind from Pleasures to Pains, and often from Virtue to Vice. Our *public Desires* must therefore frequently subject us to *Sorrow*; and the pleasures of the *publick Sense* must be very inconstant,” (*Essay* V x, 105-6). How then, are we to reconcile a quantitative hedonism with Hutcheson’s insistence on the prudential value of virtue? Importantly, Hutcheson insists that the pains of the public sense can be avoided. Importantly, Hutcheson holds that the “publick sense”, and hence the virtuous attunement to the well-being of others, is beneficial only under the assumption of belief in divine providence: “Against this there is no Relief but the Consideration of a “*good governing* Mind, ordering all for good in the whole, with the belief of a *future State*, where the particular seeming Disorders are rectified,” (*Essay* V xi, 109).²² Without this belief, according to Hutcheson, the prudential value of virtue is chimerical: it *will* be overtaken by the pains of public sympathy and engagement with others. (See *Essay* VI iv, 123.²³) If so, it would appear that there is no need to declare that the prudential benefit accompanying our own moral “reflex Acts” is qualitatively superior. Rather, virtue is beneficial only on the assumption of a belief in providence, which guarantees that the engaging one’s “publick sense” will be beneficial.

Thus it appears at the best reading of Hutcheson’s value theory, at least in the *Essay* and *Inquiry*, is a quantitative hedonism. Hence we should be reluctant to conclude that Hutcheson is a qualitative hedonist unless there is dispositive evidence that Hutcheson changed his views from the *Essay* to the *System*. In what follows, I argue that there is no such evidence, either in the *System* or in earlier works; whatever evidence there is of qualitative hedonism permits, I argue, of a perfectly plausible quantitative interpretation. This fact—in light of Hutcheson’s more or less explicit commitment to quantitative hedonism in his early works—provides us good reason to accept the quantitative reading of Hutcheson’s value theory.

3. *The System*

The passages from the *Essay* and *Inquiry* just explored would seem to pro-

²²For a helpful account of the influence of the public sense on the prudential value of virtue—including the role of belief in providence in establishing the stability of the prudential value of virtue—see James A. Harris, “Religion in Hutcheson’s Moral Philosophy” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008).

²³See also Harris, 214-215.

vide substantial reason to revise the standard view of Hutcheson’s value theory. The classic response, however, is to admit that Hutcheson adopted a quantitative hedonism in the early writings, but substantially revised his axiological commitments by the time of the *System*. Indeed, if my reading of the *Inquiry* and *Essay* is correct, we might be tempted to conclude that Hutcheson changed his views between the publication of the *Essay* (first published in 1728) and the *System* (posthumously published in 1755, but substantially complete by 1737).²⁴ Indeed, there appear to be many ways in which Hutcheson revised his thought between the *Essay* and the *System*. Though Hutcheson discusses “perceptions” of dignity in the *Essay*, he has not yet developed the idea of a “sense of dignity” (cf. *Essay*, I i, 18). However, the *System* discusses the “sense of dignity” in far more detail. This has led some commentators to conclude that the *System* represented a substantial departure from Hutcheson’s earlier work. William Scott, for instance, writes:

[In Hutcheson’s *System*], there is much that is new—not merely in matter but also in theory and form. In addition to the tendency giving prominence to the position of *Will* in Morality, the ideas of Perfection and Dignity (which received mere incidental mention in the *Essay on the Passions* [sic.]) now constitute an integral part of the revised system. . . Hitherto the end of Hutcheson’s work has always been frankly eudaemonistic, and further since Happiness was merely a sum of pleasures, it was nothing more than hedonism; now, on the contrary, Happiness and Perfection become twin ends, presumably coincident.²⁵

Daniel Carey claims that the *System* “is at times unwieldy and difficult to integrate, which accounts in some measure for Hutcheson’s dissatisfaction with it.”²⁶ (Incidentally, if Scott and Carey are correct, those who propose to read Hutcheson as a qualitative hedonist must explain why we should treat Hutcheson’s *System*, which is an idiosyncratic work, left unpublished at the time of his death, as a better representative of his considered views

²⁴Cf. Daniel Carey, “Introduction” in *System*, op. cit., v. See also William Robert Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching, and Position in the History of Philosophy* (New York, NY: August M. Kelley, 1966 [1900]), 210.

²⁵Scott, 214. I should say that Scott’s reading of Hutcheson’s treatment of perfection is controversial. Happiness and perfection, as dual ideas, also show up in the *Essay* (VI vii, 129-32)—Hutcheson claims not that perfection is an additional end, but rather that we are naturally led to perfection by an increase in our happiness, as a result of a benevolent deity.

²⁶Carey, vi.

than the *Essay* or *Inquiry*, which were not only published during his lifetime, but underwent a substantial number of subsequent revisions. If Hutcheson’s works are in tension, why treat the *System*—as Riley, Edwards, and Strasser do—as authoritative?²⁷) Given Scott’s analysis, we might be tempted to conclude that Hutcheson held a quantitative hedonism about happiness or well-being through the *Essay*, but, given the passages previously discussed in the *System*, altered his view to reflect a qualitative hedonism by 1737—in effect, making happiness and perfection “coincident ends” by declaring that the pleasures of virtue are of higher quality *given* their perfection.

This reading is certainly possible. But I think we need not adopt it. A minor point first: the final edition of the *Essay* was published in 1742—five years after Hutcheson’s *System* was—in the eyes of most commentators—complete. But the final edition of the *Essay*—no less than the first edition—reflects a quantitative treatment of the pleasures of the moral sense: the moral sense does not deliver pleasure of greater quality, but rather of greater *quantity*. (Furthermore, he did not revise his explicit commitment to quantitative hedonism at *Essay* V i.) Hutcheson did not confine himself to mere surface-level changes to the *Essay* over the years—hence it would be quite odd to attribute to Hutcheson a shift from quantitative to qualitative hedonism from the period 1728–1737 given that the 1742 edition of the *Essay* is explicitly quantitative in its treatment of the evaluative superiority of the higher pleasures. The same holds of the *Inquiry*, which was itself last revised in 1738, again with the explicitly quantitative passages left intact.

But leave this aside. There is a more important reason why we should not treat Hutcheson’s *System* as reflecting a qualitative hedonism: the text of the *System* permits of a perfectly good quantitative reading; one that renders Hutcheson’s value theory consistent, though one that keeps on display an evolving moral psychology. I take this argument in three stages. First, I address Hutcheson’s supposed inclusion of a welfare-relevant quality operator in the *System*. Second, I address the claim that Hutcheson himself explicitly rejects a quantitative distinction between kinds of pleasure given that he seeks to replace all talk of pleasurable intensity with talk of pleasurable quality or “excellence”.

3.1. Pleasure and Dignity

As noted in §1, the standard reading of Hutcheson’s value theory—at least in the *System*—is that some pleasures are marked out as possessing a “dig-

²⁷Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

nity”, which itself renders them of greater welfare value independently of their intensity and duration. But I think there are some tensions with a quantitative reading arising in the *System* itself. Consider, for instance, the following curious passage:

The chief happiness of any being must consist in the full enjoyment of all the gratifications its nature desires and is capable of; or if its nature admits of a great variety of pleasures of different and sometimes inconsistent kinds, some of them also higher and more durable than others, its supreme happiness must consist in the most constant enjoyment of the most intense and durable pleasures, with as much of the lower gratifications as consists with the full enjoyment of the higher. In like manner; if we cannot ward off all pain, and there be different kinds and degrees of it, we must secure ourselves against the more intense and durable kinds, and the higher degrees of them; and that sometimes by bearing the lower kinds or degrees, or by sacrificing some smaller pleasures, when 'tis necessary for this end. (*System* I ii 6 i, 100.)

Here Hutcheson explicitly links “supreme happiness” with the “most intense and durable pleasures”. Hence it would appear that a qualitative reading of *System* I ii 6 i is well-motivated. And though Hutcheson appears to make reference to certain markers of a qualitative hedonism (“higher” pleasures, “lower” pains, etc.), a qualitative reading of this passage cannot be supported. In particular, consider Hutcheson’s discussion of pain. Hutcheson claims that we have reason to suffer the “lower kinds” when doing so allows us to better avoid the higher. But this makes sense only if we read “lower” quantitatively. On a qualitative reading, what does “lower” kinds of pain refer to? Presumably it must mean “lower quality” pain, i.e., pain of lesser suitability to human nature. But this is especially puzzling given that Hutcheson urges us to *avoid* the higher pains and *suffer the lower*. Why, on a qualitative reading, should Hutcheson insist that we suffer a pain of lower quality (or lower “dignity” or “perfection”) rather than a pain of *higher* quality? A qualitative hedonist should insist on the opposite: if pain is to be suffered, why not suffer the pain that is of greater excellence, or “beatific quality”? Thus Hutcheson’s recommendation that we suffer the “lower kinds” of pain makes sense only when we read the “height” of a pain quantitatively, i.e., as the sensible advice to, when one can, take less pain rather than more. But if the “height” of pains is to be read quantitatively, there is little justification for reading the “height” of pleasures, at least in this passage, qualitatively. On my reading, Hutcheson’s account of “supreme

happiness” runs as follows: happiness is defined in quantitative terms (“the most intense and durable pleasures”); the “higher gratifications” are simply identified as those *kinds* of pleasure that are more intense and durable.²⁸ Indeed, careful attention to Hutcheson’s corpus reveals that he often uses “higher” as a mark of greater quantity, as we saw above in considering the treatment of moral pleasures in the *Inquiry*. Thus there appears to be good reason to read *System* I ii 6 i as committing Hutcheson to a quantitative evaluative metric.

But if so, how are we to reconcile *System* I ii 6 i with the more qualitative-sounding passages in I ii 7? Consider again Hutcheson’s argument for the prudential value of virtue. For Hutcheson, the pleasures of virtue are the pleasures of reflection on our own virtuous conduct—pleasures *of the moral sense*. Hence, in triggering the pleasures associated with the moral sense, one experiences pleasure that is of greatest intensity. This explains the esteem of the competent judges, and vindicates Hutcheson’s claim in the *Inquiry* that the moral sense yields more pleasure than other sources: the pleasures of the moral sense are pleasures of the greatest intensity.

But the prudential importance of these “reflex Acts” is not limited to reflection on our own virtue. For Hutcheson, we can enjoy the pleasures of the evaluative senses in reflection on our *pleasures*, no less than our own conduct. Hutcheson writes that the moral sense and various evaluative senses evaluate not only actions or conduct, but also objects of desire, states of mind, passions, and, indeed pleasures themselves. Indeed, in the *System*, Hutcheson claims that the *sense of dignity* plays a similar role to the moral sense in the evaluation of objects, actions, and pleasures (although in a way that remains independent of the moral sense):

Tho’ it is by the moral sense that actions become of the greatest consequence to our happiness or misery; yet ’tis plain the mind naturally perceives some other sorts of excellence in many powers of body and mind; must admire them, whether in ourselves or others; and must be pleased with certain exercises of them, without conceiving them as moral virtues. We often use words too promiscuously, and do not express distinctly the different feel-

²⁸It is illuminating to consider, for comparative purposes, a nearly identical passage from Hutcheson’s *Essay*: “Happiness consists in ‘the highest and most durable Gratifications of, either all our *Desires*, or, if all cannot be gratify’d at once, of those which tend to the greatest and most durable *Pleasures*,” (*Essay* IV v, 80). But it is clear, given the explicit commitment to quantitative hedonism in the *Essay*, that Hutcheson means to understand the “highest and most durable Gratifications” in terms compatible with quantitative hedonism.

ings or sensations of the soul. Let us keep *moral approbation* for our sentiments of such dispositions, affections, and consequent actions, as we repute virtuous. We find this warm approbation a very different perception from the admiration or liking which we have for several other powers and dispositions; which are also relished by a sense of *decency* or *dignity*. (*System* I i 2 vii, 27.)

According to Hutcheson, dignified objects or activities are those that are suitable to human nature. But this sense of suitability or sense of dignity has a substantial effect on the quantity of pleasure we achieve:

Thus, according to the just observation of Aristotle, “The chief happiness of active beings must arise from action; and that not from action of every sort, but from that sort to which their nature is adapted, and which is recommended by nature.” When we gratify the bodily appetites, there is an immediate sense of pleasure, such as the brutes enjoy, but no further satisfaction; *no sense of dignity upon reflection*, no good-liking of others for their being thus employed. There is an exercise of some other bodily powers which seems more manly and graceful. There is a manifest gradation; some fine tastes in the ingenious arts are still more agreeable; the exercise is delightful; the works are pleasant to the spectator, and reputable to the artist. The exercise of the highest powers of the understanding, in discovery of truth, and just reasoning, is the more esteemable, when the subjects are important. But the noblest of all are the virtuous affections and actions, the objects of the moral sense.²⁹ (*System* I i 2 vii, 29.)

Hutcheson concurs with Aristotle, but his explanation is given in quantitative terms: when we engage activities that suit our nature, or that are dignified, we engage our sense of dignity, and subsequently take intense and long-lasting pleasure (though not as intense as the pleasure of the moral sense)—*via* our sense of dignity—in our activities and states of mind. Hence, by the time we get to the *System*, Hutcheson has expanded the variety of evaluative senses that can be triggered by “reflex Acts”: here the sense of dignity is engaged when we reflect on our own activities and states of mind—the sense of dignity delivers pleasure when we engage in activities or feel pleasures that are suitable for human nature. This reading is supported by a passage, at *System* I ii 7 i, in which Hutcheson claims, just as he does at

²⁹My emphasis.

Inquiry I ii 8, that we are not motivated toward dignified actions or states of mind *because* we take pleasure in such reflex acts: “Nor is it a view of private sublime pleasures in frequent future reflections which recommends virtue to the soul. We feel an impulse, an ardour toward perfection, toward affections and actions of dignity, and feel their immediate excellence, abstracting from such views of future pleasures of long duration,” (*System* I ii 7 i, 118). However, in estimating our happiness, these reflex acts are to be regarded as the first importance: “Tho’ no doubt these pleasures, which are as sure as our existence, are to be regarded in our estimation of the importance of virtue to our happiness.”

The operation of the moral sense and the sense of dignity sheds light on the most qualitative-sounding passages from the *System*, especially his account of the notion of pleasurable “excellence” and the link between pleasurable excellence and pleasurable dignity. Consider the following: “By this intimate feeling of dignity, enjoyments and exercises of some kinds. . . are incomparably more excellent and beatifick than the most intense and lasting enjoyments of the lower kinds.” Here Hutcheson claims that *by* our “feeling of dignity” we discern the greater excellence of some pleasures. But the excellence of particular kinds of pleasures is not—of itself—*relevant to their welfare value*. The excellence we discern simply *is* the perfection, or suitability to human nature, of a particular pleasure. Excellent pleasures are more prudentially valuable not because they are, simply, more suitable to human nature. Rather, their perfection or suitability to human nature triggers, as a result of “reflex Acts”, the evaluative senses, which are themselves sources of long-lasting, intense pleasure. It is true that the pleasures of virtue, for instance, are more excellent, dignified, or “suitable to human nature”. But this excellence is not *itself* relevant to prudential value. The various pleasures—even those that are more or less excellent—are more or less *valuable* only because they are *more or less pleasurable*, given the added pleasures of the sense of dignity (and, in the case of the pleasures of virtue, the moral sense).

Given all this, though Hutcheson speaks in terms of the dignity, or excellence, of various pleasures, we should not regard these as evaluative markers that in and of themselves extend welfare value. It just so happens that excellent, dignified, pleasures extend welfare value by triggering our evaluative senses, which themselves are sources of “higher”, i.e., more intense and lasting, pleasure.

3.2. *Intensity as Quality?*

One passage from the *System* offers a substantial challenge to the possibility of reading the *System* as presenting a quantitative hedonism of the sort offered in the *Inquiry* and *Essay*. Hutcheson writes that “As to pleasures of the same kind, ’tis manifest their values are in a joint proportion to their intenseness and duration. . . In comparing pleasures of different kinds, the value is as the duration and dignity of the kind jointly,” (*System* I ii 7 i, 117). Here Hutcheson appears to state, quite explicitly, a quantitative account of the comparison of pleasures of the same kind, while rejecting this quantitative rubric in favor of a qualitative one for pleasures of different kinds.

He goes on to write:

Now if we denote by intenseness, in a more general meaning, the degree in which any perceptions or enjoyments are beatifick, then their comparative values are in a compound proportion of their intenseness and duration. But to retain always in view the grand differences of the kinds, and to prevent any imaginations that the intenser sensations of the lower kinds with sufficient duration may compleat our happiness; it may be more convenient to estimate enjoyments by their dignity and duration: dignity denoting the excellence of the kind, when those of different kinds are compared; and the intenseness of the sensations, when we compare those of the same kind. (*System* I ii 7 i, 118-19.)

This passage is noted by Edwards, Strasser, and Riley³⁰ in arguing for Hutcheson *qua* qualitative hedonist and it is not difficult to see why. Hutcheson appears to be giving us a stipulative definition of intensity: we must understand intensity simply as the extent to which any particular pleasure is “beatifick”. Only under that assumption could pleasures of different kinds be compared by their intensity and duration. For the sake of clarity (or “convenience”), however, Hutcheson simply replaces all talk of intensity with talk of *dignity* when it comes to evaluating pleasures. But what does “dignity” mean in this context? It should be noted that Hutcheson appears to be using “dignity” here in an idiosyncratic way. Hutcheson appears to expand the notion of pleasurable dignity. When comparing the welfare values of pleasures of different kinds, dignity refers to “excellence” (which is determined, as argued above, by the sense of dignity). When the excellence of a pleasure is not at issue, dignity simply means “intensity”. Leaving aside

³⁰Cf. also Jonathan Riley, “Millian Qualitative Superiorities and Utilitarianism, Part II” in *Utilitas* 21 (2009), 129n5.

this interesting terminological move for the moment, the trouble for a quantitative reading would appear to arise from the first use of “dignity”, i.e., to refer to the “excellence” of a particular pleasure. Hutcheson appears to suggest that the only relevant operators when comparing pleasures of different kinds are *excellence* and *duration*. But Hutcheson is careful to note that this is different than an evaluation that is based on intensity and duration, which applies only to pleasures of the same kind.

Though this passage seems to clearly point in favor of Hutcheson *qua* qualitative hedonist, the qualitative reading of this passage is awkward. If Hutcheson wished to claim that the pleasures of different kinds are of different welfare values merely given the fact that some are of greater excellence, it is a bit mysterious why he would allow a comparison of all pleasures to be given along the dimension of dignity (“excellence”) *and duration*. Why say that pleasures of different kinds are to be compared on the basis of their duration at all? Why not suggest that they are to be compared only on the basis of their excellence? One possibility might be that hedonic *quantity* also plays a role in comparing pleasures of different kinds. Surely any qualitative hedonist could agree. But then it becomes equally mysterious why intensity—in its standard quantitative understanding—is simply left out and replaced by the excellence operator when comparing pleasures of different kinds. What is so special about duration when it comes to determining pleasurable quantity? It would seem more plausible, and more coherent with a qualitative hedonism, to suggest that pleasures of different kinds are either compared by their intensity, duration, and excellence, or excellence alone, rather than the bizarre and apparently unmotivated combination of excellence and duration.

Thus Hutcheson’s replacement of intensity with “dignity” (which can refer either to excellence or intensity, depending on context) appears to be something of an enigma. One possible interpretation of this passage—especially in light of the seemingly contradictory passage at *System I ii 6 i*—is that Hutcheson may not have realized, or fully understood, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative hedonism.³¹ This might explain Hutcheson’s puzzling axiological combination of excellence and duration, rather than the coherent options (of which there are three: intensity and duration—which would yield a quantitative hedonism—excellence alone—which would entail a qualitative hedonism—or excellence, intensity and duration, which would also entail a qualitative hedonism). We might simply conclude that Hutcheson was unaware, given his failure to fully grasp the distinc-

³¹I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possibility.

tion between qualitative and quantitative hedonism, that his own preferred option is unmotivated in light of this distinction.

We might certainly accept that Hutcheson did not possess a clear picture of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative hedonism as we currently understand it. But the failure to fully understand this distinction—assuming that he does fail to understand it—does little to shed light on the passage at hand, especially as it concerns Hutcheson’s replacement of intensity with excellence in comparison of pleasures of different kinds. After all, Hutcheson was in clear command of the extent to which both intensity and duration are required for an estimation of the *amount* of pleasure one experiences (this is clear both from *System* I ii 6 i, but also from Hutcheson’s adroit understanding of pleasurable quantity in the *Essay*). So he clearly understood the components of pleasurable quantity. Furthermore, Hutcheson in this very passage claims that in order to assess pleasures of the same kind, we compare only their intensity and duration, *not* their excellence and duration. Hence he appears in this passage to be well aware that comparing pleasures by their excellence is different than simply assessing them by their quantity—which, as he clearly understands, is measured by intensity and duration (here “dignity” denotes intensity directly). Hence his conglomeration of excellence (denoted by “dignity”) and duration in assessing pleasures of different kinds is striking indeed: why, given that he knew full well the importance of intensity and duration in assessing pleasurable quantity, would he have excised intensity, but kept duration?

I think that Hutcheson’s replacement of “intensity” with “dignity” (when denoting excellence) is philosophically significant, and not the product of an error or a failure to understand the difference between quantitative and qualitative hedonism. But it is *not*, I claim, an alteration of Hutcheson’s quantitative hedonist axiology. Of course, my reading is not wrinkle-free, but it has substantial virtues, including allowing Hutcheson to remain consistent with his previous statements on the nature of happiness, and avoiding committing Hutcheson to elementary blunders. Instead of reading *System* I ii 7 as an alteration in Hutcheson’s theory of the nature of human happiness, I suggest that we read these passages as a pragmatic guide to the pleasures that are best pursued in an attempt to *achieve* happiness. In other words, when Hutcheson claims that we should assess pleasures of different kinds by their excellence and duration, he is saying that assessing pleasures by the excellence of their kind along with their duration is a better prudential action-guide than assessing pleasures by, simply, their intensity and duration (except, of course, when excellence is not at issue).

This reading fits with Hutcheson’s overarching moral philosophical goals.

Hume (in the *Treatise*, and in a letter composed to Hutcheson himself) famously distinguishes between two roles a moral theorist might play, the “anatomist” and the “painter”.³² While Hume saw himself as the anatomist, content to provide an exhaustive theory of morality which could then be used by others (moralists, or “painters”) to instill a reverence for virtue in readers, Hutcheson sees his task as akin to the painter. According to Hutcheson, “The intention of moral philosophy is to *direct men* to that course of action which tends most effectually to promote their greatest happiness and perfection; as far as it can be done by observations and conclusions discoverable from the constitution of nature,” (*System*, I i 1 i, 1; my emphasis). Hence it would be no surprise that, in the *System*, Hutcheson would attempt to provide a pragmatic account of pleasurable quality: one that would best *direct men* toward their “greatest happiness and perfection”.

And, I claim, this pragmatic task is that to which Hutcheson turns in *System* I ii 7. The context of *System* I ii 7—in contrast to the context of *System* I ii 6 i—is *explicitly* pragmatic: “To discover wherein our true happiness consists we must compare the several enjoyments of life, and the several kinds of misery, that we may discern what enjoyments *are to be parted with*, or what uneasiness *to be endured*, in order to obtain the highest and most beatifick satisfactions, and to avoid the most distressing sufferings,” (*System* I ii 7 i, 116-17).³³ In other words, Hutcheson means to offer an account of the properties of various pleasures that should best direct our choices between them. Given this, the point of Hutcheson’s replacement of intensity with excellence should be more clear. Hutcheson is not arguing that excellence *rather than* intensity is a determinant of *welfare value*. Rather, Hutcheson is claiming that excellence rather than intensity is a better guide to those enjoyments that are to be “parted with” or “endured”.

But why is excellence and duration a better action-guide than intensity and duration? To answer this question, we must look closely at Hutcheson’s text. Recall that, for Hutcheson, the shift from intensity and duration to excellence and duration is intended to “prevent any imaginations that the intenser sensations of the lower kinds with sufficient duration may compleat our happiness.” It is “more convenient” to judge pleasures of different kinds only on the basis of the excellence of the kind, along with duration. But why would it be a more convenient action-guide to replace intensity with excellence, but not duration with the excellence of a pleasure also? The answer is simple. As Hutcheson claims in the *Essay*, the *perception* of intensity—but

³²See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.3.6.6.

³³My emphasis.

not perception of duration—is influenced by variation in *taste*. As he says in *Essay V i*, the extent to which particular pleasures are of greater intensity will depend on, for instance, whether one is a “luxurious debauchee”, or has experienced the pleasures of virtue. Hence, in offering an action guide, Hutcheson wishes to blunt the possibility of misunderstanding given the difference in taste: that—so long as they are sufficiently intense—the pleasures of the lower kinds can outweigh the pleasures of virtue, or of the imagination. Hence to “prevent any imaginations that the intenser sensations of the lower kinds with sufficient duration may compleat our happiness,” we replace intensity with the excellence of the kind. This gives us a more reliably universal guide to those pleasures that are to be endured or parted with in the pursuit of happiness. Had Hutcheson merely said “intensity and duration”, rather than “dignity and duration”, the “luxurious debauchee” would, given his taste, have interpreted this as a call to continue the life of the external senses, a claim Hutcheson wishes to dispute. In so doing, Hutcheson reframes his in-depth examination of each type of pleasure, allowing him merely to compare their excellence and duration, rather than intensity and duration—which is apt to be rejected by those of differing tastes. When the excellence of a kind is not at issue—when the sense of dignity is indifferent between two pleasures and hence when differences in taste are unlikely to lead people prudentially astray—he simply allows dignity to denote “intensity” directly. Replacing “intensity” with dignity, when it comes to pleasures of different kinds is, as Hutcheson says explicitly, *a matter of convenience*.

Furthermore, replacing intensity with excellence is fully compatible with Hutcheson’s quantitative axiology. Excellent pleasures—given the pleasures of the evaluative senses upon reflection—simply result in pleasures that are of greatest intensity; pleasures that are suitable to human nature *trigger* the pleasure of the sense of dignity. In short, my pragmatic reading of *System I ii 7 i* runs as follows. Hutcheson is not seeking to provide us with an account of the welfare value of pleasures; this he has already done one chapter earlier. Rather, he seeks to give us an account of the pleasures that should be pursued that is both (a) compatible with his axiology and (b) that avoids the discrepancies in perception of pleasurable intensity. For this reason, Hutcheson replaces talk of intensity with talk of pleasurable excellence (when pleasures differ along the dimension of excellence). Because perception of pleasurable duration is not similarly controversial, there is no need to replace talk of duration.

The pragmatic reading of Hutcheson’s passage might sound a bit awkward. But it is no *more* awkward than the qualitative reading, which must explain the role “duration” plays in the comparison of pleasures of different

kinds (given that this reading also allows no place for a traditional intensity operator), and must attribute to Hutcheson incoherence not only with previous works (such as the *Essay*), but previous passages in the same work. We may be convinced that Hutcheson simply didn't recognize the distinction between qualitative and quantitative hedonism, and therefore was unaware of his textual incoherence. But the quantitative/pragmatic reading plausibly interprets Hutcheson's text at *System* I ii 7 i, refrains from committing Hutcheson to a bizarre hedonic calculus, allows Hutcheson to remain consistent concerning the "chief happiness" of humankind, and also reflects Hutcheson's overall moral theoretic goals. Thus there is, I think, reason enough to accept it.

4. *Objection: Value Superiority*

I have so far argued that Hutcheson's complex moral psychology provides the resources to read various crucial paragraphs from the *System* and elsewhere as asserting not that the higher pleasures are better because they are of higher quality, but that they are better because they trigger our moral sense and sense of dignity, and hence lead, overall, to a greater quantity of pleasure.

But is this really plausible in light of Hutcheson's various axiological claims? In particular, one might argue, Hutcheson goes to great pains to suggest that the *weight* of various pleasures differs in a way that could only be explained if he adopted some form of qualitative hedonism. After all, he writes that virtue is "incomparably" better than "the most lasting sensual pleasures." Here Hutcheson seems to gesture toward something like the *lexical dominance* of the higher pleasures over the lower pleasures. Lexical dominance is the highest form of evaluative priority: a value x is lexically dominant over a value y if and only if the any amount of x , no matter how small, will outweigh any finite amount of y . But it seems very difficult to understand how a quantitative hedonism could support any claim of lexical dominance. After all, lexical dominance does not allow that the lexically dominant value could be traded-off against *any* amount of the lexically dominated value. But if all pleasures are identified by intensity and duration, this is incoherent.³⁴ Any equivalent quantity of two kinds of pleasure must be of equivalent value. How, then, could pleasures of one kind be lexically dominant on pleasures of another kind? How, then, could the smallest possible amount of one kind of pleasure be worth "the most lasting" pleasures

³⁴Cf. Riley, 261-4.

of a different kind?

This objection counts against the quantitative reading only if the quantitative reading can give no plausible account of Hutcheson's axiological claims. But though these passages are suggestive of lexical superiority or "incommensurability", they are at best inconclusive. Consider the following quote from the *System*: "We have an immediate sense of a dignity, a perfection, or beatifick quality in some kinds, which no intenseness of the lower kinds can equal, were they also as lasting as we could wish. No intenseness or duration of any external sensation gives it a dignity or worth equal to that of the improvement of the soul by knowledge, or the ingenious arts..." (*System* I ii 7 i, 117). Also, "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," (*System* I ii 7 i, 117). On the quantitative reading, these passages are not meant to claim that the welfare value of the higher pleasures is lexically superior to the welfare value of lower pleasures. The quantitative reading will insist that Hutcheson's reference to an incomparably higher *dignity* (or "beatifick quality") of some kinds of pleasure means just that: the higher pleasures will be incomparably more dignified than the lower pleasures. External sensations—the lowest kind of pleasure—simply will not be suitable to human nature no matter how intense or long-lasting they are. The pleasure of ancient Roman gluttony will never achieve a comparable *dignity* to that of the pleasures of the moral sense. But for the quantitative reading, dignity is not a *per se* determinant of welfare value. Rather, dignity determines welfare value only insofar as the *sense* of dignity is triggered on reflection, and leads to long-lasting, intense ("higher") pleasure. Hence in order to read this passage as insisting on a form of lexical dominance one must already hold that dignity is a *per se* determinant of welfare value. But to do this is to simply beg the question against the quantitative reading.

Furthermore, consider the following passage. Hutcheson writes: "The exercise of virtue for a short period, provided it be not succeeded by something vicious, is of incomparably greater value than the most lasting sensual pleasures," (*System* I ii 7 i, 118). This sounds clearly lexical, but on close examination is compatible with the quantitative view. Hutcheson claims not that the smallest amount of the pleasures of the moral sense is of incomparably greater welfare value than the most lasting sensual pleasures, he claims rather that the *exercise* of virtue for a short period is of incomparably greater value than the most lasting sensual pleasures. But the exercise of virtue for a short period triggers the pleasures of the moral and evaluative

senses, and hence yields long-lasting, intense pleasure–pleasure that is of greater quantity than the “most lasting” sensual pleasures.³⁵

Of course, even in the *Essay* and *Inquiry* Hutcheson clearly wishes to impart an evaluative priority to the higher pleasures as opposed to the lower pleasures. But it is important to understand what this priority is and how this priority functions. When discussing the comparative intensity of pleasures, for instance, Hutcheson writes: “The Pleasures of the *internal Senses*, or of the Imagination, are allowed by all, who have any tolerable Taste of them, as a much superior Happiness to those of the *external Senses*, tho they were enjoyed to the full.” Here the quantitative reading insists that the crucial phrase is “enjoyed to the full”. For some pleasure x to be enjoyed to the full is for that pleasure to be enjoyed as much as is possible given the type of pleasure x is. To enjoy the pleasures of drinking a beer to the full is to enjoy one’s beer as much as a beer can be enjoyed—it most certainly does *not* mean to enjoy an *infinite amount of the pleasure of drinking beer* (just as “the most lasting sensual pleasures” does not mean an infinite amount of the pleasures of the external senses, it means the longest-lasting sensual pleasure one might find). Hence, on this reading, Hutcheson is claiming that the fullest enjoyment of the external pleasures—given their type—will never outweigh even the smallest possible amount of the pleasures of the internal sense. Why? Because the smallest amount of the pleasures of the

³⁵Of course, this reading cannot accommodate Hutcheson’s term “incomparably” if “incomparable” literally means, for Hutcheson, not comparable. But it is not clear that Hutcheson means this in using the term “incomparably”. He often uses “incomparably” as a simple intensifier. See, for instance *Inquiry* I i 8, 22, where “incomparably” is used as interchangeable with “vastly”. (Compare also *Essay* VI iv, 121.) However, even if Hutcheson means to *literally* claim that the higher pleasures are of incomparable value, this does not necessarily tell against the quantitative view if Hutcheson regards pleasures as delivering either infinite intensity or duration. (See, for instance, Riley’s account of Mill’s hedonism, Riley, *op. cit.*) Given his religious proclivities, Hutcheson *might* have claimed that the moral pleasures are of infinite duration, given that our pleasurable reflex acts might continue into the afterlife. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.) Indeed, as already noted, Hutcheson’s religious views, and the supposition that we receive substantial pleasures in the afterlife, play an important role in Hutcheson’s theory of the public sense: the public sense generates pleasure rather than pain at the shabby state of many living in the world *because* we assume that others will obtain pleasure in the afterlife (cf., Harris). But I hesitate to rest too much on this argument; Hutcheson does not appear to claim that the pleasures of the moral sense are of infinite duration. In explaining the long duration of the pleasures of the moral sense, Hutcheson writes: “each good Action is Matter of pleasant *Reflection as long as we live,*” (*Essay*, V x, 106, my emphasis). However, even if Hutcheson does not mean to refer to some pleasures as of infinite duration, this causes no problems for the quantitative reading, given Hutcheson’s promiscuous use of the term “incomparable”.

internal senses will still yield *more pleasure* than, say, a beer when “enjoyed to the full.” He is not claiming that any finite amount of the pleasures of the external sense will outweigh any amount of the pleasures of the internal senses, no matter how small. This holds not simply of the pleasures of the internal senses in comparison to the pleasures of the external senses, but also of a comparison between the pleasures of virtue and all others: “that in the virtuous Man, *publick Affections*, a *moral Sense*, and *Sense of Honour*, actually overcome all other Desires or Senses, *even in their full Strength*. Here there is the fairest Combate, and the Success is on the side of Virtue,” (*Essay*, V iii, 91, my emphasis). This results in a strong evaluative priority: the pleasures of the moral sense and the sense of dignity are simply more intense than the lower pleasures, though the lower pleasures may be “in their full strength”.

While nothing in the passages I have cited in this section tell against the qualitative reading, they do not constitute evidence that the quantitative reading is false, or that quantitative hedonism was abandoned or only half-heartedly accepted by Hutcheson. Hence Hutcheson’s axiological claims give us no reason to overturn a judgment that Hutcheson is, in fact, a quantitative hedonist.

5. Conclusion

When we consider Hutcheson’s moral and hedonic psychology in depth, there is good reason to believe that he does not treat the excellence, quality or “dignity” of certain pleasures as a feature in the axiological evaluation of particular pleasures. Rather, the quality of pleasure is only important insofar as the cooperation of our moral and evaluative senses increases our overall quantity of pleasure.

I have also tried to provide a reading of the more strikingly qualitative passages—especially those found in *System* I ii 7—that does not render Hutcheson’s writings incoherent or commit Hutcheson to a misunderstanding of the nature of quantitative or qualitative hedonism. This chapter is to some degree slippery, and does not obviously permit of easy integration into Hutcheson’s corpus. This fact may itself be one partial explanation for Hutcheson’s refusal to publish the *System*, though it was substantially complete years before his death. But I think that though the *System* displays some unique features, we need not read I ii 7 as fundamentally altering Hutcheson’s value theory. What the *System* does bring out, in contrast to the *Essay*, is the importance of our sense of dignity in contributing—as the moral sense does in the *Essay* and *Inquiry*—to the overall amount of pleasure

we experience. Thus, I submit, Hutcheson's value theory is best read as a form of quantitative hedonism that makes liberal use of a variety of moral and non-moral senses. Hutcheson's complex moral psychology masks the simplicity of his hedonism.